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Russian Troop Buildup Near Ukraine Largest Since War Outbreak, Monitor Says

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Recent Russian military movements and an increase in clashes between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists have raised fears of an escalation in the long-simmering war. **Sophia Sandurskaya / Moskva News Agency**

Russia has amassed the largest concentration of troops on its border with Ukraine since the eastern Ukraine conflict first erupted in 2014, The Insider investigative news website reported Wednesday, citing military analysts.

Recent Russian military movements and an increase in clashes between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists have raised fears of an escalation in the long-simmering war.

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The Russian military has deployed motorized rifle, artillery and airborne as well as likely tank

units near Ukraine, according to a group of Russian military bloggers known as the Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) cited by The Insider.

“We haven’t seen such a concentration of troops since the hot phase of the war in Ukraine in 2014-15,” CIT said.

“Such a large-scale transfer of forces could be explained by strategic (rather than local) exercises, but the next such maneuvers are only scheduled for September,” it added.

Using the online wagon and container tracking service GdeVagon, the group said it tracked the Russian troops, including the air assault division that was involved in the 2014 conflict, arriving in annexed Crimea and the border region of Voronezh.

CIT noted however that it did not yet see signs of Russia readying for a direct invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine last week accused Russia of massing thousands of military personnel on its northern and eastern borders as well as on the Crimean peninsula.

Kiev's Western allies have rushed to its defense with a series of statements warning Russia against taking further action and seeking explanations for its troop buildup.

The Kremlin has not denied the troop movements but insisted that Moscow was "not threatening anyone.”

The reports of a Russian buildup follow a dramatic increase in clashes along the frontline in recent weeks, with Ukraine announcing new deaths of its soldiers almost daily. Moscow and Kiev have accused each other of being behind the renewed clashes.

The conflict in the mainly Russian-speaking Donbass region broke out in 2014 following Moscow's annexation of Crimea and has since claimed more than 13,000 lives.

The separatists are widely seen as having Russia's political and military backing, which Moscow denies.

Fighting had subsided before the latest outbreak of violence, with a ceasefire agreed last year having seen clashes drop to their lowest level in years.

AFP contributed reporting.

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