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Russia Moves Ground Troops, Ballistic Missile Systems Near Ukraine Border – British Analysts

April 09, 2021



Military analysts and the White House say Russia has amassed the largest concentration of forces near eastern Ukraine since 2014, **Russian Defense Ministry / TASS**

British defense analysts said Thursday they have identified Russian ballistic missile systems deployed alongside over a dozen tank and rocket launcher units on the Ukrainian border amid concerns of renewed hostilities.

Military monitors and the White House say Russia has amassed the largest concentration of forces near eastern Ukraine since the conflict between Ukrainian forces and pro-Russian separatists first broke out in 2014. Kremlin officials said the movements were non-threatening but warned that an escalation of hostilities would mark "the beginning of the end" for Ukraine.

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The Janes defense publication said it located through open-source intelligence at least 14 Russian Armed Forces units, including Iskander short-range ballistic missile systems, that have moved or are moving to the Ukrainian area of operations since late March.

“While Russia’s intentions are still unclear, this movement stands out as possibly the largest unannounced movement of troops since Russia’s invasion of Crimea and eastern Ukraine,” it said.

“The true extent of the cross-military district deployments also remains to be seen.”

Russia uses the nuclear-capable, high-precision Iskander system primarily to attack troops and hardware in a frontline fight. The missiles can be guided by troops sighting targets, by satellites or by unmanned aerial vehicles at a range of up to 500 kilometers.

Janes’ report adds further details to earlier analysis by a group of Russian military bloggers known as the Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT) that Russia has deployed motorized rifle, artillery and airborne units near Ukraine. Using online freight tracking services, the CIT said it located Russian troops arriving in annexed Crimea and the border region of Voronezh.

Janes reported that Russia’s army-level communication system at a training ground south of Voronezh is not used at battalion or brigade levels and “is indicative of the scale of the deployment.”

Both Janes and the CIT noted that they did not yet see signs of Russian forces being in an offensive posture.

Janes said its assessment was subject to change, citing Russian army air defense systems moving into the Voronezh region “which have not been observed with prior movements.”

It added that announced plans to reinforce the Russian Navy Black Sea Fleet with 10 landing and artillery vessels from the Caspian Flotilla “is not a common occurrence.”

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