

U.S. Mercenaries Preparing Donbass 'Provocation' — Russian Defense Chief

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Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. **Press service of the Russian Ministry of Defense / Moskva News Agency**

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu claimed on Tuesday that U.S. private military companies have stationed troops in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine and are preparing a “provocation using unknown chemical components.”

Shoigu’s statements came during a Defense Ministry meeting in Moscow amid growing fears that Russia could launch an invasion of Ukraine.

“We have identified the presence of over 120 members of U.S. mercenary groups in the cities of Avdiivka and Krasny Liman to commit provocations...Tanks filled with unidentified chemical components were delivered to the cities of Avdeevka and Krasny Liman to commit provocations,” the state-run TASS news agency quoted Shoigu as saying.

Shoigu, considered a trusted ally of Vladimir Putin, also slammed the U.S. for increased tensions near Russia’s border.

“The United States is building up its military presence at Russian borders. In the countries of Eastern Europe, American units with a total number of about 8,000 servicemen are deployed on a rotational basis,” he said.

Shoigu further boasted of Russia’s improved military, saying that the country’s army was a “world leader” in terms of its modernity.

Around 100,000 Russian troops are currently believed to be stationed on the border with Ukraine. Russia has repeatedly denied plotting an invasion into Ukraine, saying it is in its right to move troops within its borders.

Speaking at the same meeting Tuesday, Putin warned of a “military-technical” response to what Russia perceives as threatening moves from the West.

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