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# Get Out of Romania and Bulgaria, Russia Tells NATO Amid Ukraine Tensions

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The Russian Foreign Ministry. **Maksym Kozlenko (CC BY-SA 3.0)**

Moscow is seeking the withdrawal of NATO forces and weapons from Romania and Bulgaria as part of its sweeping security demands from the U.S.-led alliance, Russia's Foreign Ministry said Friday.

Russia demands written responses from the United States on its proposed security guarantees, which includes the withdrawal of NATO's infrastructure from eastern European countries that became members of the Western military bloc after 1997.

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Washington, which is engaged in high-level talks to forestall a possible invasion of Ukraine by the tens of thousands of Russian troops amassed near its borders, has dismissed Moscow's demands as "non-starters."

“One of the main elements of our initiatives is consciously formulated very clearly and does not allow any ambiguous interpretations,” the Foreign Ministry said.

“We’re talking about the withdrawal of foreign forces, equipment and weapons and other steps to return to the 1997 configuration,” it said in a statement.

“These include Bulgaria and Romania.”

Romania's foreign ministry on Friday labeled the Russian demand as as "unacceptable" and added that it "cannot be part of a negotiation."

Romania said that NATO's presence in allied countries was "a purely defensive reaction to Russia's increasingly aggressive behavior in the eastern vicinity... currently intensifying despite NATO's attempts to engage in constructive dialogue."

Bulgarian Prime Minister Kiril Petkov also told parliament on Friday that "Bulgaria is a sovereign country and we have long made our choice by becoming a member of NATO."

"As such, we decide alone how to organise the defence of our country in coordination with our partners," he said.

He added that the NATO Treaty did not provide for "second-category member states for whom collective defense is to be applied selectively or within a limited scope."

"We call on the Russian Federation to remain engaged in constructive dialogue to de-escalate tension."

The former Soviet-led Warsaw Pact allies joined NATO in 2004 and currently have agreements in place to deploy around 6,000 U.S. troops on their territories on a rotational basis.

In addition to withdrawing NATO forces from Bulgaria and Romania, Russia wants NATO to guarantee no new military bases in ex-Soviet countries and prevent new members, including Ukraine.

In Friday’s statement, the Russian Foreign Ministry accused NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg of “unceremoniously exerting pressure” on non-aligned Finland and Sweden to join NATO in the face of Russia’s possible invasion of Ukraine.

*AFP contributed reporting.*

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