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Russia Ruling Party Urges the Kremlin to Arm Ukraine Separatists

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A serviceman carries a machine gun into a shelter on territory controlled by pro-Russian separatists along the frontline in eastern Ukraine's Luhansk region. **Alexei Alexandrov / AP / TASS**

Russia's ruling, pro-Kremlin party will ask the country's leadership to deliver military supplies to eastern Ukraine's separatist-held breakaway regions, a senior lawmaker said Wednesday, a new escalation of rhetoric amid ongoing tensions over Ukraine.

"We appeal to the leadership of our country to provide assistance to the Luhansk and Donetsk republics in the form of supplies of military products necessary to deter aggression, as well as to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety of citizens," Vladimir Vasilyev, the parliamentary head of the United Russia party in the State Duma, told the state-run Rossiya 24 channel.

Vasilyev's statement came shortly after Senator Andrei Turchak, United Russia's general council secretary, said Russia should provide certain types of weapons to the eastern Ukrainian separatists and that his party was "extremely concerned about the pumping up of Ukraine with Western lethal weapons."

“Russia should provide the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics with the necessary assistance in the form of the supply of certain types of weapons to increase their defense capability and deter the military aggression clearly being prepared by Kyiv. The Kyiv regime must be stopped,” Turchak said.

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Ukraine has been at war with the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LNR) — two pro-Russian breakaway regions collectively known as the Donbass — since 2014. The conflict has claimed over 15,000 lives, according to Kyiv.

Ukraine and its Western allies have accused Russia of backing the rebels fighting in the Donbass with weapons and other support, claims the Kremlin has repeatedly denied. Ukraine last week said that Russia in January supplied the separatists with “several units of tanks and self-propelled artillery, other weapons and ammunition, including artillery systems and mortars.”

Vasilyev and Turchak’s statements come as the West is also accusing Russia, which has massed over 100,000 troops on the Ukrainian border, of preparing a potential invasion of its neighbor.

The Kremlin has rejected these claims, instead blaming the West for increasing tensions with deployments and support for Ukraine, pointing to the military assistance Ukraine has been receiving from its Western allies.

Russia has also accused U.S. private military companies of preparing “a provocation” in the Donbass using chemical weapons, while U.S. intelligence has warned Russia was planning a “false flag” operation inside the Donbass that could be used as a pretext for war.

Last week, Russia’s Communist Party submitted a resolution calling on President Vladimir Putin to formally recognize the DNR and LNR, a move experts believe could act as a prelude to Crimea-style annexation by Russia of the territory.

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