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Russian Intellectuals Call on Kremlin to End Ukraine Invasion Threats

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T-72B3 tanks of the Russian Southern Military District's 150th Rifle Division take part in a military exercise. **Erik Romanenko / TASS**

Leading Russian intellectuals have called on their country's leadership to de-escalate the current standoff over Ukraine and avoid a "immoral, irresponsible, and criminal" war.

Western countries have for weeks raised alarm over the massing of over 100,000 Russian troops near Ukraine's borders. Moscow denies planning an invasion, but demands sweeping security guarantees that include a ban on Kyiv ever joining NATO.

"We, responsible citizens of Russia and patriots of our country, are appealing to the political leadership of Russia and throwing down an open and public challenge to the 'War Party' which has been formed within the government," states the petition launched by the Congress of Russian Intellectuals.

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The petition, whose authors include more than 100 prominent rights advocates, scientists, journalists and politicians, has received over 3,000 signatures so far.

Its authors accuse Russia's leadership of "deceiving and using people" by promoting "only one point of view" on state-run media: "the idea of a holy war with the West instead of developing the country and raising the standard of living of its citizens."

"But no one asks the citizens of Russia. There is no public discussion. ... The question of price is not discussed, but it is ordinary people who will have to pay this price — a huge and bloody price."

Following the United States and NATO's responses to Russia's security demands — which rejected its proposal to keep Ukraine out of NATO — Russian officials have said that the responses "ignored" Moscow's key concerns but expressed a willingness to continue diplomatic dialogue.

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