The Moscow Times
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Ukraine Says Diplomatic Solution More Likely Than Russian Attack

By AFP

February 06, 2022



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Emmanuel Macron and Russian President Vladimir Putin (left to right) during a press conference following the Normandy format summit in Paris in 2019. **Alexei Nikolsky/TASS**

Ukraine's presidency on Sunday insisted the chance of resolving soaring tensions with Russia through diplomacy remained greater than that of an attack, as the U.S. warned Moscow was stepping up preparations for an invasion.

"An honest assessment of the situation suggests that the chance of finding a diplomatic solution for de-escalation is still substantially higher than the threat of further escalation," said presidency advisor Mykhailo Podolyak in a statement.

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Podolyak said that Russia had been conducting large-scale troop rotations, manoeuvres and weapon deployments on a regular basis "to ensure constant massive psychological pressure" since massing forces at Ukraine's border last spring.

"For our intelligence service and our armed forces, this Russian activity comes as absolutely no surprise," he said.

Podolyak pointed out that Ukraine's Western backers received "a significant amount" of their intelligence about Russian activities from Kyiv.

"How long will such Russian activity last and for what purpose is it maintained? Only the Kremlin can know the exact answer to this question," he said.

"The task of both Ukraine and our partners is to be prepared for any scenario, and we are fulfilling this task 100%."

The statement came after Washington said its intelligence assessments showed Moscow was stepping up moves towards a potential full-scale invasion, and has in place 70% of the forces it would need for such an attack.

Russia has assembled 110,000 troops along its border with Ukraine but U.S. intelligence had not determined if President Vladimir Putin has actually decided to invade, U.S. officials said.

The U.S. officials warned that the assembled Russian force on the frontier with Ukraine is growing at a rate that would give Putin the force he needs for a full-scale invasion — some 150,000 soldiers — by mid-February.

The U.S. officials said Putin wants to have all possible options at his disposal: from a limited invasion of the pro-Russian Donbas region of Ukraine to a full-scale, all-out invasion.

They estimated a major attack would leave 25,000 to 50,000 civilians dead, along with 5,000 to 25,000 Ukrainian soldiers and 3,000 to 10,000 Russian troops.

Russia denies that it is planning to invade Ukraine.

Kyiv has consistently sought to play down fears of an imminent Russian incursion as it seeks to prevent harm to its economy, with President Volodymyr Zelenskiy urging Western allies not to stir "panic."

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