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Send 30K Troops to East Ukraine, Separatist Commander Asks Russia

February 08, 2022

A member of the Luhansk People's Republic "people's militia" on the frontline in eastern Ukraine.
Alexander Reka / TASS

A commander in separatist-held eastern Ukraine has appealed to Moscow to send 30,000 troops and military equipment to aid separatist forces against a potential Ukrainian offensive.

Alexander Khodakovsky's plea to Moscow comes amid unprecedented tensions between Russia and the West over Ukraine, with over 100,000 Russian troops stationed near Ukraine's borders despite a recent flurry of diplomatic talks. Kyiv's Western allies accuse Moscow of plotting an invasion of its neighbor, while Russia blames the United States and NATO for provocations and threatening its security.

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"We need to have at least 40,000, but 40,000 with automatic rifles on the frontline,"

Khodakovsky, a commander and former political leader in the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic, told Reuters on Monday.

He said that the Donetsk separatists had 10,000 of their own fighters currently ready for combat and that they needed 30,000 soldiers from Moscow.

The Kremlin hasn't yet commented on Khodakovsky's appeal.

Last month, Russian ruling party lawmaker Andrei Turchak urged the Kremlin to send weapons and military equipment to the separatists.

Khodakovsky welcomed Turchak's call but said specialists would be needed to operate such "complex systems."

"I would like to see Russian military units that can use this weaponry," he told Reuters.

On Monday, Donetsk People's Republic leader Denis Pushilin spoke of the "constant threat of military actions" from the Ukrainian side without providing any evidence.

Ukrainian government forces have been at war with pro-Russian separatists since 2014, when separatists seized control of the regions shortly after Russia's annexation of Crimea. The conflict has so far claimed over 13,000 lives.

Western countries accuse Russia of supporting the separatists with troops and equipment — claims Moscow denies.

Russia has issued hundreds of thousands of passports to residents of eastern Ukraine since war broke out, and the Russian parliament is set to decide whether to formally recognize the separatist republics' independence.

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