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# Russia Announces End of Military Drills in Crimea

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**Russian Defense Ministry**

Russia's military announced Wednesday the withdrawal of troops taking part in drills in annexed Crimea as Moscow signaled de-escalation in the Ukraine crisis.

The Defense Ministry said its troops and equipment will "prepare for the next stage of combat training" once back at their permanent bases in southern Russia.

"The personnel loaded armored vehicles, [including] tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and self-propelled artillery installations on railway platforms at railway stations," it said in a statement.

State television showed images of military units crossing a bridge linking the Russia-controlled peninsula, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014, to the mainland.

**Embed:**

On Tuesday, Russia's Defense Ministry said units of its southern and western military districts have completed their exercises and have begun returning to their garrisons. Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu had earlier informed President Vladimir Putin that "some" of the troops at the border would start withdrawing to their bases.

Russia released few details of the withdrawal — reiterating that large-scale military drills in territories including Belarus and the Black Sea were ongoing — and there was no immediate outside confirmation.

Military expert Ruslan Leviev called the announcement misleading, arguing that the bases where Russian tanks were reportedly returning to are closer to the Ukrainian border than Crimea.

**Embed:**

> Известия пишут что из Крыма выводят 3, 42 и 150 мотострелковые дивизии. 42-я — ладно, она из Чечни. Но 3-я и 150-я — это смешно, их базы как раз у границы с Украиной. Т.е. отводят в сторону границы с Украиной https://t.co/FYMsve9X76 pic.twitter.com/kR5CC42SND
>
> — Руслан Левиев (@RuslanLeviev) February 16, 2022

NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg voiced "cautious optimism" over Moscow's overtures, but both he and U.S. President Joe Biden warned that a Russian attack remained "very much a possibility."

Putin said Tuesday he was "ready" to work with the West on de-escalating tensions, the latest signal that the prospect of war with Ukraine could be receding.

Days earlier, the United States and its allies rang the alarm that Russia could invade Ukraine at any moment, with several countries ordering citizens to leave and evacuating their Kyiv embassies.

The Kremlin has dismissed Western "hysteria" over a feared Russian invasion of Ukraine with more than 100,000 troops amassed on three sides of Ukraine.

*AFP contributed reporting.*

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