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Russia Says Kills 5 Ukraine 'Saboteurs'

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Russia's military said Monday it has killed five people it identified as Ukrainian military "saboteurs," a claim swiftly denied by Kyiv as the two countries face mounting tensions over the conflict in eastern Ukraine.

The Southern Military District claimed that two Ukrainian infantry fighting vehicles were also destroyed in the early morning clashes in the Rostov region on the border with Ukraine.

"Five border violators from the sabotage and intelligence group were destroyed as a result of the clashes," the state-run TASS news agency quoted the district as saying.

It added that Russia's Armed Forces and Federal Security Service (FSB) border guards did not suffer losses.

The FSB's border service referred to the alleged saboteurs as an "unknown group."

Ukraine's military maintains that its troops have not left their positions and are not carrying out offensive operations, and Kyiv quickly denied Moscow's latest claim of a prevented border

breach.

"Not a single one of our soldiers has crossed the border with the Russian Federation, and not a single one has been killed today," Anton Gerashchenko, an official at Ukraine's interior ministry, told reporters.

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Russia's Southern Military District did not offer evidence to back up its claims.

Eastern Ukraine's pro-Russian separatist leaders accuse Kyiv of planning and carrying out attacks, while Ukraine's government has denied any plans to regain control of rebel-held areas using force.

Ukraine and its allies accuse the separatist republics of purposely escalating the conflict with a dramatic increase in shellings, as well as mobilizations and evacuations of civilians into Russia.

The United States has warned for weeks that Russia could stage a false-flag operation to justify an incursion into Ukraine.

Western leaders have in recent months raised alarm over the build-up of more than 100,000 Russian troops surrounding Ukraine and a series of military drills.

The Kremlin denies plans to invade Ukraine but seeks sweeping security guarantees from the U.S., including a permanent ban on Ukraine's future NATO membership.

AFP contributed reporting.

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