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Russian Army Chief Says Focus Is Now on Liberation of Donetsk

By AFP

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Russian army chief Valery Gerasimov **kremlin.ru**

Russia's army chief said on Thursday that his troops in Ukraine were "focused on completing the liberation" of Donetsk, an eastern Ukrainian region Moscow claims to have annexed.

"The situation on the frontline has stabilized and the main efforts of our troops are now focused on completing the liberation of the territory of the Donetsk People's Republic," Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov said in a briefing for foreign military representatives.

Noting that the line of combat was some 815 kilometers long, Gerasimov said that the Russian military had "hit more than 1,300 critical targets ... significantly reducing the combat potential of the Ukrainian armed forces."

He also said that hypersonic missiles had been "used for the first time in combat conditions" and added that "damage continues to be inflicted on critical transport and energy

infrastructure deep inside Ukrainian territory."

Gerasimov also called the joint naval drills currently being carried out by Russian and Chinese warships a response to increasingly aggressive U.S. military posturing in the Asia-Pacific region.

"This cooperation is a natural reaction to the aggressive build-up of U.S. military potential in the region ... The exercises we are conducting are in strict accordance with international law," Gerasimov said after Moscow announced it was dispatching several warships to join war games off the coast of China between Dec. 21 and 27.

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"The purpose of these events is to increase the combat readiness of the troops and forces of the two countries and the ability to withstand new challenges and threats," Gerasimov said.

The Defense Ministry said the exercises would include live-fire drills with missiles and artillery and include practice measures to counter submarines.

"We are not going to create any alliances and new dividing lines in the region, as Washington has done," Gerasimov commented on Thursday.

China and Russia have drawn closer in recent years as part of what they call a "no-limits" relationship acting as a counterweight to the global dominance of the United States.

Former Russian president Dmitry Medvedev earlier this week traveled to China to meet with President Xi Jinping for talks that Medvedev said addressed international security and the conflict in Ukraine.

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