

Some Russian Forces May Be Preparing to Withdraw From Ukraine Border, NATO Says

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BRUSSELS — NATO has seen limited Russian troop activity near the Ukraine border that may suggest some Russian forces are preparing to withdraw, Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said on Thursday.

It is the first time during the Ukraine crisis that NATO has given any credence to Russian statements that it is withdrawing troops from near the Ukraine border, where NATO said it had built up a force of around 40,000 soldiers.

"Late yesterday, we have seen limited Russian troop activity in the vicinity of the border with Ukraine that may suggest that some of these forces are preparing to withdraw. It is too early to say what this means, but I hope this is the start of a full and genuine withdrawal," Rasmussen told reporters during a visit to Montenegro.

However, he said that, at present, most of the "previously deployed" Russian force remained

near the Ukrainian border and the Russian military was continuing to carry out exercises in the same area.

"If we see any meaningful, comprehensive and verifiable withdrawal, I would be the first to welcome it. This would be a first step from Russia into the right direction of living up to its international commitments, especially as Ukraine is preparing to hold important presidential elections on Sunday," Rasmussen said.

Russia said on Wednesday that troops deployed for exercises near the Ukrainian border had dismantled equipment and were moving to train stations and airfields for return to their permanent bases. The United States and NATO said then they saw no clear signs of a pullout.

NATO also disputed earlier statements by Moscow that it was withdrawing its troops from the Ukraine border.

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