

Russian Troops to Complete Pullback From Ukraine Border 'Within Days'

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The  **Moscow Times**

Russia will pull back all forces deployed to regions near its border with Ukraine "within a few days", a deputy defense minister said on Friday, a move that if carried out could ease tensions around Ukraine's presidential election on Sunday.

Moscow has concentrated tens of thousands of troops across the border from eastern Ukraine where pro-Russian separatists have declared two independent states.

Kiev and its Western allies see the Russian troops as a potential invasion force should Moscow choose to back the rebels openly, fueling pre-election tensions. The United States and EU hope the vote will strengthen the embattled central government.

Asked whether Russia would comply with Western calls for a withdrawal of its troops near the Ukraine frontier, Deputy Defense Minister Anatoly Antonov told Reuters: "They will see it — 100 percent ... We will leave less than nothing behind."

He said that Russia had already moved 20 transport planes and 20 trains worth of personnel

and military equipment out of the provinces of Rostov, Belgorod and Bryansk flanking Ukraine after completing what he said were military exercises there.

A full withdrawal of forces deployed to the regions could be completed "within a few days", he said.

A Defense Ministry source later said troops and equipment would be fully moved out of the border area in the course of a few days.

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