

Russia Launches Military Drills Near Ukraine as Invasion Fears Remain High

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The Russian military [announced](#) live fire exercises near Ukraine on Tuesday as fears of an invasion of its western neighbor remained high amid ongoing diplomatic efforts to calm tensions.

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The military's Western Military District said the motorized rifle drills will involve T-72B3 main battle tanks and BMP-2 infantry fighting vehicles.

The drills stretch across western Russia's Voronezh, Belgorod, Bryansk and Smolensk regions.

Late in December, Russia completed [10,000-troop drills](#) across southern regions that included Crimea, which it seized from Ukraine in 2014.

Russia's announcement Tuesday — marking its second live fire exercises near Ukrainian borders in a month — came one day after Russian and U.S. diplomats held strategic security talks to try to de-escalate tensions.

One of the key de-escalation issues offered by Washington was mutually limiting military exercises and deploying missiles in Europe. The U.S. State Department on Tuesday [said](#) Russia's exercises go “in exactly the opposite direction” of de-escalation.

The West has for months raised alarm over Russian military buildup near Ukraine and fears of a Russian invasion of its ally. Moscow denies planning an invasion and says moving troops and holding military drills within its borders is its right.

The U.S. State Department said Russia offered no proof it would not invade or any explanation for why it has deployed some 100,000 troops toward the Ukrainian border.

“These kind of deployments, 100,000 troops out of barracks and on the Ukrainian border, are extremely expensive,” Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland said during Tuesday's briefing. “As is the deployment of this kind of weaponry in the cold winter.”

The Ukrainian president's spokesman welcomed “the intent and efforts of the United States and Russia, and NATO and Russia to reduce tensions and resolve all mutual issues at the negotiating table.”

Monday's negotiations in Geneva offered no breakthrough, with the next round of dialogue moving to NATO headquarters in Brussels on Wednesday.

AFP contributed reporting.

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