

Russian Invasion of Ukraine Appears Imminent as Biden Prepares for War

U.S. President Joe Biden warned Thursday that Russia could still invade Ukraine within days, and the No. 2 diplomat at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow was expelled as tensions flared anew in the worst East-West standoff in decades.

NATO allies accused Russia of misleading the world with “disinformation” by saying it was returning some troops to their bases—one of the gestures Russia made this week that briefly cooled temperatures and raised hopes for peace. Russia is believed to have some 150,000 forces around Ukraine’s borders.

Speaking at the White House, Biden said Washington saw no signs of a Russian withdrawal of forces and said the U.S. has “reason to believe” that Russia is “engaged in a false flag operation to have an excuse to go in.”

He told reporters: “Every indication we have is they’re prepared to go into Ukraine, attack Ukraine.”

The State Department said Russia ordered the deputy chief of mission to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, Bart Gorman, to leave the country, calling the move “unprovoked” and “an escalatory step.” Russia provided no details of why he was expelled.

Tensions also spiked along the line that separates Ukrainian forces from Russia-backed separatists in the country’s east, with the parties accusing each other of intensive shelling.

Russia held out an offer of diplomacy, handing the U.S. a response Thursday to offers to engage in talks on limiting missile deployments in Europe, restrictions on military drills

and other confidence-building measures.

The response, published by the Foreign Ministry, deplored the West's refusal to meet the main Russian security demands and reaffirmed that Moscow could take unspecified "military-technical measures" if the U.S. and its allies continue to stonewall its concerns.

At the same time, it said Russia was ready to discuss measures to enhance security in Europe by discussing limits on missile deployments, restrictions on patrol flights by strategic bombers and other confidence-building steps.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken headed to New York for the U.N. Security Council meeting and then Germany for the Munich Security Conference.

Western powers estimate Russia has 150,000-plus troops massed outside Ukraine's borders.

"We've seen some of those troops inch closer to that border. We see them fly in more combat and support aircraft," U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said at NATO headquarters in Brussels. "We see them sharpen their readiness in the Black Sea. We even see them stocking up their blood supplies. You don't do these sort of things for no reason, and you certainly don't do them if you're getting ready to pack up and go home."

British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace said the West has seen "an increase of troops over the last 48 hours, up to 7,000." That squared with what a U.S. administration official said a day earlier. The top EU official said similar.

British Armed Forces Minister James Heappey even called Russia's claim to be withdrawing troops "disinformation." Russia accuses the West of the same.

Russia has "enough troops, enough capabilities, to launch a full-fledged invasion of Ukraine with very little or no

warning time,” NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said. “The fact that you’re putting a battle tank on a train and moving it in some direction doesn’t prove a withdrawal of troops.”

Moscow said several times this week that some forces are pulling back to their bases, but it gave few details that would allow for an independent assessment of the scope and direction of the troop movement.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman . Igor Konashenkov offered a bit more detail Thursday, saying that Russian tank and infantry units that took part in drills in the Kursk and Bryansk regions neighboring Ukraine were pulling back to their permanent bases in Nizhny Novgorod region. He said that some of those units already had arrived at their bases after a 700-kilometer journey east.

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