



Russian Military Buildup Along the Ukrainian Border

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Since [mid-October 2021](#), [social media and news outlets](#) have [reported](#) significant movement by Russian military forces, with [limited Russian transparency](#), on or near the Ukrainian border and within Ukraine's occupied Crimea region. These movements, which follow a similar but less expansive military buildup in March-April 2021 and Russia's [Zapad military exercises](#) in September 2021, have come amid [increasingly aggressive rhetoric](#) reported from Russian policymakers about the so-called encroachment of [NATO near Russia's borders and the geopolitical status of Ukraine](#). This [rhetoric](#) has continued despite new bilateral negotiations between the United States and Russia, as well as [joint meetings](#) with NATO and within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), in January 2022. On February 6, U.S. National Security Advisor [Jake Sullivan](#) warned, "Any day now, Russia could take military action against Ukraine," and said, "We believe that the Russians have put in place the capabilities to mount a significant military operation into Ukraine." Many [observers](#) and [policymakers](#), including some in Congress, have expressed concerns about a possible new Russian invasion of Ukraine or other aggressive actions.

Recent Developments

U.S. and allied leaders have [publicly voiced](#) their concerns about Russia's military buildup in recent weeks. On January 14, 2022, Ukraine was hit by a cyberattack that [many observers](#) attributed to Russia. The same day, the [Biden Administration accused Russia](#) of sending saboteurs to Ukraine "to have the option of fabricating a pretext for invasion." U.S. officials told [Reuters](#) in late January 2022 that Russia had moved blood supplies and other [medical support](#) to the Ukrainian border, a concerning sign that Moscow was potentially preparing for casualties. During a January 28 [press conference](#), Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley stated, "The Russian Federation has amassed upwards, at this time, of over 100,000 ground forces, air forces, naval forces, special forces, cyber, electronic warfare, command and control, logistics, engineers and other capabilities along the Ukraine border." On February 5, U.S. officials told [media outlets](#) that Russia had 70% of the forces it would need to conduct a full-scale invasion, with 83 [Battalion Tactical Groups](#) (BTGs) deployed and 14 more in transit to the region.

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Russian Troop and Equipment Deployments

Many analysts and officials characterize Russia's recent military buildup as the largest in [recent memory](#). The buildup comes after a sustained increase in Russia's permanent force posture on the Ukrainian border. Since 2014, Russia has created two new Combined Arms Armies (CAAs) in the [Western Military District](#) (20th CAA, headquartered in Voronezh) and the [Southern Military District](#) (8th CAA, headquartered in Rostov-on-Don and Novochoerkassk) bordering Ukraine to oversee, coordinate, and manage command and control of units transported to the border. The 8th CAA also reportedly commands the separatist units in the Russia-controlled regions of eastern Ukraine (Donetsk and Luhansk). Russia's military capabilities in occupied Crimea center on (1) the Black Sea Fleet and (2) ground, air, and coastal defense units focused on defending the peninsula and denying freedom of movement to Ukrainian and foreign actors.

Figure 1. Russian Borders with Ukraine and Belarus



Source: Congressional Research Service.

Media reporting has documented Russia's shift of equipment and units (including Iskander-M short-range ballistic missile and heavy artillery systems) from the [41st CAA](#) from the Central Military District, headquartered in Novosibirsk, Siberia, to Yelnya, on Belarus's eastern border (see [Figure 1](#)).

Since late December 2021, Russia has [continued](#) to build up its forces in the region. Reports indicate Russia has moved almost the entire [41st CAA](#) to Yelnya and positions [closer to the Ukrainian border](#). Analysts and media outlets have [reported](#) the movement of elements of the [1st Guards Tank Army](#) (based outside Moscow) and the [6th CAA](#) (based outside St. Petersburg) to areas on Ukraine's northeastern border near Voronezh. Reports also have noted the [increased](#)

[movement](#) of units from the [49th](#) and [58th](#) CAAs toward Ukraine's southeast border and the Russia-controlled regions of eastern Ukraine. Troops from Russia's Southern Military District have conducted [military exercises](#) and have [moved](#) artillery and BTGs into the peninsula. In January 2022, Russia [announced](#) large-scale naval exercises would take place in "all zones of responsibility." Some analysts are concerned Russia may be [transporting](#) landing ships to the Black Sea Fleet to support [potential amphibious operations](#).

Additionally, in early January 2022, Russia began to [transport](#) a significant portion of units from the Eastern Military District ([35th](#), [29th](#), [36th](#), and [5th](#) CAAs), [155th Naval Infantry Brigade](#), air defense, Iskander-M, and artillery units into Belarus. On January 18, 2022, Belarusian and Russian officials [announced](#) these units would participate in [joint Belarus-Russian](#) military exercises (Allied Resolve 2022) from February 9 to February 20 and would include [Aerospace Forces \(VKS\)](#) air defense and fighter assets. [Concerning for observers](#) is the fact these units include [support, logistics](#), command and control, electronic warfare, heavy artillery, and strategic air defense systems (S-300V and S-400).

Analysts also have noted the [movement of Russia's Airborne \(VDV\) units](#) to Belarus and to Ukraine's occupied Crimea region. These units would play a key role in spearheading any potential Russian operation, along with special forces (*spetsnaz*) and Naval Infantry units. [Media reporting](#) indicates Russia has been gradually building up the [necessary VKS air and helicopter assets](#). In recent days, open source reporting noted the [possible movement of Rosgvardiya \(National Guard\) troops](#) closer to the Ukrainian border. These troops would be crucial for rear area security, as well as for occupation and counter-insurgency missions.

Most observers [believe](#) Russia either has, or shortly will have, all the necessary components to conduct a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. [Indicators](#) concerning to observers include the movement of personnel to staff the equipment transported from across Russia; the presence of strategic-level artillery, rocket artillery, Iskander-M, and electronic warfare systems; support and logistics (including [Material-Technical Support Brigades](#)); the movement of VKS [fighter](#), [fighter-bomber](#), and helicopter squadrons; and the presence of command and control capabilities.

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