

Ukraine conflict

Russia raises pressure by sending more troops to Ukraine border

Western officials believe further deployments would be needed for full-blown invasion



A convoy of Russian armoured vehicles moves along a motorway in Crimea on Tuesday. Russia has deployed more than 106,000 troops to sites close to the Ukraine border © AP

Max Seddon in Moscow, **Henry Foy** in Brussels, and **Roman Olearchyk** in Kyiv 16 HOURS AGO

Diplomats from the US and Russia have shuttled across Europe for security talks over Ukraine but military analysts have had their eye on more ominous movements: the further deployment by Moscow of arms and personnel around its border with its southern neighbour.

Russia has bolstered its military presence on the border with Ukraine while engaging in weeks of diplomatic talks, with a series of deployments that western officials and analysts say could indicate [preparations for a renewed invasion](#).

After Moscow's lead negotiator said discussions last week with the US and Nato had [hit a "dead end"](#), Russia moved additional units to the Ukraine border from the country's far east and reinforced existing deployments within striking distance of Kyiv.

In total, Russia has deployed more than 106,000 troops to sites close to the border, according to western and Ukrainian officials. The forces include between 55 and 60 battalion tactical groups, which are highly mobile and strategically independent assault units.

Russia's military posture showed "they could initiate a conflict within a matter of weeks rather than months", said Michael Kofman, a senior research scientist at CNA,

Russian officials deny they are planning to attack Ukraine but have [threatened an unspecified “military-technical response”](#) if their demands for Nato to halt its eastward expansion — which would essentially rewrite Europe’s post-cold war security order — go unmet.

Ruslan Pukhov, director of Moscow defence think-tank Cast, said Russian president Vladimir Putin had turned to the threat of invasion after losing other avenues of influence in Ukraine. These include the collapse of Normandy format talks brokered by France and Germany last autumn, as well as Kyiv’s moves against a leading pro-Russian MP and three TV channels close to him the previous winter.

“What are the tools Russia and Putin have apart from coercive diplomacy and direct military intervention?” Pukhov said.

The White House continues to mount a [diplomatic effort to deter Russia](#) from a renewed invasion of Ukraine by threatening sanctions in response to any aggression and by continuing talks with Moscow about its security proposals.

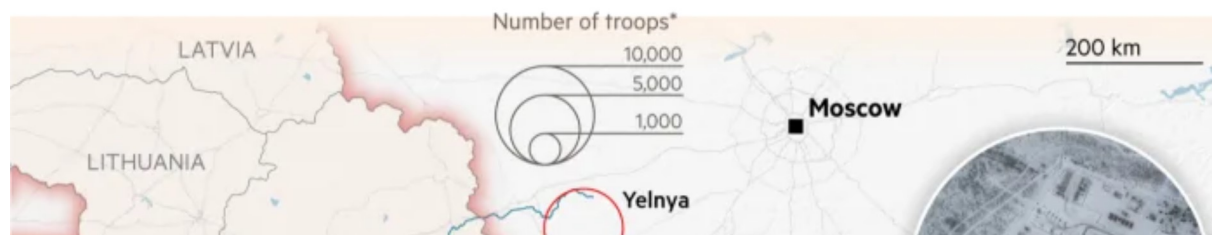
But US and [Nato officials](#) have said they consider as unacceptable Russia’s big demand that the alliance pledge never to admit Ukraine, leading [President Joe Biden](#) to admit on Wednesday that he expected Putin to “move in” on Ukraine.

Officials and analysts say Moscow is already well prepared.

In addition to troops, tanks and other weaponry, since the end of December Russia has begun moving ammunition stockpiles, field hospitals and supporting security services to sites close to the border. According to western intelligence officials, these deployments suggest an invasion is being prepared.

“They have enough on the border in terms of quantity and quality and capability to conduct a range of activities. That could be as small as a military intimidation, a raid, a strike [or] all the way up to more muscular options,” one senior western intelligence official said.

Build-up of Russian forces near the borders of Ukraine





* Figures include 700 personnel for battalion tactical groups. In Yelnya, Bakhchysarai and Pogonovo there is equipment on the ground but not enough personnel to man it at this time. The 35,000 troops figure for the rebel-held territory was supplied by the Ukrainian Ministry of Defence. Data as of January 12 2022

Sources: Rochan Consulting; FT research Images: Planet Labs PBC
© FT

Cartography by Steven Bernard

“But if they really intend a full-scale invasion with the intent of taking and holding territory, then the consensus is that they would need more troops than currently deployed.”

That is especially so, the official added, as “the signs are that the Ukrainians are not going to buckle, even under a pretty punishing air and ballistic missile attack. That they will try to hunker down and then once it is over, stand and fight against whoever comes in.”

In recent weeks, Russia has deployed 36 Iskander missile launchers close to the border, which are capable of hitting Kyiv.

Moscow has also moved some tank landing ships south to the Black Sea, while its existing air bases near the border mean large numbers of strike aircraft and combat helicopters can reach Ukraine without being relocated.

“The scope of these capabilities that they are bringing in is concerning,” the senior

Instead of a full invasion, Russia might opt to destabilise Ukraine with paramilitary attacks, hybrid actions and cyber attacks, such as the one last week that took down about 70 Ukrainian government websites and was widely attributed to Russia.

It could also achieve many of its potential military goals through devastating air strikes, Pukhov said.

“Even from Russian territory, it would be rather easy to smash the Ukrainian armed forces, especially if you don’t do a massive land operation — you use high precision weapons and other tools, which we [the Russians] have and Ukraine doesn’t.”

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2022. All rights reserved.
