

Beat: News

## NATO fears invasion as Russia masses troops on Ukraine border

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**USPA News** - Russia has massed about 20,000 combat-ready troops on the eastern Ukraine border, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) said Wednesday, saying the move increases tensions in the region and could signal a ground invasion under the pretext of a humanitarian mission. NATO spokeswoman Oana Lungescu stated that the buildup of Russian troops along the border further escalates "the situation and undermines efforts aimed at finding a diplomatic solution to the crisis."

The declining humanitarian situation in the eastern region of Ukraine "is due to Russia's continued destabilization of Ukraine," she said. Russia's Defense Ministry rejected the latest allegations and claimed the statements are "misleading the global community." "They [the Pentagon, U.S. State Department and NATO spokespersons] seem to be serious people who constantly have to improvise in their speeches in order to lend some seriousness to their claims," Major General Igor Konashenkov, a spokesman for Russia's defense ministry, said, as quoted by the Interfax news agency. Konashenkov suggested that this is the reason behind the discrepancies in figures when it comes to statements about "the alleged `massing` of Russian troops," he said. NATO has asked Russia to put an end to fueling the conflict by withdrawing military forces from the border of Ukraine and to stop the flow of weapons and fighters into the neighboring state. Additionally, the international organization called for the state to influence its pro-Russian separatists and to "renounce violence." Russia using a humanitarian or peacekeeping mission as an excuse to deploy troops into eastern Ukraine is currently a legitimate concern of NATO, Lungescu said. "This is a dangerous situation ... This is a conflict fueled by Russia," she added. The latest developments come in the wake of the crash of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17, which was allegedly shot down by pro-Russian separatists as it flew over Donetsk in eastern Ukraine on July 17. Western governments have placed partial blame on Russia, saying the missile system that shot it down was provided by Russia. All 298 people on board Flight MH17 - en-route from Amsterdam to Kuala Lumpur - were killed. Russian relations with the European Union and other Western governments have significantly deteriorated since Crimea, which is internationally recognized as an autonomous republic in Ukraine, was occupied by Russian forces and then annexed by the Russian Federation after residents voted to join Russia in a disputed referendum. Russia has received intense criticism from much of the international community for its role in the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, which is now focused in Ukraine's east, where separatists have declared independence in an effort to also join Russia. At least 1,129 people have been killed in fighting in eastern Ukraine

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