
RUSSIA SAYS IT IS CREATING THREE NEW DIVISIONS TO COUNTER NATO MOVES

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MOSCOW [] is creating three new divisions to counter the North Atlantic Treaty Organizations planned expansion along its eastern flank, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Wednesday, in a move that comes amid rising tensions in the region.

Moscow has threatened it will respond to NATO plans to boost its troops presence along its border with Russia. Western officials said last week the alliance will send four battalions [] 4,000 troops—to Poland and the ex-Soviet Baltic countries.

The Defense Ministry is taking a series of measures to counter the expansion of NATO forces in direct proximity to the Russian border, Mr. Shoigu said at a ministry meeting shown on state television.

The Pentagon has said new NATO troop deployments are in response to Russias provocative military exercises along its borders with alliance members. Russia says its exercises are partly a result of the increased NATO presence.

The announcements of troop increases at the border follow incidents that have raised concerns about a potential crisis in the Baltics. Russian warplanes intercepted a U.S. Navy destroyer and Air Force plane last month.

According to the U.S. account, Russian warplanes and a military helicopter repeatedly buzzed the USS Donald Cook, flying to within 75 feet of the warship as it carried out operations on the Baltic Sea.

Alexander Golts, a Russian military analyst and visiting researcher at Uppsala University in Sweden, said such incidents would continue until Russian President Vladimir Putin believed

Washington was treating Moscow on an equal basis.

An aircraft believed to be a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 passes over the bow of the USS Donald Cook during a patrol in the Baltic Sea. The U.S. alleges that Russian planes repeatedly buzzed the Donald Cook, passing close by the ship in a deliberate and aggressive manner. ENLARGE

An aircraft believed to be a Russian Sukhoi Su-24 passes over the bow of the USS Donald Cook during a patrol in the Baltic Sea. The U.S. alleges that Russian planes repeatedly buzzed the Donald Cook, passing close by the ship in a deliberate and aggressive manner. PHOTO: ZUMA PRESS

The West cannot ignore Russia. If they try to ignore Russia, they will undertake more and more risky missions, said Mr. Golts, who said Russia and NATO need to figure out a way to communicate to avoid accidents. What is needed is more mechanisms to make sure such incidents don't have disastrous consequences.

In a news conference in Mons, Belgium, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the alliance's planned troop buildup in the Baltic States wouldn't have happened if Russia had not used force against Ukraine in 2014. Mr. Stoltenberg said he had seen reports about Russia's additional military buildup close to NATO's borders.

This is part of a broader picture and pattern we have seen for many years now, Mr. Stoltenberg said.

NATO's planned deployment, he continued, was a reaction to a more assertive Russia that has demonstrated the will to change borders with force.

What we do is defensive, he said. We do that because we need to send a clear signal that we stand together, we have a credible defense and deterrence. And we will continue to respond.

Mr. Stoltenberg confirmed the alliance was contemplating a battalion-sized presence in several Eastern European countries. He said a final decision on the military presence will be made at the Warsaw summit in July. But he said the troops will be multinational, sending a clear signal [that] if you attack one country you attack the whole alliance.

Russia has already spent billions of dollars to reform its military and modernize its arms industry, though an economic crisis brought about by lower oil prices as well as U.S. and EU sanctions has slowed some plans. Mr. Putin has promised to spend more than 21 trillion rubles, or more than

\$300 billion, to revamp Russias fighting forces by the end of the decade.

Three divisions would represent around 30,000 troops, but military analysts said it was unclear whether or not the units would be created from scratch or from existing formations in those regions.

Two divisions in Russias western military district are likely intended to directly counter increased NATO troop numbers in the Baltics and Poland, while an additional division in the south will increase troop presence along the border with Ukraine, Mr. Golts said.

Mr. Shoigu said work had already started to build up the units new headquarters.

Moscow is planning to increase the number of its armed forces by 10,000 this year as the military pushes to turn the armed forces into a one-million-man fighting force.

Kaynak/Source: