

## **Vladimir Putin To Oversee Russia 'Strategic' Missile Drills Next Week**

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News of the drills come as Russia announces the pullback of troops from around Ukraine, a force that had driven concerns in the West -- particularly Washington -- that Moscow was planning an imminent attack.

*Russia-Ukraine Conflict: Tensions have been increasing between Ukraine and Russia.*

**Moscow:** President Vladimir Putin will on Saturday oversee military drills involving Russian "strategic forces" which will include ballistic and cruise missile launches, the defence ministry said.

News of the drills come as Russia announces the pullback of troops from around Ukraine, a force that had driven concerns in the West -- particularly Washington -- that Moscow was planning an imminent attack.

Putin will preside over "a planned exercise of strategic deterrence forces... during which ballistic and cruise missiles will be launched," the defence ministry said Friday.

The air force, units of the southern military district, as well as the northern and Black Sea fleets would be involved, it said.

The Kremlin told reporters that the launch of ballistic missiles was a "fairly regular training process".

"All the details have been made public in advance," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, dismissing any question or concerns on the drills.

Tensions between the West and Russia over Ukraine and European security have been made worse by large-scale military exercises near Kyiv's borders and also in Belarus.

Even though Russia has announced that some of its troops have been pulled back and returned to permanent bases, the West says it has seen no meaningful withdrawal.

Ukraine and rebels in the east of the country who have Moscow's backing have been trading accusations over an uptick in shelling between separatist and government-controlled territory.

- AFP