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Putin puts troops on alert in west Russia

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Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered an urgent drill to test the combat readiness of the country's armed forces across western Russia, including the border area towards Ukraine.

Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Putin ordered forces of the Western Military District to be put on alert on Wednesday.

"In accordance with an order from the president of the Russian Federation, forces of the Western Military District were put on alert," said Shoigu.

Massive military drills are to be held for four days beginning February 28 and most of the country's armed units including ships of the Baltic and the Northern Fleets and the Air Force are involved in the drills.

According to the defense ministry, some 150,000 service men are to participate during the military exercises.

There was no official statement from Moscow that the massive maneuvers are linked to the upheavals in Ukraine, which led to the fall of pro-Putin president Viktor Yanukovich.

On February 23, the Ukrainian parliament ousted president Viktor Yanukovich and named Oleksandr Turchynov, the legislature's newly-elected speaker, as interim president.

Moscow has questioned the legitimacy of Ukraine's new government, saying the current authorities have come to power as a result of an "armed mutiny."

In addition, Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev has denounced the Western countries' decision to accept the Ukrainian new authorities as a mistake and an "aberration of consciousness."

Ukraine has been the scene of anti-government protests since November last year, when Yanukovich refrained from signing an Association Agreement with the EU in favor of closer ties with Russia.