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Kerry warns of world war over Crimea

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US Secretary of State John Kerry has warned Russia about the Ukraine crisis, saying the "nationalistic fervor" in Crimea is similar to the build-up before World War II.

During a speech at the State Department on Tuesday, Kerry said he saw a "nationalist fervor which could, in fact, infect in ways that could be very, very dangerous. All you have to do is go back and read in history of the lead up to World War II, and the passions that were released with that kind of nationalistic fervor."

The top US diplomat said Russian President Vladimir Putin violated international law by deciding to annex Crimea, declaring that his move will have a "cost attached."

He was reacting to Crimea's union with the Russian Federation following Sunday's referendum.

Nearly 97 percent of voters in Crimea voted on March 16 to secede from Ukraine in favor of joining

Russia.

It "doesn't legitimize just taking what you want because you want it or because you're angry about the end of the Cold War or the end of the Soviet Union or whatever it is," Kerry argued.

He added that if Moscow believes people in Crimea want annexation, "you need to work through the operative process."

Kerry also called such a move "as egregious as any step that I can think of that can be taken by a country in today's world."

The United States and its Western allies have been in collision course with Russia ever since Moscow decided to deploy its troops in the Crimea region.

US President Barack Obama imposed sanctions against Russia over the crisis.

On Tuesday, US Vice President Joe Biden called Crimea's union with Russia a "land grab" by Moscow and a "blatant violation of international law."

"Russia has offered a variety of arguments to justify what is nothing more than a land grab, including what he [Putin] said today," Biden said. "But the world has seen through Russia's actions and has rejected the flawed logic behind those actions."