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US/European military provocations greet Russian annexation of Crimea

By Chris Marsden
19 March 2014

The Obama administration is utilising Moscow's incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation to escalate its campaign of threats and sanctions. To this end, the United States is lining up its puppet regime in Ukraine and its regional allies to prepare a series of military provocations.

Following a speech Tuesday to the Russian Federal Assembly, President Vladimir Putin signed a treaty annexing Crimea.

US Vice-President Joseph Biden responded by accusing Russia of a "blatant violation of international law" and making a "brazen military incursion." The US was considering deploying ground troops to the Baltic States on new military exercises, he threatened.

Hours later, Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk told his defence ministry that the conflict in Crimea had entered a military phase. Yatsenyuk accused Russian forces of killing a Ukrainian serviceman at a base near the Crimean regional capital, Simferopol, calling the incident "a war crime." Ukraine then authorised its troops to fire in "self-defence."

Provocations to legitimise war need not take place only within Crimea. They could be staged throughout eastern Ukraine.

Yesterday, Ukraine's armed forces were busy moving tanks and digging trenches in the Donbas basin. The Ukrainian State Border Service stated that Russian troops were a threat to the Kharkiv, Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Donetsk, where Russian-speaking residents are demanding a Crimea-style referendum, has been placed under the leadership of the oligarch Sergei Taruta. He has threatened to carry out arrests and break up protests, declaring, "The soft touch is over, we are now going to defend ourselves."

The Ukrainian government has allotted more than \$600 million to bolster military defences and partially mobilize the armed forces. It refused Monday to remove its troops from Crimea, despite a March 16 peace treaty signed with Russia that extends to March 21. Justice Minister Pavlo Petrenko said "the most important issue is to restore the military might of Ukraine... Our army should be ready for combat."

Putin's speech tempered an endorsement of Crimean annexation and denunciations of the US and its allies for creating the crisis in Ukraine with the offer of a compromise.

The Maidan protests in Kiev, he said, were utilised by "nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophobes and anti-Semites" who "executed this coup," and who had "foreign sponsors." He accused the West of using double standards because it intervened in Kosovo in 1999 and endorsed that province's unilateral separation from Serbia.

In Ukraine, he said, the West had behaved "irresponsibly," pushing the protests that toppled President Yanukovich until Russia "could not step back any more." He declared that "Russia has national interests that need to be respected." It had faced the possibility of Sevastopol, where Russia's Black Sea fleet is based, being used by NATO, which would have threatened southern Russia.

He concluded, however, with a pledge not to "split Ukraine" or trample on Ukraine's national feelings, implying that there would be no further Russian military interventions. He then signed a treaty accepting the "Republic of Crimea" and the city of Sevastopol as parts of the Russian Federation.

Putin's offer of a compromise—essentially a pledge to go this far and no further—was summarily rejected by Washington, Germany, the UK and France. German Chancellor Angela Merkel condemned moves to incorporate Crimea as "against international law," while French President Francois Hollande said, "The next European Council meeting on March 20-21 must provide the opportunity for a strong and coordinated European response to the hurdle that has just been jumped." UK Prime Minister David Cameron said "further measures" should be taken against what Foreign Secretary William Hague described as "a land grab."

A combined G-7 and European Union crisis meeting has been called for next week in The Hague, following a request by US President Barack Obama.

The US, together with the European Union, is threatening an escalation of sanctions—so far limited to targeting political figures close to Putin—to cover businesses and trade. But yesterday, the US again focused its energies on building a regional military alliance against Russia.

The US and the EU are providing all of the funding and equipment to Ukraine’s military, now reorganised around a newly-created 60,000-strong “National Guard” under the leadership of fascistic politicians Andriy Parubiy and Dmytro Yarosh and encompassing Right Sector and Svoboda militias.

On Monday, after a meeting with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchytsia, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen pledged a partnership that “includes development of ties with the Ukrainian military as well as the expansion in the number of joint drills.” He added, “In addition, NATO will more actively involve Ukraine in its multinational projects regarding the development of military potentials.”

A key role in US military scheming is being assigned to Poland, with Biden holding talks in Warsaw with Prime Minister Donald Tusk and President Bronislaw Komorowski.

Writing in *Forbes*, Loren Thompson noted the key geo-strategic significance of Poland, a NATO member since 2004 with a population of 38 million that “shares borders with three former Soviet republics and the Russian enclave at Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea.”

He wrote that Poland was now intent on renewing its earlier abortive effort to acquire a missile defence system, Polish Shield, which was rejected in 2009 by Obama due to Russian opposition. Costing at least \$43 billion, it will operate in conjunction with “land-and sea-based defences the US is deploying to the region.”

The plan is to purchase the Medium Extended Air Defense System, or MEADS, from the US. Thompson noted that the Obama administration “late last week gave prime contractor Lockheed Martin permission to offer” MEADS to Warsaw.

Poland has announced plans to form a multinational military brigade with the Caucasian states, Ukraine and Lithuania. The proposal was first made in 2009, but defence ministers will meet this week to form a brigade that the *Daily Telegraph* said “would straddle NATO’s eastern border and bring Ukraine’s armed forces closer to the Western fold.” Last week, Ukraine’s deputy defence minister visited NATO headquarters to discuss the move.

Biden also met with Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaite, Latvian President Andris Berzins and Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves. Latvia and Estonia share borders with Russia. All

three have significant Russian populations. Russians in Latvia, making up a third of the population, are considered “non-citizens” and cannot vote. This week, 1,500 Latvians who fought for Nazi Germany’s Waffen SS held their annual parade through Riga.

The Islamist Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan has made its most bellicose statements against Russia to date, warning that it will close the Bosphorus to Russian ships if there is any violence against Tatars in Crimea. Turkey will not recognize the referendum in Crimea, Erdogan said.