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US warns Russia against 'further military intervention' in Ukraine

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The United States has warned Russia against “further military intervention” in eastern Ukraine, saying Washington is deeply concerned about the violence there.

On Saturday, a large number of armed men seized government buildings in the eastern Ukrainian city of Kramatorsk, 150 kilometers (90 miles) from the Russian border, and authorities in Kiev called it an "act of aggression by Russia."

In response, Washington accused Moscow of supporting “armed separatists” in taking control of the city, saying Moscow’s actions are reminiscent of the events that preceded its “annexation” of Crimea.

"We are very concerned by the concerted campaign we see under way in eastern Ukraine today by pro-Russian separatists, apparently with support from Russia," said Laura Lucas Magnuson, spokeswoman for the White House National Security Council.

"We saw similar so-called protest activities in Crimea before Russia's purported annexation. We call on President (Vladimir) Putin and his government to cease all efforts to destabilize Ukraine, and we caution against further military intervention," she added.

The Autonomous Republic of Crimea declared independence from Ukraine on March 17 and formally applied to become part of Russia following a referendum a day earlier, in which nearly 97 percent of the participants voted in favor of the move.

On March 21, Putin signed into law the documents officially making Crimea part of the Russian territory. He said the move was carried out based on the international law.

This week, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov warned that any military action by the Ukrainian authorities in the eastern parts of the country would undermine diplomatic efforts to resolve the crisis.

He said that Russia has no intention to incorporate eastern regions of Ukraine, adding, “We don’t have either our servicemen or our agents there.”

“We can have no such intentions. This would run counter to the vital interests of Russia,” Lavrov said.