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New Ukraine Government Has White House's Support, U.S. Vice President Says

By Matthew Bodner

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U.S. Vice President Joe Biden has told new Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseny Yatsenyuk in a telephone conversation that the interim government in Kiev has Washington's full support.

The White House said in a statement that Biden congratulated Yatsenyuk on his appointment on Thursday and said that the U.S. will provide Ukraine with "full support" in carrying out economic reforms, restoring peace, fulfilling its international obligations, and establishing "open and constructive relations with its neighbors."

He also expressed hope that the government can "restore the faith of the Ukrainian people in the country's democratic institutions" prior to the May 25 presidential elections.

U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen released a series of statements on Thursday offering further support to the new Ukrainian

Cabinet and warning Russia not to sends its Armed Forces to Ukraine.

Russia began conducting military exercises in a number of its western regions earlier this week, sparking concerns that it is gearing up for military intervention in Ukraine. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said that the exercises were not linked to the situation in Ukraine.

However, tensions were further heightened when a group of unidentified armed men broke into the Crimean parliament building early on Thursday and hoisted a Russian flag on its roof.

"We expect other nations to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and avoid provocative action," Hagel said after meeting with the NATO Council in Brussels, adding that he is "closely watching Russia's military exercises along the Ukrainian border," The New York Times reported.

Russia should refrain from taking "any steps that could be misinterpreted, or lead to miscalculations during a delicate time," he said.

Hagel added that he was planning on speaking with Shoigu by telephone "soon."

Rasmussen said in a statement on NATO's website that his organization "stands ready to support democratic development, defense reforms, military cooperation and democratic control over the security sector," and wishes to confirm its support for Ukraine on the path to "democratic and inclusive reforms."

Rasmussen also described the seizure of the Crimean parliament building as "dangerous and irresponsible" and urged Russia not to take any action that could escalate tension or create misunderstanding.

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