

Western Countries Mull Russia Isolation Measures

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A file photo of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry.

As thousands of Russian troops are securing control over Crimea, the U.S. has warned Russia about the economic and diplomatic sanctions it could face if it fails to de-escalate tensions with Ukraine.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, who is meeting with the Ukrainian leadership in Kiev on Tuesday, has warned Russia that its "invasion and occupation of Ukrainian territory" could lead to the country's exclusion from the Group of Eight, after the leaders of all Group of Seven countries announced they have suspended preparations for June's G8 Summit scheduled to be held in Sochi.

"He [President Vladimir Putin] is not going to have a Sochi G8," Kerry told NBC News on Sunday. "He may not even remain in the G8 if this continues."

Russia responded to the suspensions by saying they had "no grounds" and damaged the G8 and the whole international community.

On Monday U.S. diplomat Victoria Nuland urged sending observers from another international body, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, to Ukraine to monitor human rights in the region and defuse military tension. However Moscow's ambassador to the organization, which would need a consensus decision to send such a mission, said that Russia wanted more information about that plan and added that international missions sometimes worsen the situation in a country, Reuters reported.

On Sunday, Kerry said the U.S. and several other countries were ready to "completely isolate" Russia, and that it could face economic sanctions, a travel visa ban, asset freezes and a disruption of its bilateral trade with the U.S., which amounted to \$40 billion last year.

President Barack Obama also cautioned Russia on Friday that there would be "costs" to a military intervention in Ukraine.

"I think there is a unified view by all of the foreign ministers I talked with [...], all of the G8 and more, that they are simply going to isolate Russia," Kerry said. "They are not going to engage with Russia in a normal, business-as-usual manner."

European Union foreign ministers gathered in Brussels on Monday to think up a response to the crisis that could include economic sanctions against Russia.

Although the Obama administration is still pondering formal mechanisms to reprimand Russia, American efforts to marginalize the country have already materialized.

Representatives from the Federal Veterinary and Phytosanitary Inspection Service, Russia's food safety watchdog, were denied entry into the U.S., a measure that excluded them from participating in negotiations related to Kazakhstan's accession into the World Trade Organization held in Washington from March 3 to 6.

The deputy head of the Russian delegation, Nikolai Vlasov, was informed one day prior to departure that his officials would not be allowed to enter U.S. territory, according to a press release on the agency's website.

The assistant to the head of the inspection service, also known as Rosselkhoz nadzor, told a Russian business news agency that the U.S. State Department did not explain the motives behind its decision and that it was likely linked to the current situation in Ukraine. Rosselkhoz nadzor announced that it will conduct its own negotiations with Kazakhstan when the Kazakh delegation returns from Washington.

Other countries have also acted upon their disapproval of Russia's presence in Ukraine. Finnish Defense Minister Carl Haglund cancelled his meeting with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Shoigu.

Analysts expect that G7 countries and members of the EU will likely adopt measures to isolate Russia economically, which would bring further ills to the struggling Russian economy.

"I think the West's informal disregard of Russia could be a major consequence of these

isolation threats," said Alexey Markarkin, deputy director of the Moscow-based think tank Center of Political Technologies, said by phone. "This could lead to Russia being ignored by investors and to being viewed as an even more 'high risk' place. That is what will be problematic for Russia if the West manages to isolate it."

In response to Washington's statements about the presence of Russian troops in Ukraine, the foreign affairs committee of Russia's Federal Council is now appealing to Putin to recall Russia's ambassador to the U.S.

Biden Calls Russia's Medvedev

Vice President Joe Biden urged Russia to pull its forces back from Ukraine in a phone call on Monday with Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev, the White House said.

"The vice president urged Russia to pull back its forces, support the immediate deployment of international monitors to Ukraine, and begin a meaningful political dialogue with the Ukrainian government," the White House said in a statement released later Monday.

(Reuters)

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