

Global Reactions to Ukraine Intensify

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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The West is taking action against those involved in the Russian military intervention into Crimea.

BRUSSELS — NATO urged Russia on Thursday to call back to bases its forces on the Ukrainian Crimea peninsula, saying it stood by Ukraine's territorial integrity in the face of the greatest threat to European security since the end of the Cold War.

The warning came on the heels of a flurry of activity, including a U.S. announcement of a travel ban and discussions with China, EU comments about ending talks on visa-free travel for Russians, counter criticisms by the Russian Foreign Affairs Ministry and a Russian Government Security Council meeting chaired by President Vladimir Putin.

In the NATO statement Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said, "Ukraine is a valued and long-standing partner for NATO. In these difficult moments NATO stands by Ukraine, NATO stands by Ukraine's sovereignty, integrity and by the fundamental principles of international law."

The crisis in Ukraine escalated on Thursday after the parliament in Crimea, which has

effectively been seized by Russian forces, voted to join Russia.

"This crisis is not just about Ukraine, this crisis has serious implications for the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area as a whole. We clearly face the gravest threat to European security since the end of the Cold War," Rasmussen said.

"Above all we call on Russia to step up its international commitments and halt the military escalation in Crimea. We call on Russia to withdraw its forces to their bases and to refrain from any interference elsewhere in Ukraine," he said.

Meanwhile, the White House said it was able to secure Chinese agreement about Ukraine's territorial integrity. China agrees with the United States that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine must be respected in its dispute with Russia, the White House said in statement after top-level contacts between the two countries.

In comments posted on its website, China's Foreign Ministry said that State Councilor Yang Jiechi had urged all sides to exercise restraint and said the crisis must be resolved through political and diplomatic means.

The legitimate rights and interests of all ethnic groups in Ukraine must be taken into account, added Yang, who spoke to President Barack Obama's national security adviser, Susan Rice.

China is treading a cautious path in the Ukraine dispute, withholding criticism of strategic partner Russia while adhering to its traditional policy of not interfering in the affairs of other countries.

The U.S. has engaged in global diplomatic efforts to gather opposition against Russia's deployment of troops in the Crimea region of southern Ukraine.

Obama spoke earlier to British Prime Minister David Cameron as Washington sought to mount pressure on Europe.

Vice President Joe Biden talked by phone with Latvian President Andris Berzins to underscore the U.S.' commitment to peace and security in the Baltic region.

But U.S. and Russian diplomats have been unable to find a common language. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Thursday there was no agreement as yet between Moscow and Washington over the crisis in Ukraine, Interfax news agency reported.

"For now we cannot tell the international community that we have an agreement," Lavrov was quoted as saying after meeting his U.S. counterpart, Secretary of State John Kerry, in Rome.

Russia on Thursday dismissed as "primitive distortion of reality," cynicism and double standards a U.S. Department of State fact sheet that dismissed Putin's comments on the crisis in Ukraine as "false claims."

"It is clear that in Washington, as before, they are unable to accept a situation developing not according to their templates," Alexander Lukashevich, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman, said in a statement.

In Washington President Barack Obama on Thursday ordered the freezing of U.S. assets and a ban on travel into the U.S. of those involved in the Russian military intervention into Crimea.

Obama signed an executive order aimed at punishing those Russians and Ukrainians responsible for a Russian move into Crimea.

The order, the White House said in a statement, is "a flexible tool that will allow us to sanction those who are most directly involved in destabilizing Ukraine, including the military intervention in Crimea, and does not preclude further steps should the situation deteriorate."

In addition, the State Department is putting in place visa bans on a number of officials and individuals responsible for or complicit in threatening the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine.

Putin is not among those targeted under U.S. sanctions announced in response to Russia's incursion into Ukraine, a senior Obama administration official said Thursday.

"It is an unusual and extraordinary circumstance to sanction a head of state, and we would not begin our designations by doing so," the official said.

The order was announced as Kerry and Lavrov began their meeting.

A senior State Department official said the U.S. had informed the Europeans beforehand about the sanctions.

The U.S. wants Russian troops to return to their bases in Crimea and for Moscow to allow international monitors into the region to ensure the rights of ethnic Russians there are protected.

"We call on Russia to take the opportunity before it to resolve this crisis through direct and immediate dialogue with the government of Ukraine," the White House said.

The Obama order targets any assets held in the U.S. by "individuals and entities" responsible for the Russian military intervention in Ukraine, threatening its territorial integrity or seeking to assert governmental authority over any part of Ukraine without authorization from the Ukrainian government in Kiev.

The White House also said it is prepared to consider additional steps and sanctions as necessary.

In Moscow, Putin discussed Ukraine, including the Crimean parliament's appeal to let the region join Russia, at a meeting of his Security Council on Thursday, his spokesman said, RIA Novosti reported.

European Union leaders meeting in Brussels on Thursday to discuss the situation upped the ante by saying they were considering freezing talks with Russia on a visa-free regime — something Moscow has demanded for some time.

The Foreign Ministry said such moves were "politicized, unconstructive and ungrounded"

and expressed hope it would not happen.

"We still hope that at the end of the day our partners will not go for such a move," the ministry's spokesman Alexander Lukashevich said in a statement.

The USS Truxtun, a U.S. Navy guided-missile destroyer, is heading to the Black Sea for what the U.S. military on Thursday described as a "routine" deployment that was scheduled well before the crisis in Ukraine.

The announcement came a day after the Pentagon unveiled plans to put more U.S. fighter jets on a NATO air patrol mission in the Baltics, moving to reassure allies alarmed by Russia's effective seizure of the Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea.

Crimea is home to Russia's Black Sea military base in Sevastopol.

The U.S. Navy said in a statement that the Truxtun left Greece on Thursday en route to the Black Sea and would conduct training with Romanian and Bulgarian naval forces.

"While in the Black Sea, the ship will conduct a port visit and routine, previously planned exercises with allies and partners in the region," the Navy said in a statement, without offering additional details.

"Truxtun's operations in the Black Sea were scheduled well in advance of her departure from the U.S."

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