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U.S. Goes After Putin Allies, 'Key Sectors' of Economy

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Russian deputies standing after voting in the State Duma on Thursday.

As Russia's State Duma on Thursday ratified the annexation of Crimea and the Black Sea port of Sevastopol to Russia, the U.S. kept good on a promise for "serious consequences" by hitting high-ranking individuals reportedly tied to President Vladimir Putin with sanctions — but Russia quickly hit back with its own list.

The Foreign Ministry responded almost immediately on Thursday to U.S. President Barack Obama's announcement of new sanctions — which will now affect 20 additional people and Bank Rossia — by saying the U.S. sanctions would "hit the U.S. like a boomerang."

"There must be no doubt: We will respond adequately to every hostile thrust," the ministry said.

It seemed as if Russia had been expecting the move and had prepared its response in advance,

releasing a list of nine U.S. lawmakers and officials who would now be denied entry to Russia.

Russia's list includes John Boehner, the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, Robert Menendez, the head of the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee, senators John McCain and Harry Reid and several administration officials.

That list came just moments after Obama said Russian threats in southern and eastern Ukraine "posed dangerous risks of escalation" and announced an executive order to impose sanctions on key sectors of Russia's economy.

High-ranking individuals believed to be close to Putin were added to the U.S. sanctions list, including Gennady Timchenko, Chief of Staff Sergei Ivanov, Arkady Rotenberg, Vladimir Yakunin and Bank Rossia owner Yury Kovalchuk, among others.

In addition, the U.S. administration added to the list Bank Rossia, which has $10 billion in assets and is believed to be used by senior members of the Russian government.

The tit-for-tat sanctions are the latest escalation in the ongoing Ukraine crisis, following on the heels of Russia's finalization of steps to officially take over the Crimean peninsula and the Black Sea port of Sevastopol despite repeated calls from the West for Russia to back down.

The treaty on making the Ukrainian territories part of Russia was signed by Putin and the leaders of Crimea and Sevastopol on Tuesday despite the fierce outcry from Western leaders. The majority of crimeans voted for secession from Ukraine in a referendum Sunday, but the referendum has not been recognized by the U.S. and the European Union, who see the move as Russia's attempt at territorial expansion.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon expressed "deep concern" over the Russia-Ukrainian crisis to Putin at a meeting with him at the Kremlin on Thursday, the Kremlin website reported.

Ban Ki-moon told Putin he was worried about the latest seizure of Ukrainian military bases in Crimea by the Russian armed forces and urged Putin to build "an open and constructive dialog" between Moscow and Kiev," Interfax reported.

As news of the sanctions broke later, Ban Ki-moon urged restraint on all sides.

"I have emphasized that all parties [should] refrain from any hasty or provocative actions that could further exacerbate the already very tense and very volatile situation," Ban Ki-moon said, Reuters reported.

The UN official also said he was "disappointed" with Sunday's referendum, although he "understands and shares [Putin's] legal worries in connection with the standing of Russian minorities," he said.

Ban Ki-moon also met with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who "expressed the deep concern" of Russia in connection with "multiple violations" of the rights of Russian-speaking people in the east and southeast of Ukraine, as well as with "radical groups contributing to tensions with the connivance of Kiev authorities," the Foreign Ministry's website reported.

Lavrov's comments echo earlier statements by Russian authorities that say the rights of Russian speakers in Ukraine are being infringed upon by ultranationalist groups.

Earlier in the day, all State Duma deputies but one, opposition-minded Ilya Ponomaryov from A Just Russia faction, voted to ratify the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol.

But even Ponomaryov seemed to decry Russia's move for its damage to the country's image, not for the annexation itself. He called the annexation "hasty" and a move "leading Ukraine and the whole world to view us as aggressors," but he expressed support for Russia's recognition of the independence of Crimea and Sevastopol, Interfax reported.

The treaty is expected to be ratified by the Federation Council on Friday, after which it will take effect and the legal process of integration will begin and last until next January.

In response to the Russian parliament's approval of the annexation of Crimea and Sevastopol on Thursday, the Ukrainian parliament, Verkhovna Rada, adopted a declaration calling on the world not to recognize the annexation of the two territories.

Ukrainian lawmakers stressed that for the first time since World War II, "generally recognized European borders are being 'redrawn' by the country that guaranteed Ukraine's territorial integrity and inviolability of its borders," Verkhovna Rada said in a statement on its website in English.

"The Ukrainian people will never, under no circumstances, stop fighting for the liberation of Crimea from the occupants, however complicated and prolonged it might be," the statement said.

U.S. Ambassador to the UN Samantha Power commented on the annexation of the Ukrainian territories by calling Russia "a thief."

"A thief can steal property, but that does not confer the right of ownership on the thief," Power told a Security Council Meeting late Wednesday in a speech transcribed on her official website.

Power called on the international community to ensure that "what happened in Crimea cannot be repeated in other parts of Ukraine."

Apart from Power, fears of Russia's imperial ambitions were voiced by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Acting Ukrainian President Oleksander Turchynov, who authored the declaration approved by his parliament Thursday.

Rasmussen, speaking at the Brookings Institution on Wednesday afternoon, called Russia's annexation of Crimea an "attempt to turn back the clock" and "the gravest threat to European security and stability since the end of the Cold War," a transcript on the NATO website said.

In his declaration approved by the Verkhovna Rada, Turchynov said Russia was motivated by the "augmentation of the Russian world" in its move to annex Ukrainian territories.

Despite the overall criticism of Russia's actions, the European Union is unlikely to impose further financial and economic sanctions on Russia during a two-day summit in Brussels, which starts Thursday, as there was no consensus on the subject among its members, an unidentified European official told Golos Ameriki radio in a report published Thursday.

The report contradicted German Chancellor's Angela Merkel statement Thursday, in which she said the summit "will make clear that we are ready at any time to introduce phase three measures if there is a worsening of the situation," Merkel told her parliament, Reuters reported.

The Kremlin human rights council on Thursday remained firm, however, reiterating that the referendum was in line with the people's right for self-determination spelled out in the UN Charter and with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which said "the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government," the council said on its website.

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