

Obama Expresses Concern Russia Moving on Ukraine

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With no sign of Russia abandoning the Crimean peninsula, U.S. President Barack Obama said Tuesday he was concerned that Moscow will move deeper into Ukraine and warned President Vladimir Putin that that would be a bad choice.

Obama stood fast on his insistence that Crimea remains a part of Ukraine, even as the fledgling Ukrainian government in Kiev ordered its troops to pull back from the disputed territory.

"We are not recognizing what is happening in Crimea," Obama said at his first news conference since Russia moved to annex Crimea after a referendum 10 days ago. Obama rejected "the notion that a referendum sloppily organized over the course of two weeks" would "somehow be a valid process."

Obama said he did not think international recognition of Crimea as part of Russia is "a done deal." But he also said "it would be dishonest to suggest there is a simple solution to what has already taken place in Crimea," where Russian troops are in control.

"We also are concerned about further encroachment by Russia into Ukraine," Obama said at a joint news conference with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

"I think that will be a bad choice for President Putin to make," Obama said. "But ultimately he is the president of Russia, and he is the one who is going to be making that decision."

Obama was pursuing efforts to pressure Russia out of its aggressive pose as world leaders met for an international Nuclear Security Summit. But to the east, the Russian annexation of Crimea was beginning to take root and Moscow shrugged off Obama's drive to leave Putin in the cold.

Obama also said he was concerned about Russia's troop buildup along the Ukrainian border. "We oppose what appears to be an effort at intimidation," Obama said. "But Russia has a right legally to have its troops on its own soil."

Asked whether in hindsight he agrees with Republican presidential challenger Mitt Romney's assessment that Russia is the U.S.' top geopolitical foe, Obama said he is more concerned about a nuclear bomb in Manhattan than in Russia.

"The U.S. has got a whole lot of challenges," Obama said. "Russia is a regional power that is threatening some of its immediate neighbors, not out of strength but out of weakness."

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