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Putin Calls for International Access to Airliner Crash Site

By Anna Dolgov

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin gestures as he chairs a government meeting at the Novo-Ogaryovo state residence outside Moscow.

President Vladimir Putin called for international access to the crash site of a Malaysian airliner in rebel-controlled eastern Ukraine, while the leaders of the U.S. and EU nations accused him of failing to back up his words with action and warned of additional sanctions when an EU panel convenes Tuesday.

In an address published on the Kremlin website early Monday morning, Putin also said that "Russia will do everything that depends on us for the conflict in eastern Ukraine to move from its current military phase into the phase of discussions at a negotiation table through peaceful and exclusively diplomatic means."

But Putin has been making similar statements for months, calling for the Ukrainian government and pro-Moscow insurgents to hold peace talks, and Western leaders have

accused him of ensuring that the conflict rages on through his support of separatists.

"Elegant forms of words and fine communiques are no substitute for real action," British Prime Minister David Cameron said on his Facebook page Sunday.

"The weapons and fighters being funneled across the border between Russia and eastern Ukraine; the support to the militias; the half-truths, the bluster, the delays. They have to stop," Cameron said. "If President Vladimir Putin stops the support to the fighters in eastern Ukraine and allows the Ukrainian authorities to restore order, this crisis can be brought to an end."

Putin on Monday called for "all the people who are responsible for the security in the region to raise their accountability to their people and the people of the countries whose citizens perished in the accident."

But in the view of Western leaders, the list of people who are responsible for the security in the region starts with the Russian president.

U.S. officials also accused Putin of impeding international investigation of the crash in eastern Ukraine while denying that Russia might be responsible. The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe said Friday that its monitors had been blocked from accessing the site of the crash by "impolite and unprofessional" and apparently drunk gunmen.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said the Kremlin's response to the crash indicated that it was "ridiculous" for the international community to trust Putin.

"This is the moment of truth for Russia and for Mr. Putin, where they need to stop just saying things and they need to make sure that they happen," Kerry said on CNN's "State of the Union" program Sunday.

So far, "what's happening is really grotesque, and it is contrary to everything President Putin and Russia said they would do," Kerry told NBC on Sunday.

U.S. Representative Peter King, a Republican from New York, told CBS that Putin "has shown he is really incapable of functioning in a civilized world."

"The way he's responding to a crisis, which he caused, which everyone knows he did, and yet he goes underground," King told CBS. "This is what a mafia guy does. This is what a goon does. Not a world leader."

U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Dianne Feinstein had earlier urged Putin to "man up" on the airliner crash.

Ahead of a European Union foreign ministers' meeting Tuesday, Cameron listed a series of the organization's demands for Russia, including international specialist access to the crash site, the withdrawal of Russia's support for separatists, and establishing "proper long-term relationships" between Russia, the West and Ukraine.

"Russia must immediately halt supplies and training for the rebels. They do not represent the people of Ukraine. Without Russian support they will wither," Cameron said on his

Facebook page.

"If President Putin does not change his approach to Ukraine, then Europe and the West must fundamentally change our approach to Russia," he said.

Cameron, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande agreed Sunday that international access to the crash site was a top priority, and that EU foreign ministers "should be ready to impose further sanctions on Russia when they meet on Tuesday," the British prime minister's office said, the BBC reported.

Following the announcements, Putin said in his address that "it is necessary to ensure that a full-fledged group of experts under the auspices of the International Civil Aviation Organization, an international commission, work on the site."

But he made no indication of planning to change his policy toward Ukraine's separatists and blamed the crash on a supposed failure to heed Russia's appeals for a peace settlement. He stopped short of specifically naming the Ukrainian leadership.

Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte, whose country lost 192 of its nationals in the airliner crash, said that another team of OSCE and Dutch experts was expected to reach the crash site on Monday, the Malay Mail reported.

Putin "must now take responsibility vis-a-vis the rebels," Rutte said over the weekend, AFP reported.

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