

Kerry: Moscow Lying When It Says No Russian Troops in Ukraine

February 25, 2015



U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry testifies at a Senate Appropriations State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs Subcommittee hearing on review FY2016 funding request and budget justification for the State Department on Capitol Hill in Washington Feb. 24, 2015.

WASHINGTON — U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry has said Russia was lying when it said there are no Russian troops or equipment in Ukraine, where pro-Russian separatists are fighting government troops.

Fighting has abated in eastern Ukraine in recent days, raising hope that a cease-fire that was due to start on Feb. 15 can finally take effect after the rebels initially ignored it to storm the government-held town of Debaltseve last week.

Western countries have not given up on the cease-fire deal to end fighting that has killed more than 5,600 people, although they remain suspicious of the rebels and their presumed patron, Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Asked Tuesday during U.S. congressional testimony if Russia was lying when it says it has no

troops or equipment in Ukraine, Kerry replied: "Yes."

Kiev and its Western allies say the rebels are funded and armed by Moscow and backed by Russian military units. Moscow denies aiding sympathizers in Ukraine and says heavily armed Russian-speaking troops operating without insignia there are not its men.

The chief U.S. diplomat later elaborated on the need to push back against Russia's stance it is not involved in the conflict.

"Russia ... tragically is sort of reigniting a new kind of East-West, zero-sum game that we think is dangerous and unnecessary," Kerry told U.S. lawmakers when testifying about the State Department budget.

"The question asked earlier about ... how they present things and the lies about their presence in Ukraine and the training, I mean, you know, it's stunning but it has an impact in places where it isn't countered," he said. "Propaganda works."

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