

# Putin Tells Merkel And Hollande of 'Ukrainian Provocation'

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Russian president Vladimir Putin has held phone talks with German chancellor Angela Merkel and French president Francois Hollande to discuss increasing violations of the ceasefire agreement in southeast Ukraine, the Kremlin announced Friday.

Putin stressed the “provocative nature” of Ukraine’s military operations in the Donbass region, and called on Merkel and Hollande to pressure Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko into complying with the Minsk agreements.

All three agreed on the need to remove heavy weaponry and the equal withdrawal of forces from the front line.

Andrey Parubiy, the speaker of Ukraine’s parliament, warned earlier this week that military activity could soon flare up in the Donbass region, the RBC newspaper reported.

"There is a risk that our enemy could strengthen on two fronts. There is an election campaign in the U.S. and Europe is going through a moment of crisis. The Kremlin is also planning to

intensify the conflict in this period,” Parubiy said. “On one front we face military attacks and attempts to destabilize the country on the other.”

Russia’s Foreign Ministry also warned Wednesday that Kiev could be preparing for a new offensive in the Donbass, expressing its concern over the build up of Ukrainian military forces and volunteer battalions along the front line.

The conflict between Ukrainian government forces and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine has killed more than 9,000 civilians and combatants since hostilities began in April 2014. Fighting has died down since the end in April 2015 but low-level fighting continues the in Luhansk and Donetsk provinces.

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