

# Incursion, Desertion, Skirmish: What Really Happened in Crimea?

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Andrew Kravchenko / Reuters

Some time  
between Aug.  
6 and  
8, something  
was definitely  
up around  
the disputed  
Ukraine-Crimea  
border. There  
was some  
kind of  
incident — ☒

possibly gunfire,  
possibly even  
shelling, locals  
were not  
sure in  
the early  
hours of  
Aug. 7.  
There was  
unconfirmed  
information about  
one Russian  
soldier dead  
and three  
wounded. That  
same day,  
Russia shut  
down its  
cross border  
controls. Reports  
of military  
build-up behind  
the border  
meanwhile filled  
up social  
networks.

On Aug.  
10, Russia's  
Federal  
Security  
Service  
(FSB) [said in a statement](#) that  
it  
had “  
averted  
three  
attempts  
by  
Ukrainian  
military  
units  
to  
enter  
Crimean  
territory.”  
According

to  
the  
Russian  
side,  
these  
incursions  
resulted  
in  
armed  
confrontations  
and  
the  
deaths  
of  
two  
Russian  
servicemen.  
Seven  
people  
were  
arrested,  
it  
was  
claimed.

Soon after  
the statement  
followed an  
unexpected  
press  
conference,  
in  
which P  
resident  
Vladimir  
Putin  
accused  
Ukrainian  
authorities of  
resorting  
to  
terrorism.  
He said that  
Ukraine's  
actions  
would

not  
be  
left  
unanswered.”  
These  
words  
immediately  
sparked a  
media  
storm,  
and  
speculation  
that  
a  
military  
operation  
against  
Ukraine  
was  
about  
to  
begin.

But  
what  
really  
happened  
in  
Crimea,  
and  
can  
the  
FSB's  
claims  
be  
trusted?  
The  
Moscow  
Times  
reviews  
several  
versions  
of  
events  
in  
the

disputed  
region.

## **Version**

### **1. Incursion Planned and Sanctioned by the Ukrainian Government**

According to  
the FSB,  
the confrontation  
with Ukrainian  
special forces  
in Crimea  
occurred  
on  
Aug.  
6  
near  
to  
the  
disputed  
border  
in  
Armyansk.  
The  
version  
goes  
thus:  
on  
Aug. 8,  
the  
Ukrainians  
organized  
two

incursion  
attempts”  
under  
the  
cover  
of  
fire  
support  
and  
armored  
vehicles  
operated  
by  
the  
Ukrainian  
military.”  
Two  
Russian  
soldiers  
were shot  
dead during  
the operation.  
FSB officers  
detained a  
group of  
seven  
Ukrainian  
saboteurs”  
in  
possession  
of 20  
improvised  
explosive  
devices,  
anti-personnel  
and  
anti-tank  
mines,  
as  
well  
as  
some  
special  
forces  
equipment  
said  
to

be  
used  
by  
the  
Ukrainian  
military.  
A  
former  
pro-Kiev  
volunteer  
fighter  
from  
eastern  
Ukraine,  
Yevgeny  
Panov,  
was  
supposedly  
among  
those de  
tained.

According to  
unidentified  
sources cited by the  
Kommersant  
newspaper, the  
arrested group  
had planned  
several  
explosions in  
Crimea in  
order to  
damage the  
region's  
tourism industry.

## **Version**

### **2.**

## **Incursions**

## **Sanctioned**

## by the U.S. State Department

With typical  
swagger, the head of  
Crimea declared that  
Ukrainian  
authorities would  
not “have  
the guts”  
to carry  
out terror  
attacks in  
Crimea. Instead,  
he put  
the blame  
squarely on  
the U.S. State Department.

“You can see the path [Ukrainian government] has chosen – the path of terror. ... But I am  
sure that it is not their own actions or incentives — the U.S. State Department is all over it,  
because Ukrainian officials wouldn't have the guts to carry out something like that,” Sergei  
Aksyonov said.

At the same time, Aksyonov later moved away from his anti-American claims, and  
called on his compatriots to “kill Ukrainian saboteurs” and “hang them along the border.”

## Version 3. No Attacks from Ukraine

As expected, Ukraine dismissed the accusations, and described them as a  
“provocation” from the Russian side. Not a single intelligence officer has been detained by  
Russian law enforcement, said a spokesman for Ukrainian intelligence service, Vadim  
Skibitsky.

Claims of military support were scarcely credible, Skibitsky added: “If [Ukraine] had used  
heavy military hardware, armored transports, artillery batteries, trust me — Russia would  
have reported it immediately on Aug. 8, but there was no reaction.”



The U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt, sided with Kiev.

“The U.S. government has seen nothing so far that corroborates Russian allegations of a 'Crimea incursion,' and Ukraine has strongly refuted them,” Pyatt wrote on Twitter on Wednesday. “And Russia has a record of frequently levying false accusations at Ukraine to deflect attention from its own illegal actions.”

## Version

### 4. Russians Shooting Other Russians

According to the controversial Ukrainian politician and Interior Ministry advisor Anton Gerashchenko, there was indeed a law enforcement operation in Crimea. However, the cause was not Ukrainian insurgents, but Russian law enforcement who had targeted deserting Russian soldiers.

“A bunch of armed soldiers from a Russian military station have deserted, there was a skirmish, and now [Russians] are trying to catch them,” Gerashchenko told 112.Ukraine television. “The Russians are worried that the deserters may get to Ukraine and reveal valuable intelligence about the situation in Crimea and the level of morale in local military,” he said.

Moreover, some local media reported Crimean law enforcement distributing wanted notices for five “criminals” wearing military uniform with a Russian flag on it. The men had “committed a high-level crime in the town of Armyansk,” according to the reports. Other outlets, however, published similar wanted notices, supposedly looking for insurgents from the Ukrainian intelligence services.

On Thursday Aug. 11, the head of Ukrainian intelligence, Viktor Kondratyuk, confirmed that a shootout had taken place in Crimea, but said that it was between members of the Russian armed forces and the FSB's border guard service. Kondratyuk's version did not specify whether it had anything to do with deserted soldiers.

## Version

### 5. Kidnapping

While both Russia and Ukraine were busy arguing their version of events, Igor Kotelyanets, brother of Yevgeny Panov, one of the arrestees, told journalists he believed his brother had been kidnapped and transferred to Crimea against his will. Panov had nothing to do with the Ukrainian Defense Ministry or intelligence services, his brother said. Last week, he had taken several days off to visit friends in the Zaporozhye region in eastern Ukraine. “Crimea was off-limits to him,” Kotelyanets told the Krym Realii news outlet. “He always said he would go only when it had been returned to Ukraine.”

Several hours after his interview, Russian state media reported that Panov had already confessed and pleaded guilty to charges of terrorism.

Meanwhile, both Russia and Ukraine announced they would be building up security military presence around the disputed Crimean border.

Original url: <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2016/08/11/crimea-a54963>