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Buyer's Remorse: Trump's Position on Crimea Angers Russia

Sean Spicer Said Trump 'Expects' Russia to Return Crimea to Ukraine. And The Kremlin Isn't Happy.

By Ola Cichowlas

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@maccladie / Twitter

The Kremlin had high hopes for U.S. President Donald Trump. He had praised Russian President Vladimir Putin, proposed tag-teaming with Moscow in Syria and even hinted he might recognize Crimea as part of Russia.

Then, on Feb. 14, White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer shattered the Kremlin's American dream.

"President Trump has made it very clear that he expects the Russian government to de-escalate violence in the Ukraine and return Crimea," Spicer told reporters at a daily press

conference.

Russia annexed the Crimean peninsula from Ukraine in 2014. The West, in turn, responded by imposing international sanctions on Moscow. Trump appeared to be Russia's best bet for getting those sanctions lifted.

Naturally, Spicer's words provoked anger among the Russian authorities. It didn't help that the Crimea statement came right after Trump forced National Security Advisor Michael Flynn, a Russia sympathizer, to resign for withholding information about his phone conversations with the Russian ambassador.

The Moscow Times brings you some reactions from Russian officials.

Maria Zakharova, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman

"We do not return our territories. Crimea is the territory of the Russian Federation. That's it."

Vyacheslav Volodin, Chairman of the State Duma

"This subject should not be discussed anymore. Some kind of press secretary said something. Listen, some person will say something again. The pre-election program should be carried out, and the pre-election program included regulating relations with Russia, China, the fight against terrorism.. When the pre-election program will be carried out, then everything will be fine."

Alexei Pushkov, Head of the International Affairs Committee in the Federation Council

"The White House statements on Crimea are aimed to claim the critics of president Donald Trump. But those concessions will not help, there is a declared war on him until a victorious end."

Viktor Ozerov, Head of Security Committee in the Federation Council

"Crimea is and will remain Russian. Demanding to return it simply cannot be fulfilled. It's as if Russia demanded for Alaska to be returned."

Leonid Kalashnikov, Russian Senator

"This differs from his [Trump's] promises, including thinking about recognizing Crimea. But, as you can see, it does not always correspond to what he does afterwards."

Leonid Slutsky, Duma deputy

"Russia has no intention to discuss the issue of returning Crimea to Ukraine with the U.S. or anyone else for that matter. This has nothing to do with the bilateral agenda. Crimea was integrated into Russia according to the will of the peninsula's citizens and for almost three years now has been inseparable for our country. Any attempts to reignite the subject of Crimea's "return" will be treated as infringement of Russia's territorial integrity. Russia and USA will have to repair their cooperation as two great nations on equal terms, especially as far as fighting global terrorism is concerned."

Vitaly Milonov, Russian Duma deputy

"It's not interesting what the press secretary of the American president has to say. These are not the words of the leader of the United States. Trump has actually said the opposite.

His personnel can have their own opinions. He could also have made a mistake.

Many people have worked in the White House, like Monica Lewinsky. But we talked to Bill Clinton, not to Monica Lewinsky."

On the Flynn affair, Milonov told The Moscow Times:

"Our secret services do their job properly. If there were any links to them, you would be the last to know."

Sergei Markov, a pro-Kremlin political analyst

"At the moment, I think Trump is temporarily sacrificing improving ties with Russia in order to strengthen his position. With these Ukraine and Crimea statements, Trump is trying to reduce pressure from Congress which is trying to sabotage his program.

The sidelining of Flynn was organized by those same people, who want relations with Russia to remain bad. That's why the phone call with the Russian ambassador was picked up. He called dozens of ambassadors but none of those conversations were interesting to them. Only the phone call with the Russian ambassador was singled out."

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