

Obama Issues New threats against Russia. Military Action Contemplated

After White House meeting with Ukrainian prime minister

By [Chris Marsden](#)

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Following a White House meeting with interim Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk designed to underscore US support for the newly installed government and ratchet up pressure on Russia, President Barack Obama issued new threats against Moscow.

Obama declared that Washington and the “international community” would “completely reject” the referendum to be held Sunday in Crimea on secession from Ukraine and affiliation with the Russian Federation. He reiterated the US demand that Russia withdraw its forces from Crimea and recognize the new right-wing, anti-Russian regime in Kiev, which was installed last month in a US- and European Union-backed coup led by armed fascist militias.

The US would impose new sanctions if Russia refused to comply with these demands, Obama said, claiming that the “international community...will be forced to apply a cost” to what he called Russian violations of international law.

In keeping with the lies and hypocrisy that pervade the official pronouncements of US and European officials on the Ukraine crisis, Obama hailed the actions of the Maidan Square militias that played the leading role in toppling the elected pro-Russian government of Viktor Yanukovich, calling them “ordinary people” fighting for “change” and “democracy.”

The same day that Obama made these statements, one of the Maidan “freedom fighters” incorporated into the new government, Andriy Parubiy, the new security chief, announced that the parliament would vote Thursday to establish a 20,000-strong National Guard recruited from “activists” in the anti-Russian protests and from military academies to prevent “terrorist activities.”

Parubiy, one of the leaders of the fascist-dominated forces that spearheaded the coup, is described by Wikipedia as having founded “the neo-Nazi Social-National Party of Ukraine” in 1991, the year of the break-up of the Soviet Union. Wikipedia notes that in 2010, Parubiy asked the European Parliament to reconsider its negative response to awarding the World War II Nazi collaborator Stepan Bandera the title of Hero of Ukraine.

Parubiy’s deputy in the new government, Dmytro Yarosh, is head of the fascist Right Sector. Together, they will head up a state-sanctioned and financed ultra-nationalist militia with a mandate to terrorize opponents of the new regime, as well as Jews and other minorities.

Obama also declared that Ukraine “cannot have an outside country dictate to them how to

manage their affairs,” and added that the “interests of the US are solely to ensure that the people of Ukraine are able to determine their own destiny.” This is presumably why the US poured billions of dollars into assembling proxy forces in the country and hand-picked “Yats”—in the memorable words of US State Department official Victoria Nuland—to succeed Yanukovych.

Obama’s bellicose remarks were buttressed by those of Secretary of State John Kerry. Testifying Wednesday before a House committee, Kerry warned that the situation in Ukraine “can get ugly fast if the wrong choices are made, and it can get ugly in multiple directions.”

He told the committee that he would fly to London to meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Friday, in what the Obama administration is describing as a “last-ditch” effort at diplomacy in advance of Sunday’s Crimean referendum.

Obama’s White House statement was preceded by a statement from leaders of the G7 group of leading powers declaring that Sunday’s referendum “would have no legal effect,” “no moral force” and would not be recognised.

In a clear indication that action up to and including military aggression is being considered, the statement declared, “Russian annexation of Crimea would be a clear violation of the United Nations Charter; Russia’s commitments under the Helsinki Final Act; its obligations to Ukraine under its 1997 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership; the Russia-Ukraine 1997 basing agreement; and its commitments in the Budapest Memorandum of 1994...

“In addition to its impact on the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea could have grave implications for the legal order that protects the unity and sovereignty of all states. Should the Russian Federation take such a step, we will take further action, individually and collectively.”

Yatsenyuk came to Washington appealing for military backing and money. Ukraine has been promised \$1 billion in loan guarantees by Washington and \$15 billion from the EU, but only \$700 million of this is currently in place.

On the ground, the US is all but running Ukraine through its representatives in Kiev. Announcing Yatsenyuk’s visit on Sunday, Tony Blinken, Obama’s deputy national security adviser, said on NBC’s “Meet the Press” that teams from the Treasury and Justice departments and the FBI were in Kiev working to unravel the “kleptocracy” of Yanukovych’s deposed government.

As well as funding the government and running its campaign against its political opponents, the US is expected to whip Ukraine’s army into shape.

On Tuesday Ukraine’s president, Oleksandr Turchynov, declared, “The parliament’s primary task is to ask countries that are guarantors of our security to fulfil their commitments” so that Ukraine could re-forge its armed forces. Turchynov stated that there were presently only 6,000 combat-ready infantry in the army out of a nominal force of 90,000.

The US has already effectively taken operational control of the military activities of Ukraine’s neighbours, launching joint exercises with Poland, Romania, Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania and dispatching Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) jets from airbases in

Geilenkirchen, Germany and Waddington in Britain. The AWACS flights were recommended by NATO's top military commander, US Air Force General Philip Breedlove.

On Monday, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Gen. Martin Dempsey, told PBS that Russia's interference in Ukraine "exposes Eastern Europe to some significant risk." He did not rule out US military intervention.

"That's a question that, I think, deserves to be assessed and reassessed and refreshed as this thing evolves," he said. "Remember, we do have treaty obligations with our NATO allies."

Joint war games began Tuesday with Poland, while naval operations in the Black Sea with Romania and Bulgaria were underway yesterday involving the USS Truxtun, which has a nuclear capability, the Bulgarian naval frigate Drazki, and three Romanian vessels.

Obama has devoted considerable effort to attempting to secure China's tacit support for Washington's anti-Russian manoeuvres. The US wants China to issue a statement indicating that the Russian intervention in the Crimea is illegal. Phone discussions with Chinese President Xi Jinping have been inconclusive, however.

Xi Jinping also held a phone conversation with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, after which the state news agency Xinhua stressed that both sides agreed on the need for "mediation."

Key to US plans is securing the full support of Germany to ensure that the EU takes a hard line against Russia. Germany has previously pursued a policy of engagement with Russia in trade. A great deal is at stake, with German firms investing \$27.7 billion in Russia and owning stakes in over 6,000 Russian companies. Russia supplies Germany with the bulk of its oil and gas imports.

Despite this, Germany is shifting in the direction desired by the US, with Chancellor Angela Merkel describing the planned referendum in Crimea as "illegal" and Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier threatening tough sanctions.

The UK is the other European power expressing concern over the impact of sanctions on Russia, with Prime Minister David Cameron stressing that broader EU sanctions involving curbs on energy, trade and financial relations would be enacted only if Russian forces moved beyond Crimea to the main part of eastern Ukraine.

However, oligarchs with substantial investments in London or resident there will not be touched. The *Telegraph* notes that UK exports to Russia were worth £3.9 billion last year and imports worth £6.8 billion. More than 60 companies originating from the former Soviet Union have listed in London in recent years.

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