

3 rd March

Reports are that more than 6,000 air mobile Russian troops are now in the Crimea outside their base areas. How the crisis has unfolded over the last few days can be found on the second page.

Meanwhile the West dithers and talks, but offers no concrete support to the Ukraine. Putin clearly thinks he can do what he wants, as long as not too many people get killed. In the interests of balance, propaganda from the Russian Embassy in London can be found at the foot of this article. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov said in Geneva today that Russian troops were needed in Ukraine "until the normalisation of the political situation".

The Russian rouble has fallen to an all time low on the international currency exchanges. There are now over 50 to the euro. The Russian Central Bank is selling foreign reserves to support it. Stocks on Moscow's MICEX main stock index also fell 9% in early trading.

2nd March

UK ministers will not attend the Sochi Paralympics because of Ukraine situation. David Cameron says will discuss situation in Ukraine with US, Polish and Lithuanian counterparts this evening. Rumours that UK considering sanctions against Russian businesses.

Ukraine launches treason case against Admiral Denis Berezovsky over "defection" to pro-Russia Crimea after the newly appointed head of Ukraine's navy seen on TV swearing allegiance to the Crimea. Russian flag seen flying in a slew of cities across the east of Ukraine.

"Putin going by Soviet playbook in Prague 68, knows full on invasion of all Ukraine won't be met by western military action", says historian Simon Scharma. And Hungary 56 too?

NATO Secretary General has called upon Russia to de-escalate tensions. "What Russia is doing now in Ukraine violates the principles of the United Nations Charter. It threatens peace and security in Europe. Russia must stop its military activities and its threats."

CBS has said that on the Crimea border, Route E97 has been blocked by Ukrainian Berkut & local irregulars, and armed men digging in on ridgeline. However, civilian traffic is still moving. But as a correspondent tried to cross the border, Ukrainian Interior Ministry troops and local militia stole their body armour and put it on, then turned them back.

Britain and France have pulled out of preparatory talks for the G8 summit due to be held in Sochi, because of Russia's continuing build-up of military forces in the Ukrainian region of Crimea. The UK's decision was announced as Foreign Secretary William Hague flew to Kiev for talks with Ukraine's new leaders.

Ukrainian soldiers in Crimea are allegedly leaving their military units and handing over their weapons to Russian troops, says RIA Novosti. Interfax-Ukraine has reported that Russian soldiers have surrounded a military base in Perevalnoe, near Simferopol. The Ukrainian Defense Ministry has denied the reports of capitulation, saying that Russia's demands of surrender have not been met and that troops remain loyal. According to a Russian senator cited by RT news, Ukraine's navy flagship, Hetman Sahaidachny, also reportedly defected to Russia.

Ukrainian President Oleksandr Turchynov has ordered a full military mobilization and increased security at key sites, including nuclear plants, BBC has reported. According to Interfax news agency, Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev has warned newly appointed Ukrainian Prime Minister Arseniy Yatsenyuk that Moscow reserves the right to defend Russian citizens and troops in Crimea. Seven Russian Il-76 transport aircraft and 11 helicopters reportedly landed in Crimea overnight. NATO plans to hold an urgent meeting in Brussels on March 2 to discuss the situation, RFE/RL reported, citing agencies.

Gunmen have infiltrated and shut down Ukrainian naval headquarters in Sevastopol, Interfax-Ukraine is reporting. In addition, a Ukrainian military source said the Russian military, after initially claiming it was simply guarding a Ukrainian air force anti-aircraft missile division in Sevastopol, took control of the unit and its equipment. Russia's moves in the autonomous republic of Crimea have raised tensions

between Kiev and Moscow, but the new Ukrainian government and its military are in no position to challenge Russia.

Meanwhile, the Stop the War coalition is waving banners in London.

1st March

The upper house of the Russian parliament has unanimously approved President Vladimir Putin's request to deploy troops to the Ukrainian autonomous republic of Crimea, RIA Novosti reported. Earlier, Putin said action was needed to protect the lives of Russian citizens and military forces stationed at naval bases in Crimea under preexisting agreements with Ukraine. Throughout the past couple days, Russian troop movements in Crimea have been reported. The new Crimean prime minister confirmed the presence of Russian forces and asked Putin for additional support. But Ukraine is ready to mobilize its armed forces to protect its strategic locations, acting president says.

While Putin's request refers to Ukrainian territory in general, the deployment will likely be limited to parts of Crimea rather than mainland Ukraine. Kiev, however, cannot be certain of ultimate Russian plans. In the weeks leading up to Russia's 2008 military intervention in Georgia, Moscow did not color its moves with legal nuance. It simply invaded. So the show by Putin and the Russian parliament could be a move in the war of nerves -- especially as protests have spread to other pro-Russian areas in eastern Ukraine like Donetsk and Kharkiv.

The USS George H. W. Bush Carrier Strike Group moved into the Mediterranean Sea as the United Nations Security Council meets "for consultations" (although Russia can veto any decision) President Yatseniuk says Ukraine will protect all its citizens regardless of language or church preferences, and has put forces on combat alert.

Russian President Vladimir Putin today requested approval to use Russian armed forces in Ukraine to "normalize the country's socio-political situation", Itar-Tass reported, citing the presidential press service. Earlier, the leaders of Russia's upper and lower houses of parliament March called on Putin to stabilize the situation in the Ukrainian republic of Crimea and protect Russian citizens, RIA Novosti reported. Russia's upper house unanimously approved the potential use of military force in Ukraine, in a session broadcast on state TV. Valentina Matviyenko, the leader of the Federation Council, said the use of military force in Crimea could be justified. The State Duma released a similar statement, saying Putin should use all available means to protect Russian citizens.

Ambassador Susan Rice says the U.S. is deeply concerned by reports of Russian military intervention in Ukraine. "Sovereignty is inviolable, as Russians like to remind us."

Russia's Federation Council, the upper house of the parliament, then asked President Vladimir Putin to withdraw the Russian ambassador to the United States over aggressive statements made by U.S. President Barack Obama, RIA Novosti reported. Obama's criticisms of Russia's recent actions in Ukraine were a direct threat and insult to the Russian people, the vice speaker of the Federation Council said. Russia has been emphatically reminding the world that the United States will not confront Russia militarily, even if it confronts Russia politically and possibly financially.

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt says : "Russian military intervention in the Ukraine would clearly be against international law and principles of European security." He has talked to Ukraine Prime Minister Yatsenjuk on the acute situation. "Resist provocations, but preserve and uphold Ukraine state rights everywhere," he comments. Mean time, the Secretary General of NATO has tweeted St David's day greetings to the people of Wales.

Also earlier, Ukrainian coastguard vessels were reportedly deployed on battle alert after armed men attempted to seize a coastguard unit in the Crimean city of Sevastopol, the deputy head of Ukraine's State Border Service said, Kiev's 5 Kanal TV reported. The attempted seizure was conducted by a column of around 300 armed men wearing full combat gear arriving in around

10 cars. A senior member of this group said he had an order from the Russian defense minister to occupy the marine unit. What appears to be Russian troops are guarding the Crimea Parliament - Crimea Russia signs have been seen.

Additional material by Stratfor and the BBC

RUSSIA REACTS TO THREATS IN UKRAINE, BUT COUNTS ON A POLITICAL SOLUTION

In recent days, the situation in Ukraine has deteriorated rapidly. The agreements reached between President Yanukovich and the opposition on 21 February have been scrapped by opposition leaders: the legitimate Head of State that was supposed to remain in office has been effectively ousted from the country, an interim president has been appointed, presidential elections have been set for 25 May, no steps have been made in the area of constitutional reform or joint investigation. That the protest leaders treat their words and signatures so lightly was no surprise for us. But it is astonishing how easily those external mediators who sealed the agreement, namely the Foreign Ministers of Germany, France and Poland, have declared the deal to have been "overtaken by events".

But more importantly, rather than taking account of the numerous appeals to national unity and reconciliation, political power in Kiev has been concentrated in the hands of far-right extremist elements that do not hide their xenophobic, anti-Semitic, neofascist credentials. Not surprisingly, one of the first decisions of the new rulers was to abolish the law on regional languages, a move that has caused concern not only among Russian-speakers, but also in Bulgaria, Romania and Greece. This has coincided with a widespread campaign of intimidation of ethnic Russian population and desecration of monuments celebrating Russia's and Ukraine's common historical achievements such as the defeat of Nazism in the Second World War. Russian Orthodox priests have become object of threats. Attempts were made to seize the Orthodox shrines, such as the Kiev Pechersk Laura and the Pochayev Laura.

The situation of the Russian community in the Crimea has become particularly precarious. As soon as rallies erupted to express protest against with the way the Kiev events had unfolded, the Crimeans were accused of separatism and were threatened with force. There has been a lot of speculation regarding movements of troops of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, taken as a precautionary measure in full compliance with the relevant bilateral agreements with Ukraine. During the night of 1 March, unknown armed men sent from Kiev tried to seize the building of the Crimea Interior Ministry. Only decisive actions by self-defence groups allowed to stop that provocation that has left many people injured.

Most recently, the leader of the "Right Sector" extremist group that was instrumental in the "victory of the Maidan", Dmitry Yarosh, has openly called for an alliance with Doku Umarov, the most-wanted leader of the Chechen terrorists with close links to Al Qaeda.

Within this context, it is not surprising that as many as 143 thousand people from Ukraine have applied for asylum in Russia over the past two weeks.

Faced with this situation, Prime Minister of Crimea Sergey Aksenov appealed to the Russian authorities for assistance in maintaining peace and accord in the peninsula.

The numerous calls by the Russian authorities aimed at de-escalating the situation have been futile. Instead of addressing the situation through structures such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe that have a solid expertise in the field of human rights, including minority rights, and constitutional law, we have seen the Ukraine situation discussed by NATO, which certainly sent the wrong message. President Obama, rather than calling upon the ostensibly pro-Western "authorities" in Kiev to de-escalate tensions, has accused Russia of preparing an intervention and threatened with "costs".

Given the extraordinary situation in Ukraine, the threat to the lives of Russian nationals and our compatriots, as well as the Black Sea Fleet personnel, President Vladimir Putin has been compelled to use his constitutional

powers and to seek approval of the Upper Chamber of Parliament, the Federation Council, for use of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation in the territory of Ukraine pending normalisation of public order and political situation in that country. That request has been granted, although that doesn't mean that the President will use his powers immediately.

Russia remains open to cooperation with all partners in order to seek a political solution to the crisis. What is needed is a clear understanding that this cooperation is honest and based not simply on the ability to hold fruitful negotiations but also on the ability to comply with agreements that take account of the interests of the entire Ukrainian people and all partners of Ukraine.

Published 1 March 2014 <http://www.rusemb.org.uk/press/1741>

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