



United States Mission to the OSCE

Remarks on Military Activities of the Russian Federation on the Border With Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Joint Meeting of the Forum for Security Cooperation
and the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Mr. Chairperson:

On March 28th, we asked Russia for details regarding its ongoing military activities along its border with Ukraine. Specifically, we would like to know:

- 1) What is the purpose and anticipated duration of these activities?
- 2) What is the composition and strength of the Russian military forces involved in these activities?
- 3) To which units and formations do these deployed forces belong?

Based on the number, types of units, and deployed locations of the Russian forces in the southern and western military districts, which border eastern and northern Ukraine, this deployed force has a character that appears designed to intimidate and/or conduct short-notice, sustained, offensive military operations into Ukraine. More broadly, Russia's occupation of the Crimean region undermines the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine. We urge Russia to reduce its troops to pre-crisis numbers and positions.

The buildup in Russia's Rostov and Belgorod regions opposite the Ukrainian cities of Donetsk and Kharkiv, as well as the deployment of forces near Klimovo, barely 20 kilometers from the border with Ukraine, is substantial. The scope of the forces includes not only ground forces, but also forward-deployed air power, providing quick-strike capability and air support to potential ground operations.

Colleagues, maintaining a large concentration of troops in the field at a time when conscripts are normally scheduled to leave service further suggests that this is not an exercise. NATO military authorities have noted that the Russia force is "sized and outfitted and provisioned with everything that it needs to have an incursion into Ukraine." We have consistently urged the Russian Federation to take steps to de-escalate. The number of Russian troops massed in this area close to the border with Ukraine is clearly aimed at threatening and intimidating, and is therefore an ongoing escalation.

As Secretary Kerry has indicated to Minister Lavrov, it is important that these troops return to their barracks. We note reports that Minister Lavrov indicated on April 3rd that President Putin had ordered the withdrawal of one battalion of troops from Rostov. That is a potential

small step in the right direction. We would welcome specific information on the process and timing of such a move, and any further withdrawals, and an opportunity to observe this process.

...

We also took note of Russia's comment that the military activities of its forces do not require the provision of information or notification under the Vienna Document. It is clear to us that enough of the forces and major weapons systems involved are accountable to trip the Vienna Document reporting ceilings. Of course, more broadly, the unusual military activity provision of the Vienna Document is not restricted to raising concerns about specific types of military activities or the number of troops involved in such activities. Clarification of the purpose and duration of this unusual military activity is important to reassure OSCE partners, especially when the activity occurs so close to the border of another participating State.

Both Secretary Kerry and Supreme Allied Commander for Europe General Breedlove have delivered a clear message that what the international community seeks is genuine movement away from the Ukrainian border and back to Russian garrisons, if we are to be convinced that Moscow is trying to de-escalate the situation. At the same time, recognizing that onsite inspections and observation visits can contribute materially to building confidence in situations of tensions, Russia should offer additional Vienna Document inspections and Open Skies overflights to observe Russian military activity in the region of the Ukrainian border. These should be aimed at answering the questions laid out at the beginning of my presentation.

...

Colleagues, I want to close by underscoring a few points.

First, I saw the notification sent around by the Russian Federation on Friday when they refused to participate in the consultations provided for under the Vienna Document, in which they claimed that our desire for consultations was somehow “anti-Russia” – it is nothing of the sort. The Vienna Document is one of the tools that we have built together to address the situation where we have concerns. It was adopted by consensus, it took enormous hard work, this is one of the tools in our toolbox, and there is nothing prejudicial towards anyone, in any one of our States’ seeking to use it.

The second point I'd like to make: there have been some questions raised about whether thresholds have been met under the Vienna Document. It is clear to us that thresholds have been met. However, for those who have not been persuaded that thresholds have been met, I reiterate the provisions in the Vienna Document for unusual military activity still give us reason to request further information from Russia, and put the burden on the Russian Federation to take steps to address the concerns raised by other participating States.

The context of this seeking of information should not be lost on anyone. It is not unreasonable for Ukraine, or any of us, to have deep concerns about troops massed on Ukraine's border, especially given the recent and ongoing violations of Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity in the Crimea region of Ukraine. Russia has committed grievous violations of international law, and this is the background against which any reasonable person must seek to understand their deployment of troops on the Ukrainian border.

The events of the last 24 hours also, again, raise questions. We will need to see as more facts come to light. It seems strangely coincidental that these activities all took place in different parts of Ukraine on the same afternoon. There are reports on social media this morning about how “pro-Russian residents” of Kharkiv stormed the Opera, thinking that it was the town hall, and demanded that the mayor come out. It's very surprising that these so-called “residents” of Kharkiv would think that the Opera was the town hall.

It's not unreasonable for any of us around this table to have concerns about the massing of troops on Ukraine's border. What is unreasonable is the Russian Federation's repeated contempt of the tools that we have built together, each of us around this table, and their refusal to provide information that could dispel the very reasonable concerns that we have.

Thank you.