

Obama demands Russia withdraw troops from Ukraine border

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President Obama appeared in an interview with CBS News on Friday and continued his campaign of ultimatums and threats against Russia in retaliation for last week's incorporation of Crimea into the Russian Federation.

Obama demanded that Russia withdraw its troops from the Ukraine border, repeating claims by US officials and the media that Moscow has amassed thousands of troops and is threatening an invasion. He tied this new demand to his earlier insistence that Russian President Vladimir Putin hold official talks with the newly installed, rabidly anti-Russian and right-wing US puppet government in Kiev. This would effectively constitute Russian recognition of the regime that took power last month in a fascist-led putsch. Moscow has refused to recognize the Western-backed government.

Obama claimed that Russian troops were “massing along the border,” adding, “It may simply be an effort to intimidate Ukraine, or it may be that they’ve got additional plans.”

The White House announced late Friday that Putin had phoned Obama to discuss a “diplomatic resolution to the crisis.” The two reportedly agreed that US Secretary of State John Kerry would meet with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov “to discuss next steps.”

Obama's interview, like his previous statements and those of Washington's European allies, presented a world turned upside down, with Russia as the aggressor and the United States as a global upholder of peace, prosperity and democracy. He denounced Russia's annexation of Crimea following a popular referendum in the region and inveighed against “sending in troops and, because you're bigger and stronger, taking a piece of the country,” adding with unbounded hypocrisy, “That is not how international law and international norms are observed in the 21st century.”

The only “international norm” the American government recognises is its right to wage war against any country in the world and overthrow governments deemed at odds with US interests. This has included the war against Serbia in 1999 to slice off the province of Kosovo and the killing of up to a million people in the war in Iraq, as well as the invasion of

Afghanistan, the war for regime-change in Libya and the ongoing proxy war in Syria.

Obama preposterously claimed that “we have no interest in encircling Russia, and we have no interest in Ukraine—beyond letting the Ukrainian people make their own decisions about their own lives.” He denied that the US and NATO were seeking to militarily encircle Russia.

In fact, US foreign policy in Eastern Europe since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 has been precisely aimed at weakening and militarily encircling Russia by integrating the former Eastern Bloc countries and Soviet republics into US and European spheres of influence and organizations such as the European Union and NATO. This has included the so-called “colour revolutions” orchestrated by Washington in Ukraine and Georgia. This policy has now culminated in the utilization of fascist proxy forces such as Svoboda and the Right Sector to topple an elected Ukrainian government that had aligned itself with Russia.

Friday's interview followed Obama's no less cynical speech in Brussels on Wednesday, in which he rejected any reference to US war crimes in Iraq or the intervention in Serbia in 1999, while denying the collaboration of the US with Ukrainian fascists. Obama called for a further NATO and US military build-up in the former Eastern Bloc countries and the Baltic states directed against Russia, as well as harsher economic sanctions. He warned that the US would ratchet up economic sanctions against Russia not just in response to an attempt to go beyond the annexation of Crimea, but even if Russia did not go further and simply rejected US demands that it withdraw from Crimea and recognize the new regime in Kiev.

The US press has in recent days promoted the administration's warnings of a possible Russian invasion of Ukraine, without any factual substantiation. The White House is coordinating its propaganda offensive with its client government in Kiev.

On Thursday, the former leader of the neo-Nazi Social-National Party of Ukraine and current head of the Ukrainian National Security Council, Andriy Parubiy, claimed Russia

had amassed 100,000 troops on its Ukrainian border and was preparing to invade. Most Western media reports have put the number of Russian troops on the border at 30,000.

Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper yesterday published an article, "Ukraine Crisis: The Border Hunt for Vladimir Putin's Hidden Army," that called into question the reports of a Russian troop build-up. Writing of the results of a 200-mile trip along the Russian-Ukraine border, the newspaper concluded: "The Russian invasion force—if it is here—is very well camouflaged. As the fog lifted, murky shapes were revealed as trees, houses and old Lada cars. No tanks emerged from the gloom, no suspicious flights of helicopters passed overhead, and no green painted trucks rumbled down the roads."

The Russian government has denied the reports of a build-up. Foreign Ministry spokesman Alexander Lukashevich on Friday said a team of international observers had visited the area and found no evidence of invasion plans. The Russian government claims it is conducting military exercises and says it has no intention of invading Ukraine.

In any event, Russian troop movements are a defensive response to the illegal installation of a hostile government on its border and the provocative deployment of US and NATO forces to neighbouring states. This has included the sending of 300 personnel and 12 warplanes by the US to Poland.

In a statement issued Friday, Republican Senators John McCain and Lindsey Graham demanded that Obama go further by approving the sending of military aid to Ukraine, including "small arms, ammunition and defensive weapons, such as anti-armor and anti-aircraft systems."

Representative Buck McKeon, the Republican chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, said the war in Ukraine "has already started." He denounced Obama for his "continued inaction ... in the face of Mr. Putin's invasion."

Economic measures are already being used to tighten the pressure on the Putin regime. Moody's rating agency put the Russian government's bond rating on review for downgrade on Friday, following the decision by the two other US rating firms, Standard & Poor's and Fitch, to cut to negative their outlook on Russian credit.

At the same time, differences have emerged between the US and Germany and other European powers on proceeding at this time with further sanctions. German Chancellor Angela Merkel on Wednesday said she would not support economic sanctions. German-Russian trade totalled €76 billion in 2013. Also, following a meeting with Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi on Thursday, Obama repeated criticisms made in his Brussels speech of insufficient military spending by European NATO members.

The Obama administration is mobilizing its dependent allies in the Baltic states, such as Lithuania and Estonia, as

well as Poland to pressure the European powers to go further. The *Washington Post* yesterday published a hysterical opinion piece by Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves calling for a massive military build-up aimed at Russia.

Ilves declared that the annexation of Crimea marked a "paradigm shift ... International treaties no longer hold, and the use of raw force is again legitimate." He called for a benchmark increase in annual European military spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product. "For US and European Union leaders, a Churchillian moment has come," he wrote. "We need to rise to the occasion with strength, clarity and speed."

Despite the barrage of anti-Russian propaganda from the media and political establishment, the American people are broadly opposed to any US intervention. A recent CBS poll found that just 26 percent of people supported providing military equipment to Ukraine. Sixty one percent said they did not believe the US had a responsibility to intervene.

The Obama administration and the American ruling class, however, will not be deterred by popular sentiment from their aggressive strategy to weaken and ultimately dismember Russia, removing it as an obstacle to the aims of US imperialism in the Middle East, Central and East Asia and internationally—regardless of the potential of this policy to spark a new world war.



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