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**1. [Biden Says World Rejects Russia's Behavior in Crimean Crisis \(03-19-2014\)](#)**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — Vice President Biden told Baltic leaders that the United States stands with them in support of the Ukrainian people and against Russia's aggressive acts in the Crimean Peninsula.

“As long as Russia continues on this dark path, they will face increasing political and economic isolation,” Biden said at a joint press conference at the Presidential Palace in Vilnius, Lithuania, March 19. It was the final day of his visit to Poland and Lithuania for consultations with Polish and Baltic leaders.

Biden held security talks in Vilnius with Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė and Latvian President Andris Bērziņš. Earlier, on March 18, Biden met with Estonian President Toomas Ilves in Warsaw, Poland, following meetings with Poland's Prime Minister Donald Tusk and President Bronisław Komorowski.

The two-day trip to visit crucial East European NATO allies came in the aftermath of Russia's agreeing to annex the Crimean Peninsula into the Russian Federation on March 18. In a March 16 referendum that was illegal under the Ukrainian Constitution, Crimean voters overwhelmingly agreed to break away from Ukraine and join Russia. Voters were not given an option to stay in Ukraine, and the secession vote was not approved by the Ukrainian parliament.

At the Vilnius press briefing, President Grybauskaite told journalists that the world has “witnessed the use of brutal force to redraw the map of Europe and to undermine the postwar political architecture established in Europe.”

“The situation is a direct threat to our regional security,” Grybauskaite added. “Therefore, we must take all the necessary measures to ensure the security of Europe and the Baltic region.”

Biden assured the Baltic nations and Poland of the United States’ commitment to the collective defense.

“President Obama wanted me to come personally to make it clear what you already know, that under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, we will respond,” Biden added. “We will respond to any aggression against a NATO ally.”

Obama travels to Brussels the week of March 24 for talks with NATO leaders and will seek strong commitments from the 28-member alliance, Biden noted. The president is also holding an emergency meeting with the leaders of the G7 group — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan — to coordinate further sanction efforts against Russia and Crimea.

The United States and the European Union have already imposed economic and political sanctions against individual Russian and Crimean officials for their part in the Crimean crisis, and Biden said more sanctions are expected.

“There are those who say that this action shows the old rules still apply, but Russia cannot escape the fact that the world is changing and rejecting outright their behavior,” Biden said.

The United States moved 12 U.S. F-16 fighter jets from its Aviano Air Base in Italy to Poland for joint training exercises and to bolster the joint air policing program. In addition, 300 support personnel from Aviano were also sent with the fighter jets.

Biden said that the United States was looking at a number of additional steps to increase the pace and scope of military cooperation, including rotating U.S. ground and naval forces into the Baltic region for exercises and stepped-up training missions with personnel from the Baltic nations.

“The question today is not what can America do for the Baltic nations; it is what can we do together,” Biden said.

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[Lithuanian and Latvian Presidents, Biden in Lithuania](#)

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## **2. NATO Secretary General: Russia Must Suffer Consequences (03-19-2014)**

By Jim Garamone  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 19, 2014 – There must be consequences for Russia’s actions against Ukraine, the NATO secretary general said at the Brookings Institute here today.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen told the think tank that “the only way for us to address these challenges is for Europe and North America to stand together.”

Russia's aggression against Ukraine has changed the world, the secretary general said. "Russia's military aggression in Ukraine is a blatant breach of its international commitments, and it is a violation of Ukraine sovereignty and territorial integrity," he said. "The annexation of Crimea through a so-called referendum held at gunpoint is illegal and illegitimate, and it undermines all efforts to find a peaceful political solution."

The Russian action is a wake-up call for the Euro-Atlantic community, for NATO and for all those committed to a Europe whole, free and at peace, he said. The action directly violates the 1994 agreement Russia signed with Ukraine.

Further, the action has occurred right on NATO's doorstep, the secretary general said.

Rasmussen called the action the gravest threat to European security and stability since the end of the Cold War and said the move threatens the freedom of 45 million people. He called the Russian action "21st-century revisionism" and labeled it as an attempt to turn back the clock to draw new dividing lines on the European map.

It also signals an attempt "to use force to solve problems rather than the international mechanisms that we have spent decades to build," he said. "We had thought such behavior had been confined to history," he added. "But it's back, and it's dangerous, because it violates international norms of accepted behaviors."

Combatting the move is not easy and will not be quick, the secretary general acknowledged, noting that it is the nature of democracies to debate, deliberate and consider the options before making decisions. The NATO nations do this because "we value transparency and seek legitimacy for our choices, and because we see force as the last not the first resort," he said.

NATO has condemned Russia's military actions in Ukraine and is standing firmly behind the Ukrainian government in Kiev. The alliance also is making it clear that Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to escalate the situation have consequences.

"As a first step, we have suspended joint planning for maritime escort mission for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons," Rasmussen said. "This would have been the first joint operation of the NATO-Russia Council."

NATO has suspended all staff-level civilian or military meetings with Russia, and the alliance is re-examining the entire range of NATO-Russia cooperation.

NATO foreign ministers will make decisions when they meet in Brussels early next month, the secretary general said. Still, the alliance will keep the door open for political dialogue in the NATO-Russia Council. He hopes this will give Russia the opportunity to engage.

On the military side, the alliance has increased readiness. More assets have been assigned to the Baltic air police mission, and NATO has launched surveillance flights over Poland and Romania.

All this is in addition to steps allies have taken to impose diplomatic and economic consequences. "These are not our preferred choices," Rasmussen said, "but they are inevitable and appropriate consequences of Russia's choices."

Biographies:

[Anders Fogh Rasmussen](#)

Related Sites:

[NATO](#)

### **3. Navy Continues Search for Missing Malaysian Airliner (03-19-2014)**

By Claudette Roulo  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 19, 2014 – U.S. Navy aircraft and personnel remain engaged in the search effort for missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which disappeared March 8 after taking off from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, en route to Beijing, a Defense Department spokesman said today.

A P-8 Poseidon aircraft previously dedicated to search efforts in the Bay of Bengal has relocated to Perth, Australia, to join the southern search area, Army Col. Steve Warren told reporters.

“It is conducting a search in coordination with the Australians, 1,500 nautical miles west of Perth,” he said.

The P-8 can stay over its assigned search area for nine hours, Warren noted. “It is a vast area, ... but the P-8 can search a tremendous amount of space,” he added.

Australia is directing the search in the southern Indian Ocean, Warren said.

“We routinely train with the Australians,” he said. “They're very close partners to us, and we particularly routinely train in maritime search.”

A Navy P-3 Orion continues to search for the lost aircraft in the Bay of Bengal, Warren added.

The Arleigh Burke-class destroyer USS Kidd, which previously was taking part in search efforts off the coast of Malaysia, has left the search and moved on to other operations in the South China Sea, the colonel said.

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[USS Kidd Joins Search for Missing Malaysian Airliner](#)

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### **4. Biden Meets with Polish Leaders on Russia (03-18-2014)**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — Vice President Biden met at length with Poland’s Prime Minister Donald Tusk on March 18 to discuss Eastern Europe’s security crisis following the Crimean vote to join Russia. On March 18 in Moscow, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a treaty to annex the Crimean Peninsula into the Russian Federation.

“Russia has offered a variety of arguments to justify what is nothing more than a land grab,” Biden said in Warsaw, Poland. “But the world has seen through Russia’s actions and has rejected the flawed logic behind those actions.”

“The president asked me to come to Warsaw today to reaffirm the United States’ solemn commitment, solemn NATO commitment, and to consult with Poland’s leaders about the situation in Ukraine,” Biden told journalists during press briefing at the prime minister’s Chancellery.

Biden said that the United States and the European Union will impose further economic and political sanctions against Russia for annexing the Crimean Peninsula. “It’s a simple fact that Russia’s political and economic isolation will only increase if it continues down its current path and it will, in fact, see additional sanctions,” he added.

The vice president arrived in Warsaw to meet with Tusk and Poland’s President Bronislaw Komorowski about the referendum held March 16 in Crimea, where voters overwhelmingly agreed to secede from Ukraine and join Russia. Poland, the United States and the international community have condemned the referendum and efforts by Russia to annex the crucial region on the Black Sea as a violation of Ukraine’s constitution.

“This trial, this challenge that we are facing, will not be for a month or a year,” Tusk told journalists. “We are facing a strategic perspective for many years to come.”

Later, Biden traveled to Vilnius for meetings on March 19 with the leaders of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia, who are concerned by Russia’s military intervention in Crimea. Poland and the three Baltic nations share borders with Russia, while Poland also borders Ukraine. All four countries are members of the 28-nation NATO alliance.

While in talks with Polish leaders, Biden reassured them that the United States commitment to the NATO alliance is ironclad. “Recent events remind us that the bedrock of our alliance remains collective self-defense, as enshrined in Article 5 of the NATO Treaty,” Biden said.

“Our intent is that NATO emerge from this crisis stronger and more unified than ever,” he added.

The White House announced that during President Obama’s trip to Europe the week of March 24 he will meet with the leaders of the G7 group of nations — Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan — to consider further responses to Russia.

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[Biden with Polish President Komorowski in Warsaw](#)

[Biden on Ukraine with Polish Prime Minister Tusk](#)

[Vice President Biden, Estonian President Ilves in Warsaw](#)

[U.S. Official on Biden's Trip to Poland, Lithuania](#)

[Background Briefing on Biden’s Upcoming Trip to Poland, Lithuania](#)

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## **5. President Obama on Situation in Ukraine (03-17-2014)**

*Statement by the President on Ukraine*

THE PRESIDENT: Good morning, everybody. In recent months, as the citizens of Ukraine have made their voices heard, we have been guided by a fundamental principle -- the future of Ukraine must be decided by the people of Ukraine. That means Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity must be respected, and international law must be upheld.

And so, Russia’s decision to send troops into Crimea has rightly drawn global condemnation. From the start, the United States has mobilized the international community in support of Ukraine to

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isolate Russia for its actions and to reassure our allies and partners. We saw this international unity again over the weekend, when Russia stood alone in the U.N. Security Council defending its actions in Crimea. And as I told President Putin yesterday, the referendum in Crimea was a clear violation of Ukrainian constitutions and international law, and it will not be recognized by the international community.

Today, I'm announcing a series of measures that will continue to increase the cost on Russia and on those responsible for what is happening in Ukraine. First, as authorized by the executive order I signed two weeks ago, we are imposing sanctions on specific individuals responsible for undermining the sovereignty, territorial integrity and government of Ukraine. We're making it clear that there are consequences for their actions.

Second, I have signed a new executive order that expands the scope of our sanctions. As an initial step, I'm authorizing sanctions on Russian officials -- entities operating in the arms sector in Russia and individuals who provide material support to senior officials of the Russian government. And if Russia continues to interfere in Ukraine, we stand ready to impose further sanctions.

Third, we're continuing our close consultations with our European partners, who today in Brussels moved ahead with their own sanctions against Russia. Tonight, Vice President Biden departs for Europe, where he will meet with the leaders of our NATO allies -- Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. And I'll be traveling to Europe next week. Our message will be clear. As NATO allies, we have a solemn commitment to our collective defense, and we will uphold this commitment.

Fourth, we'll continue to make clear to Russia that further provocations will achieve nothing except to further isolate Russia and diminish its place in the world. The international community will continue to stand together to oppose any violations of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, and continued Russian military intervention in Ukraine will only deepen Russia's diplomatic isolation and exact a greater toll on the Russian economy.

Going forward, we can calibrate our response based on whether Russia chooses to escalate or to de-escalate the situation. Now, I believe there's still a path to resolve this situation diplomatically in a way that addresses the interest of both Russia and Ukraine. That includes Russia pulling its forces in Crimea back to their bases, supporting the deployment of additional international monitors in Ukraine, and engaging in dialogue with the Ukrainian government, which has indicated its openness to pursuing constitutional reform as they move forward towards elections this spring.

But throughout this process, we're going to stand firm in our unwavering support for Ukraine. As I told Prime Minister Yatsenyuk last week, the United States stands with the people of Ukraine and their right to determine their own destiny. We're going to keep working with Congress and our international partners to offer Ukraine the economic support that it needs to weather this crisis and to improve the daily lives of the Ukrainian people.

And as we go forward, we'll continue to look at the range of ways we can help our Ukrainian friends achieve their universal rights and the security, prosperity and dignity that they deserve. Thanks very much. And Jay, I think, will be available for questions. Thank you.

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## **6. U.S. Imposes Sanctions on Russian, Crimean Officials (03-17-2014)**

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.  
Staff Writer

Washington — The United States has imposed economic and political sanctions against 11 high-ranking Russian and Crimean officials responsible for the regionally destabilizing Crimean crisis.

President Obama on March 17 announced sanctions against seven of the most senior Russian officials directly responsible for supporting Crimea's vote for secession from Ukraine. The U.S. Treasury Department also imposed sanctions against four Ukrainian officials, including former President Viktor Yanukovich.

"I'm announcing a series of measures that will continue to increase the cost on Russia and on those responsible for what is happening in Ukraine," Obama said. "And if Russia continues to interfere in Ukraine, we stand ready to impose further sanctions."

Russian President Vladimir Putin was not included in the initial round of sanctions because the United States does not usually begin with heads of state, U.S. officials said.

European Union foreign ministers in Brussels imposed similar travel bans and asset freezes against 21 officials from Russia and Ukraine following the March 16 Crimean secession referendum.

Obama also said Vice President Biden would leave Washington late March 17 for meetings in Warsaw, Poland, with the president and prime minister of Poland, and in Vilnius, Lithuania, with the presidents of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia — all NATO allies. The U.S. president is scheduled to travel to Europe in the week of March 24 for extensive meetings with NATO allies and European leaders.

NATO announced March 17 that it was increasing cooperation with Ukraine, including "increased ties with Ukraine's political and military leadership, strengthening efforts to build the capacity of the Ukrainian military." Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchytsya met with NATO leaders in Brussels to request greater technical assistance and equipment in light of the Crimean secession vote and the Russian military intervention.

While imposing sanctions, Obama emphasized diplomatic measures still can be employed in ways that will satisfy both Russia and Ukraine without causing an irreparable rift in European relations. Additional sanctions are expected if Russia acts to annex Crimea.

"Going forward, we can calibrate our response based on whether Russia chooses to escalate or to de-escalate the situation," Obama said in the White House press room. "I believe there's still a path to resolve this situation diplomatically in a way that addresses the interest of both Russia and Ukraine.

"That includes Russia pulling its forces in Crimea back to their bases, supporting the deployment of additional international monitors in Ukraine, and engaging in dialogue with the Ukrainian government, which has indicated its openness to pursuing constitutional reform as they move forward towards elections this spring," Obama added.

The sanctions came hours after voters in the Crimean region of Ukraine voted in a referendum to split from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation. The Crimean Parliament voted March 17 to declare the region an independent state. Immediately following the legislative vote, a delegation of Crimea's parliament left for Moscow for meetings with Russian lawmakers on how to proceed with the annexation process, a step news media have reported could come within days.

In a fact sheet, the White House said that actions taken March 17 serve notice to Russia that unless it abides by international obligations and returns to pre-referendum conditions and respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, the United States is prepared to take further measures.

**The sanctions order list includes:**

- Vladislav Surkov, presidential adviser to President Putin.
  - Sergey Glazyev, presidential adviser to Putin.
  - Leonid Slutsky, a state Duma deputy and chairman of the Duma Committee on CIS Affairs, Eurasian Integration, and Relations with Compatriots.
  - Andrei Klishas, a member of the Council of Federation of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and chairman of the Federation Council Committee of Constitutional Law, Judicial, and Legal Affairs, and the Development of Civil Society.
  - Valentina Matviyenko, head of the Federation Council.
  - Dmitry Rogozin, deputy prime minister of the Russian Federation.
  - Yelena Mizulina, state Duma deputy.
  - Sergey Aksyonov, prime minister of Crimea's regional government.
  - Vladimir Konstantinov, speaker of the Crimean parliament.
  - Viktor Medvedchuk, leader of the Crimea separatist group Ukrainian Choice and a close friend of Putin.
  - Viktor Yanukovich, former president of Ukraine, who fled Ukraine to Russia and supported the dispatch of Russian combat troops into Ukraine.
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**7. Hagel Discusses Ukraine with French Defense Minister (03-15-2014)**

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 15, 2014 – Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel spoke by phone this morning with French Defense Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian to discuss the situation in Ukraine, Pentagon Press Secretary Navy Rear Adm. John Kirby reported.

"Secretary Hagel and Minister Le Drian affirmed the solidarity of the NATO alliance and discussed the importance of the United States and France continuing to working closely with one another to support Central and Eastern European allies," Kirby said in a statement summarizing the call.

The two defense leaders discussed their respective reviews of bilateral military cooperation with Russia, he added, and they pledged that senior officials from both the United States and France will continue to remain in close touch on those matters in the days ahead.

Hagel and Le Drian also discussed ongoing U.S. assistance to French operations in Africa, Kirby said.

Biographies:  
[Chuck Hagel](#)

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[State Department Fact Sheet on France](#)

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## **8. Sequestration Would Cripple U.S. Military Strategy, Hagel Says (03-13-2014)**

By Jim Garamone  
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 13, 2014 – If sequestration begins again in fiscal year 2016, the U.S. military will not be able to carry out defense strategy, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel told the House Appropriations Committee's defense subcommittee this morning.

A return to sequester would put at risk "America's traditional role as a guarantor of global security, and ultimately our own security," Hagel said.

Events in Europe over the past few weeks underscore the need for American involvement, Hagel said. President Barack Obama's fiscal 2015 defense budget request reflects that reality, he added, and sustains U.S. commitments and leadership at a very defining time.

"I believe this budget has to be far more than a set of numbers or just a list of decisions," the secretary said. "It is a statement of values. It's a statement of priorities. It's a statement of our needs. It's a statement of our responsibilities."

The budget request is realistic, Hagel said, and prepares the military to defend the nation at a time of increasing uncertainty throughout the world.

From the troop side, Hagel discussed compensation reform. The department is committed to providing service members fair compensation, he emphasized, "as well as the training and the tools and the edge they will always need to succeed in battle and return home safely."

"To meet those obligations under constrained budgets, we need some modest adjustments to the growth in pay and benefits," the secretary said. "All these savings will be reinvested in training and equipping our troops. And there are no proposals to change retirement in this budget."

The Defense Department will continue to recommend pay increases, Hagel said, but they will not be as substantial as in past years. The department will continue subsidizing off-base housing costs, he added, but not at 100 percent, as it is today. DOD will pay about 95 percent, he said, and it will be phased in over the next several years.

The budget request includes a provision to reduce subsidies for military commissaries. "We are not shutting down commissaries," Hagel explained. "We recommend gradually phasing out some subsidies, but only for domestic commissaries that are not in remote areas."

Finally, the secretary said, the Defense Department recommends simplifying and modernizing the three TRICARE military health plan systems by merging them into one, with modest increases in copays and deductibles for military retirees and family members that encourage them more fully to use the most affordable means of care. "Active duty personnel will still receive care that is entirely free," he said.

Biographies:  
[Chuck Hagel](#)

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