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By Guy Tailor

Russia pushes into Ukraine, prompting Obama rebuke but no new sanctions
Moscow reinforcing Crimea military bases with equipment 'capable of being nuclear'

*Росія вторгається до України, викликаючи критику Обами, але не нові санкції
Москва посилює свої військові бази в Криму обладнанням, яке може бути ядерною зброєю
В середу НАТО звинуватило Росію у військовому вторгненні в Україну, проте жодного натяку на нові
можливі санкції не прозвучало. Також генерал Філіп Брідлав заявив, що НАТО зафіксувало посилення
військових баз в Криму, при чому зброя на цих базах може бути й ядерною. Москва оперативно
спростувала всі звинувачення.*

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/nov/12/russia-pushes-into-ukraine-prompting-obama-rebuke/>



NATO accused Russia's military Wednesday of pushing into eastern Ukraine, prompting rebukes from the Obama administration but no sign that Washington or its Western European allies are preparing to increase economic sanctions against Moscow.

Russian authorities swiftly denied the charge, but NATO's supreme allied commander, Air Force Gen. Philip Breedlove, said that over the past two days "we have seen columns of Russian equipment, primarily Russian tanks, Russian artillery, Russian air defense systems and Russian combat troops, entering into Ukraine."

Gen. Breedlove said Tuesday that Russia is reinforcing its military bases in the Crimean Peninsula with equipment that is "capable of being nuclear," but added that NATO isn't certain nuclear weapons are being deployed.

Russia this year annexed the peninsula, which had been a region of Ukraine.

The general's claims about Russia's expansion into Ukraine followed a similar charge this week by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which reported a convoy of 43 tarp-covered military trucks — several towing howitzer artillery — headed toward Donetsk, a pro-Russia separatist stronghold in eastern Ukraine.

Ukrainian forces for months have clashed with Kremlin-backed rebels around Donetsk, and the latest developments suggest a tenuous cease-fire reached in September between Moscow and Kiev has all but collapsed. Five Ukrainian soldiers were killed and nine injured in clashes Tuesday in eastern Ukraine.

A senior OSCE official said Wednesday that the group's attempts to mediate were being eclipsed by the "constant exchange of fire" between the two sides.

In recent months, Washington and the European Union — both supporters of a fledgling pro-Western government in Kiev — have leveled economic sanctions against a string of Russian individuals and entities, including Rosneft, the state-owned oil giant, and Gazprom, the state-owned gas giant that is Europe's leading energy provider.

The sanctions also have targeted Ukrainians acting as separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine.

Western response to the most recent developments has not been backed by muscle. Obama administration officials have threatened "consequences" for Russian meddling in eastern Ukraine, but signs Wednesday suggested that the administration may be struggling to get EU support for expanding sanctions against Moscow.

When pressed by The Washington Times for an explanation of the consequences Russia might face, State Department spokeswoman Jennifer Psaki told reporters that "we and our allies and partners would be prepared to broaden and deepen existing sanctions."

Ms. Psaki then said German Chancellor Angela Merkel had referred to an "openness to adding people or entities" to the sanctions, "so that's really what we'd be talking about."

The catch is that Mrs. Merkel said this week that the European Union is not planning more sanctions against any Russian individuals or firms. Instead, Mrs. Merkel said Tuesday, EU members are considering adding some pro-Russia separatists in Ukraine to existing sanctions lists.

The German leader said specifically that, "beyond that, further economic sanctions are not planned at the moment."

Germany has put its weight behind many of the Obama administration-backed sanctions against Russian individuals and firms. But as one of Western Europe's top importers of Russian natural gas and other goods, Germany also has been seen to be standing in the way of Obama administration calls for a more biting response to Moscow.

Mrs. Merkel said Tuesday that with winter looming, Germany's "overarching goal" in the Ukraine crisis is to achieve a "real truce" between Moscow and Kiev, according to an Agence France-Presse report.

Ms. Psaki said Wednesday that the Obama administration would "continue to coordinate" with its European allies. She also said Secretary of State John F. Kerry had met Wednesday with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum in Beijing.

Mr. Kerry and Mr. Lavrov "talked about Ukraine and our ongoing concerns about escalating tensions there," Ms. Psaki said, adding that the secretary of state pushed his Russian counterpart to respect the cease-fire reached between Moscow and Kiev in September.

Tensions in eastern Ukraine have escalated since Nov. 2, when Kremlin-backed separatists held elections in Donetsk and Luhansk, another pro-Russia province. Russian leaders hailed the vote as legitimate, but U.S. and EU officials decried it as a farce.

The vote marked the latest strain to Russian relations with the West, which have sunk to their lowest level since the Cold War.

This week's developments have prompted speculation in Washington that Moscow may be preparing to try to annex a wider swath of eastern Ukraine, but authorities in Moscow denied charges that its military is expanding its presence around Donetsk and Luhansk.

Maj. Gen. Igor Konashenkov, a spokesman for the Russian Defense Ministry, called Gen. Breedlove's claims unfounded, according to a report by Russia's state-owned TASS news agency.

"We've stressed many a time there are no real facts behind the acts of shaking the air by Brussels officials," said Gen. Konashenkov, who accused the NATO commander of making "alarmist anti-Russian allegations."

Gen. Breedlove would not specify how NATO officials obtained intelligence indicating a surge of Russian military equipment and troops into Ukraine, but said the Russia-Ukraine border is "completely wide open."

"Forces, money, support, supplies [and] weapons are flowing back and forth across the border completely at will," he said. "We need to get back to a situation where this international border is respected."

In Brussels, OSCE Secretary-General Lamberto Zannier said Wednesday that the group's efforts to uphold the cease-fire have grown increasingly difficult.

“We are a civilian mission with a task that is increasingly resembling a peacekeeping action and operating in an environment where there is constant exchange of fire,” Mr. Zannier said, according to a report on his remarks by The Wall Street Journal.

The Journal reported that the OSCE began launching unmanned aerial vehicles in late October to boost information-gathering in eastern Ukraine, but one of the drones was targeted by anti-aircraft fire on Nov. 2 and others were grounded several days ago, largely because their information systems were being jammed.