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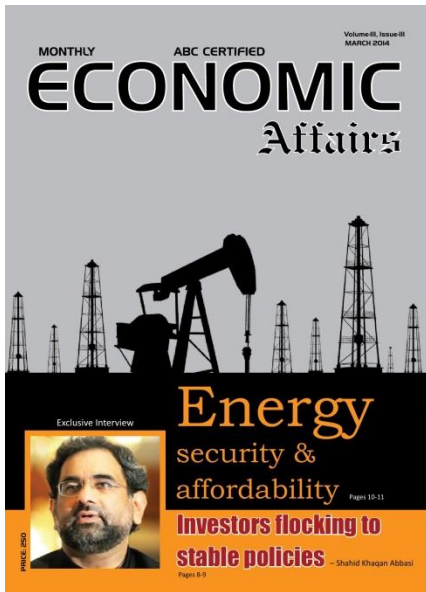
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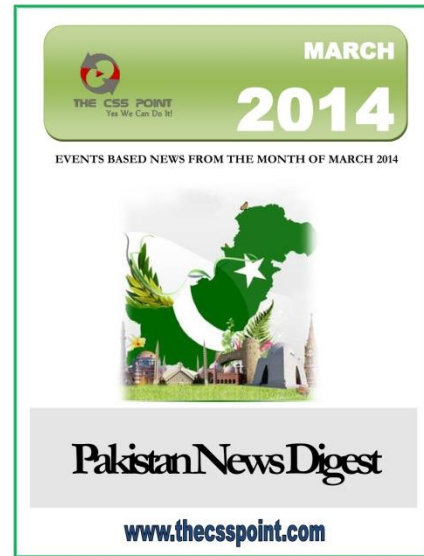
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# Russia, still no US accord on settling Ukraine crisis – Russian FM Lavrov

[The CSS Point](#) March 7, 2014



Photo: RIA

Russia and the US have yet to reach an accord on the situation in Ukraine, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov told reporters after meeting with his US counterpart John Kerry.

“Currently we cannot tell the world community that we have reached an accord,” he said.

“We have agreed that we will look again at the ideas that John Kerry gave me today on some of the upcoming steps,” Lavrov added.

“I will report to the president upon returning to Russia on how these meetings went and what issues were addressed,” Lavrov said.

Russia wants a better understanding of its Western partners’ mean by an international mechanism for Ukraine, Lavrov said.

“We would like to get a better idea of what our partners mean when they suggest creating some international mechanism, of its composition,” he told reporters after meeting with his US counterpart John Kerry.

“The main thing for us – I reiterate – is to respect the agreements reached on February 21, primarily the agreement on constitutional reform, creation of a government of national unity, and elections after constitutional reform. The second most important aspect is that any process that can be supported should have the clear support of all regions of Ukraine,” the minister said.

“Primarily, we are concerned about Crimea and the other southeastern regions in this case,” Lavrov said.

### **[Kerry says US has not yet made sanctions list of Russian officials – Russian FM](#)**

The US’s intention to impose sanctions against Russia only continues to build up pressure around the situation in Ukraine as a list of Russian officials hasn’t been produced yet, said the Russian Foreign Minister following his talks with the US State Secretary John Kerry.

“They continue to build up pressure incessantly. The US announced it had some secret lists of Russian citizens who would be banned from entering the United States but he [John Kerry] has assured me there are no such lists yet. They have only ordered them to be drafted but that doesn’t make much difference,” Lavrov said.

### **[Any solution to Ukraine crisis must be backed by all regions, including Crimea – Russian FM Lavrov](#)**

Any international proposition to resolve the crisis in Ukraine should be supported by the whole country, including Crimea, according to the Russian Foreign Minister

He said, “Any process that could be used to resolve the Ukrainian crisis, should gain support in all regions of Ukraine. First of all, we are concerned with the Crimea and other south-west regions of Ukraine,” Lavrov said.

### **[Russia’s Lavrov and US’s Kerry meet in Rome over Ukraine](#)**

US Secretary of State John Kerry met his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov on the sidelines of a Rome conference on Libya to continue discussions on Ukraine, a senior US official said on Thursday.

It is the second meeting in as many days between Kerry and Lavrov, who met in Paris on Wednesday to talk about the crisis over the crisis in Ukraine’s Crimea Peninsula.

### **[US, Russian FMs expected in Rome for Libya international conference](#)**

The chief diplomats of the United States and Russia are among the participants expected in Rome later on Thursday for an international conference aimed at mobilizing support for Libya's democratic transition.

As well as US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, other participants for the one-day talks include the foreign ministers of Germany and France, Libyan leaders and representatives of the United Nations.

Italy is hosting the event as Tripoli's former colonial master.

Ever since the ouster of Moamer Gaddafi following the NATO-backed uprising of 2011, the country's post-revolutionary rulers have struggled to assert their authority on militias and consolidate the rule of law.

Violence has increased in recent months, with armed groups targeting security personnel and foreigners. Several cases of execution-style killings have occurred in the restive city of Benghazi, the hotbed of the anti-Gaddafi uprising.

Amid the unrest, the country's highest political authority – parliament – has extended its mandate by one year, sparking violent nationwide protests. The mandate was originally due to expire in February.

Given the presence of Kerry, Lavrov and other stakeholders in the Ukrainian crisis, the conference risks being overshadowed by developments in Crimea.



# Afghanistan Wants Stop to Pakistan's Dam Project

[The CSS Point](#) March 7, 2014

**The Afghan government on Monday said that it would look to stop the Pakistani government from constructing a dam on the Indus River in the Khaibar Pakhtunkhwa province, arguing that it would disrupt the flow of the Kabul River and violate international laws on water resources.**

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) released a statement on Monday indicating Islamabad and Kabul had not come to an agreement on the dam project – named the Dasoo Dam – and that the Afghan authorities would leverage international governing bodies to keep it from moving forward.

“So far, the Pakistani government has not informed Afghanistan about the construction of the Dasoo Dam through diplomatic means and there was no agreement between the two countries in this respect,” the MoFA statement read.

The Ministry is said to be coordinating with the National Security Council (NSC) and Ministry of Finance (MoF) to organize Afghanistan's appeal to halt the dam construction.

Pakistan has asked the World Bank for help financing the project and the World Bank has asked for Afghanistan's input on the project.

Experts have warned that if the Afghan government does not take concerted action to block Pakistan from pursuing its unilateral interests at the expense of Afghanistan's, then a precedent would be set that could make it easier for Islamabad to rollover Kabul in the future.

“If the Afghan government remains silent, Pakistan will score a point, and in the future if they decide to establish a dam for agricultural purpose or power generation, Pakistan would say that it has invested billions on it and would say that Afghanistan must respect its right to use the water,” university lecturer Najib Fahim warned.

# How North Korea's elections work

[The CSS Point](#) March 7, 2014



VOTERS in North Korea will go to the polls on March 9th to elect deputies to the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA), whose members are chosen every five years. Yes, that's right—the totalitarian communist dynasty of North Korea holds elections. But they are, like a lot of things in North Korea, rather unusual. In fact they are not really elections at all.

For one thing, “voters” do not have much choice. They are presented with a single candidate in the district where they live. These candidates are chosen by the Democratic Front for the Reunification of the Fatherland, the governing coalition, which is controlled by the Workers' Party. There is only one box to tick. Abstaining or voting no would be a dangerous act of treason, given that voting takes place in booths that do not provide any secrecy, and dissenting votes must be posted into a separate ballot box. In this way the population (everyone over 17 is obliged to vote) endorses the 687 deputies in the SPA, a body that, in any case, is merely a rubber-stamp parliament that is rarely convened. In practice the supreme leader, Kim Jong Un, calls the shots, supported by the Presidium, a smaller group of senior officials.

Mr Kim, who became supreme leader in 2011 after the death of his father, Kim Jong Il, is standing as a candidate in this year's SPA elections. North Korea's news agency says his selection as a candidate was an expression of “absolute support and profound trust” in his leadership. But Mr Kim may use the election to reshape the SPA more widely. Previous elections have been used as opportunities to change North Korea's constitution and adjust its power

structure, something Mr Kim may be particularly keen to do having executed his uncle, Jang Sung Taek, long the country's number two, in December. At the same time, elections serve as a form of census, because voting is organised by residential unit. Updating its electoral records gives the government an opportunity to check up on the populace and make sure they are living where they are supposed to (and have not, say, defected to China).

The whole process highlights an odd thing about sham or rigged elections held in autocratic countries. It seems that even the most despotic leaders (and they do not come much more despotic than Mr Kim) feel the need to pay democracy the back-handed compliment of imitating its outward appearance, if not its underlying political model. North Korea's leaders seem to take their pantomime polls seriously. Mr Kim is standing in constituency number 111, whereas his father stood in number 333; both numbers are said to bring luck. Based on past experience, the Kims tend not to need it.

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# One by one, Obama's warnings to Russia brushed aside by Putin

[The CSS Point](#) March 8, 2014



WASHINGTON – One by one, President Barack Obama's warnings to Russia are being brushed aside by President Vladimir Putin, who appears to only be speeding up efforts to formally stake his claim to Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula.

In the week since Obama first declared there would be "costs" if Putin pressed into Crimea, Russian forces have taken control of the region and a referendum has been scheduled to decide its future. Obama declared the March 16 vote a violation of international law, but in a region where ethnic Russians are the majority, the referendum seems likely to become another barrier to White House efforts to compel Putin to pull his forces from Crimea.

“The referendum vote is going to serve for Putin, in his mind, as the credibility and legitimacy of Russia’s presence there,” said Andrew Kuchins, the director of the Russia program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

If Crimea votes to join Russia, the referendum could also put Obama in the awkward position of opposing the outcome of a popular vote.

The White House has tried to match Russia’s assertive posture by moving quickly to impose financial sanctions and travel bans on Russians and other opponents of Ukraine’s new central government. U.S. officials have also urgently tried to rally the international community around the notion that Russia’s military manoeuvres in Crimea are illegal, even seeking support from China, Moscow’s frequent ally against the West.

“I am confident that we are moving forward together, united in our determination to oppose actions that violate international law and to support the government and people of Ukraine,” Obama said Thursday.

The European Union also announced Thursday that it was suspending talks with Putin’s government on a wide-ranging economic agreement and on granting Russian citizens visa-free travel within the 28-nation bloc — a long-standing Russian objective.

The White House says it still believes a diplomatic solution to the dispute with Russia is possible. Obama spoke with Putin for more than an hour Thursday, outlining a potential resolution that would include Russia pulling its forces back in Crimea and direct talks between the Kremlin and Ukraine.

But the fast-moving developments in Crimea may mean that the ultimate question facing Obama is not be what the U.S. can do to stop Russia from taking control of Crimea, but what kind of relationship Washington can have with Moscow should that occur.

White House advisers insist the U.S. could not go back to a business as usual approach with Russia if Moscow were to annex Crimea or recognize its independence. But that may be seen as empty threat to the Kremlin after the U.S., as well as Europe, did just that in 2008 after Russia recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, two breakaway territories of Georgia. Russia also continues to keep military forces in both territories.

Privately, U.S. officials say Russia is running a similar playbook as it seeks to increase its influence in Crimea. And regional experts say Putin also appears to have a larger goal: influencing central government lawmakers in the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv as they prepare for elections later this spring.

# Poverty: a non-traditional security threat

[The CSS Point](#) March 9, 2014

By [Abid Qaiyum Suleri](#)



She may not be living under the economic poverty line. However, her husband was an unemployed drug addict. She was a chronic victim of domestic violence. Arguments on financial issues occurred routinely, and on top of everything, there are reports that the children had not been fed for the last three days. First thing first. Can one imagine the state of mind in which Bisma decided to end the lives of her two minor children? She may be depressed, frustrated, helpless, extremist, revengeful, all of the above, or none of the above, but it does not change the fact that [she took the precious lives of her children](#). And here arises the second question: who is responsible for the deaths of these children — Bisma, her husband, her relatives, the state, society, all of them or none of them? One can think of all kinds of possible answers; however, the Punjab police were quick in fixing responsibility and arrested her on a charge of murder. She would remain the talk of town for a few days and then all attention would be diverted to some other equally gruesome incident; after all, Pakistan is a land of the happening, where there is no dull moment.

I agree that ‘chronic poverty’ may not be the cause of this tragic incident, but Bisma’s extreme behaviour clearly indicates chronic depression and mental health issues, especially when she had a history of suicide attempts and her mother had also committed suicide a few years ago.

Fortunately, Bisma did not kill herself, but earlier last month, a cancer patient allegedly [killed seven members of his family](#) before committing suicide. Media reports are full of instances of such extreme behaviour. One wonders where we are heading towards as a society. Are we a mob of psychopaths, sadistic and violent individuals, or our sheer helplessness pushes us towards extreme behaviour? Perhaps, there is no easy answer to this question, but one can certainly assume that societal behaviour would have been quite normal if there had been attempts by our successive governments to implement [Article 38 of the Constitution of Pakistan](#), which states: “The State shall provide basic necessities of life, such as food, clothing, housing, education and medical relief.” True that ours is a resource-starved country, but even if our state had abundant resources, it would only be able to provide basic necessities even if it knew the number of deprived people. Mapping the demand side reflects the political will to act; however, our policymakers are clearly living in a state of denial. They do not want to read their lab results as it may diagnose their chronic ailments.

We have not released our poverty figures for the last many years. The National Nutritional Survey result was released after a lapse of two years as someone in the bureaucracy was not comfortable with the fact that [58 per cent of the population in Pakistan is malnourished](#). The World Food Programme-SDPI-FAO-Unicef-led “State of food (in)security in Pakistan 2013” report, suggesting (on the basis of government data) that almost 50 per cent of the people have a chronic caloric insecurity, has been awaiting clearance and shuttling between the Pakistan Agricultural Research Council and the Ministry of Food Security and Research for the last six months. In a country where physical health requirements remain unmet, we simply do not believe that mental ailments exist; thus, most media reports term Bisma a ‘ruthless mother’ and a ‘monster mom’.

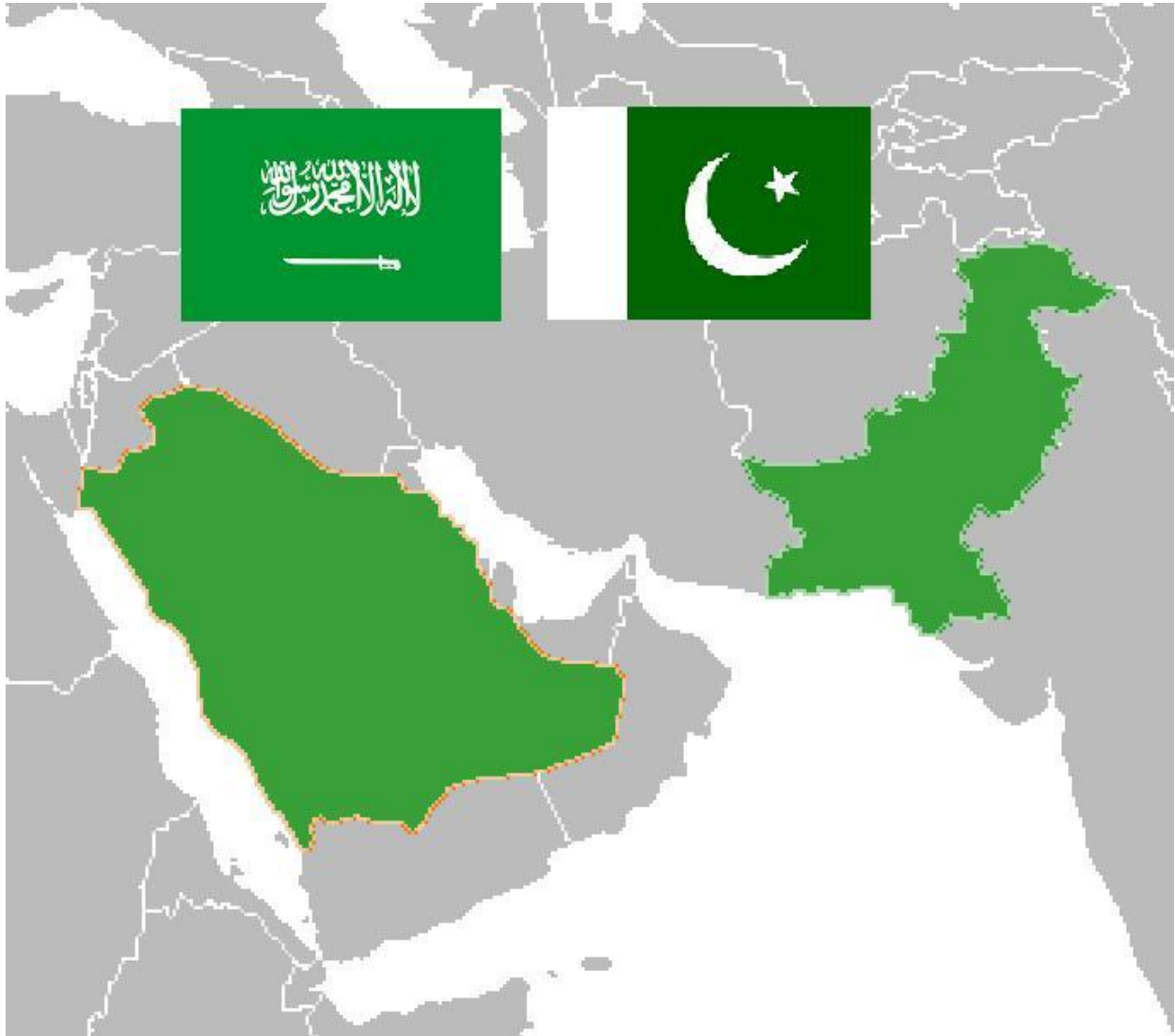
I wonder how many more deaths are required to convince ourselves that helplessness leads to extreme behaviours. We need to acknowledge the multidimensionality of poverty and need to recognise that poverty, in any form, is a non-traditional security threat, which can erode the basic societal fabric.

It may require a revised social contract to address societal extreme behaviours, but by then, it would be too late for this ‘ruthless mother’, who may attempt to commit suicide during her trial. I wish the court could have sent her for psychiatric treatment before handing her over to the police on judicial remand. It is still not too late. Perhaps, the Supreme Court or the Parliament’s Committee on Human Rights can still intervene and consider this case under Article 38. It would turn an accused into a victim, and may also lay the foundation of a paradigm shift, which is necessary if we want to provide psychological relief to our frustrated society.

# A dangerous shift in policy

[The CSS Point](#) March 9, 2014

**Riyadh is making Islamabad alienate stakeholders at home and away**



The assurances by the foreign office about Pakistan's agreement with Saudi Arabia regarding regional security have failed to convince either Pakistani critics or foreign countries. What has surprised many is the ill-considered and undiplomatic reaction from FO spokesperson Tasneem Aslam, who raised questions about the 'intelligence level of those who are indulging in this debate'. The critics included parliamentarians like opposition leader Khurshid Shah, PTI vice chairman and former foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi, and some of the knowledgeable media figures. Among the issues they raised were a basic shift in Syria policy and the agreement



to supply anti-tank and shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles, which Saudi Arabia is reportedly purchasing for Syrian rebels. According to Ms Aslam, defence deals normally had “end-user certificate, which ensures that our weapons are not resold or provided to a third country”. Many think assurances of the sort are less observed in practice than visualised by the naive spokesperson. The Russian foreign ministry has strongly remonstrated, maintaining that it was “deeply concerned” by reports that Saudi Arabia was planning to buy Pakistani-made shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles and anti-tank systems to arm Syrian rebels based in Jordan. It has warned Riyadh against supplying the missile launchers to rebels as the move would endanger security across the Middle East. Moscow has ominously hinted that in the end they could be used far from the borders of Syria.

This should concern Pakistan in particular. Some of the weapons supplied earlier to the Syrian opposition by CIA finally ended up in the hands of al Qaeda affiliated ISIS, which led the US to revise its weapon supply plans. What is the guarantee that some of the shoulder fired SAMs would not end up in the hands of Pakistani militants, some of whom are reportedly fighting alongside the extremists. Nothing would then be safe, from the army’s gunship helicopters to Pakistan’s civil aviation planes.

Equally worrisome is the prospect of possible Pakistani cooperation in repressing home grown dissent in the Gulf. Repressive policies driven by sectarian concerns are again leading to protests in Bahrain. The policy of putting down peaceful dissent through disproportionate force has led to counter violence. Last week an Emirati and two police officers from Bahrain died in an explosion. Even the Gulf countries are divided over the policy formulated in the 2013 GCC agreement on joint security. Kuwait has yet not signed it in view of strong opposition from Kuwaiti lawmakers. The differences with Qatar have reached a point where Saudi Arabia, UAE and Bahrain have withdrawn envoys from Doha. Pakistan can ill afford to become a partisan in a fractured GCC.

# Ukraine crisis: Russia isolated in UN Crimea vote

[The CSS Point](#) March 16, 2014



Russia has vetoed a draft UN resolution criticising Sunday's secession referendum in Ukraine's Crimea region – the only Security Council member to vote against the measure.

China, regarded as a Russian ally on the issue, abstained from the vote.

Western powers criticised Russia's veto over the referendum, which will ask Crimeans if they want to rejoin Russia.

Meanwhile, Kiev [has accused](#) Russian forces of seizing a village just north of Crimea and demanded they withdraw.

Ukraine's foreign ministry said 80 military personnel backed by four helicopter gunships and three armoured vehicles had taken the village of Strilkove.

An unnamed Russian official quoted by Pravda-Ukraine said they had taken action to protect a gas distribution station from "terrorist attacks".

Russia intervened in the Crimean peninsula after the fall of Ukraine's pro-Moscow President Viktor Yanukovich on 22 February.

Mr Yanukovich had sparked months of unrest across Ukraine by pulling out of a deal on closer ties with the European Union, and later opting for closer ties with Russia.

The Crimean region was part of Russia until 1954 and most of its residents are ethnic Russians, many of whom would prefer to be governed by Moscow rather than Kiev.

Russia's Black Sea fleet is also still housed in Crimea.

But Russia has signed agreements promising to uphold Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Crimea's regional parliament instigated the secession referendum after MPs voted overwhelmingly to support rejoining Russia.

But the national parliament in Kiev ruled the referendum unconstitutional, and earlier on Saturday voted to disband the regional assembly.

At the United Nations, 13 members of the Security Council backed a resolution that called for all nations to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and condemned the referendum as illegal.

Western diplomats had expected Russia to veto the document, but got what they wanted when China abstained, says the BBC UN correspondent Nick Bryant.

China and Russia usually work in tandem at the Security Council.

But Beijing is sensitive about issues of territorial integrity, because of fears it could send a message to its own restive regions of Tibet and Xinjiang, our correspondent says.

America's UN envoy Samantha Power said it was a "sad and remarkable moment" and labelled Russia "isolated, alone and wrong".

She said Sunday's referendum was "illegal, unjustified and divisive" and would have no effect on the legal status of Crimea.

Russian envoy Vitaly Churkin said the referendum was necessary to fill the "legal vacuum" since Ukraine's "coup d'etat" last month.

Earlier in Moscow, tens of thousands rallied against Russia's actions in Ukraine, the biggest such protest in two years.

As many as 50,000 attended the rally, with protesters shouting: "Hands off Ukraine."

One man told the BBC he felt Russia was turning back to the days of Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin.

Nearby, some 15,000 supporters of President Vladimir Putin came out to support the Crimean referendum.

Many of them wore identical red outfits and carried Russian and Soviet flags

“We are for friendship of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples. We want to say a firm ‘No’ to the fascist junta that came to power in Ukraine,” one man said.



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# Taliban not involved in militancy to be released: PM Nawaz

[The CSS Point](#) March 17, 2014



ISLAMABAD: Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has said that the Taliban who are not involved in militancy will be released as the government wants to resolve issues through consultations.

However, he made it clear that no demand against the Constitution or law would be met. He said that the government was serious in talks with the Taliban with an objective to bring peace to the country.

“We believe in resolving issues through consultation as the consultative process proves helpful in handling complex situations,” the prime minister said during a meeting with a 10-member delegation of the Pakistan Ulema Council (PUC) led by its chairman Allama Tahir Ashrafi.

He said the government was taking measures to ensure peace and harmony in the society. He said that extremism could only be checked by following the teachings of Islam. Nawaz Sharif said that the government was fully committed to resolving the challenges confronting the country through consultations.

The prime minister stressed that Ulema should play their role in promoting Pakistan's positive image in the global community. Nawaz Sharif assured the government's all-out support to the Ulema who are playing their role in advancing the cause of peace and harmony in the country.

Allama Tahir Ashrafi lauded the prime minister's efforts to help Pakistan overcome various challenges. He said with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's personal interest, the process of negotiations with Taliban had made a head way.

Ashrafi assured the prime minister of full support by Pakistan Ulema Council and added that the prime minister's desire for peace and his political acumen were reflective of his sincerity for the country. PUC chairman also expressed support for the government's foreign policy and its efforts to eradicate polio from the country.

# Pakistan puts off US visit to fast forward MFN, trade deal with India

[The CSS Point](#) March 17, 2014



ISLAMABAD: In a major development, Pakistan will extend MFN status to India by the end of March and in return India has agreed to reduce tariffs for Pakistani exporters on up to 300 items and to eliminate non-tariff barriers.

Top functionaries of the Nawaz government are vigorously working day and night to carve out a plan and an important visit by Commerce Minister Khurram Dastagir to Washington has been put off in view of these fast moving developments.

Pakistan would get maximum tariff concessions for its export-oriented industry and in return will extend MFN status or non-discriminatory market access (NDMA) to India when this agreement is announced.

Under it the existing negative list of 1,209 items will be abolished and trade at the Wagah border will be opened round the clock, senior officials of various economic ministries involved in the working for trade concession on various items from India.

India has agreed to provide a level playing field to Pakistani traders for which it will relax its restrictive tariff regime for Pakistani products and will give tariff concession on various products pertaining to Pakistan's strong sectors such as textile, cement, surgical instruments, and sports.

The importance and urgency of the impending deal with India on trade liberalisation can be gauged by the fact that Commerce Minister Khurram Dastagir, his secretary Wasim Niaz and other high ranking officials have postponed the visit to the US which was scheduled on March 12, 13 and 14 where both sides were to hold crucial talks under TIFA (the Trade Investment Facilitation Agreement).

The Pak-US Business Council was also scheduled to meet in Washington, but the Nawaz government preferred to enter into a deal with India on trade liberalisation as it attaches more importance to trade with India which is why the crucial visit to US has been postponed.

So much so, the officials disclosed that the World Bank is also on board for trade liberalisation between the two countries and will extend grants which are to be used to develop infrastructure on both sides of the Wagah border with the aim to facilitate trade.

To a question, the top officials said that the GHQ is on board and under the deal India will not be given transit facility for its goods to have access to markets in Afghanistan and other Central Asian States.

The concerned officials said that after the trade deal gets done, both the countries would trade 8,000 items in total. Pakistan is strong on textiles and on textile exports, India's existing tariff stands at 60-120 percent which is why Pakistan exports in textile are not increasing as expected. India has indicated to bring down the tariff on textile product to 5 percent.

Mr Zafar Mahmood, former Commerce Secretary and incumbent Chairman of the Punjab Public Service Commission is also playing a pivotal role as per the desire of the Nawaz government in clinching the trade deal with India.

If the deal is inked, the officials argued, then Pakistan will easily reach out to the biggest market of over 1 billion people and India will have access to 200 million people. Pakistan's existing exports to India stand at \$350 million which will surge in one year up to \$1 billion and if Pakistani entrepreneurs play smartly, then Pakistan' export will go up to close to \$2 billion in one year soon after the tariff concession and abolition of NTB (non-tariff barriers) under the MFN deal.

The teams of the Nawaz government are also working to safeguard the interests of various industries. "We will ensure the protection of industries that includes automobiles too but they



will be asked to import parts of the vehicles from India rather than importing from distant countries,” the official said.

They said the import of auto parts, from India will help reduce the cost of the vehicles in the country. The reduction in freight for the auto parts to be imported will be passed on to consumers of vehicles.

For the pharmaceutical industry, the raw material that is used in the production of medicines will be imported from India. In Pakistan, the prices of medicines are touching the sky whereas in India prices are very low and if the raw material gets imported then Pakistanis will get relief in terms of price of medicines.

Pakistan will also import steel at cheaper rates from India that is produced in furnace units in cities like Daska, Gujranwala and others. Since the said furnace units consume a lot of gas and electricity, the cost of steel products in the country is very high. However, the big steel mills in Pakistan are already working efficiently, and include Tuwairqi and Iteffaq foundries. Steel will be imported from India keeping in view the steel industries’ interest in Pakistan.

# What annexing Crimea will cost Russia's government

[The CSS Point](#) March 20, 2014



By LAURA MILLS and NATALIYA VASILYEVA

Associated Press

MOSCOW (AP) — Despite the pebble beaches and cliff-hanging castles that made Crimea famous as a Soviet resort hub, the Black Sea peninsula has long been a corruption-riddled backwater in economic terms. The Kremlin, which decided to take the region from Ukraine after its residents voted in a referendum to join Russia, has begun calculating exactly what it will cost to support Crimea's shambolic economy – which one Russian minister described as “no better than Palestine.”

Here's a look at what Crimea needs most and the economic challenges Russia faces in absorbing it:

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In the rapid run-up to the referendum in Crimea, voters were bombarded with the message that the grass was a lot greener on the Russian side.

President Vladimir Putin may have fanned such sentiment during Ukraine's anti-government demonstrations that preceded the Russian invasion of Crimea. He sympathized with protesters, casting them as fed up with an economy mismanaged by "one group of crooks" after another. And he extolled the comparative success of the Russian economy – firing off figures about pensions and wages in both countries to argue that people were better off in Russia.

On Monday, one day after the referendum, Crimean Prime Minister Sergei Aksyonov wrote on his official Twitter account that Moscow had provided 15 billion rubles (\$400 million) in aid to the region, which he said had doubled the Crimean budget overnight.

"This is a platform ideal for taking risks ... and for realizing economic miracles," said Russia's business ombudsman Boris Titov.

#### "NO BETTER THAN PALESTINE"

But as the Russian dream of acquiring Crimea becomes a reality, Moscow is trying to calculate the price tag of bringing in a region that – in the words of Russian Regional Development Minister Igor Slyunyayev – has an economy that "looks no better than Palestine."

As part of Ukraine, about 40 percent of Crimea's annual budget of roughly \$500 million was propped up by subsidies from Kiev. Russia would be expected to at least match – and probably far exceed – the Ukrainian annual contribution to raise living standards in its new territory.

Living standards in Crimea are drastically different from Russia. The GDP per capita in Russia, home to more than a hundred of billionaires, is about \$14,000. In Crimea, it's about \$5,000.

Demographics are one major hurdle. More than 500,000 people – about a quarter of the population – are pensioners. Pensions in Russia are about double what they are in Ukraine, and former Russian tax minister Alexander Pochinok estimated that paying pensions in Crimea alone would cost 70 billion rubles (\$1.9 billion) per year.

Many Crimean residents make their living through tourism, although much of that money is kept off official ledgers and therefore difficult to tax. About 70 percent of tourists in recent years have been Ukrainians, in large part because the peninsula's only road and railroad links are to mainland Ukraine. The industry is likely to be hard hit as many Ukrainian travelers stay away this summer, although Russian authorities have pledged to reduce the cost of air travel to the peninsula to bolster travel to the region.

#### DEPENDENCE ON UKRAINE

Crimea is highly dependent on Ukraine for energy and water, most of which is supplied across the thin strip of land that connects the peninsula to the mainland. About 80 percent of the

region's electricity is supplied across the isthmus. The governor of Russia's southern Krasnodar region, which is separated from Crimea by a stretch of water called the Kerch Strait, pledged to provide electricity to the peninsula by building an underwater supply system. Other officials have said Crimea may need to build its own electricity plant – a project that could come with a price tag of nearly \$1.7 billion, analysts say.

Russia has promised to bolster infrastructure in the region. Moscow and Kiev have been talking about building a bridge over the Kerch Strait for more than a decade, but the project has repeatedly stalled. In recent weeks, Russian officials have eagerly revived the project, which is estimated to take years and cost at least 50 billion rubles (\$1.4 billion). They also are now discussing building a railroad and underwater tunnel across the strait.

Even as the Crimean government has threatened to nationalize Ukrainian government property, Kiev has promised not to turn off the taps to energy and water.

“(The Kiev government) is eager to be seen as reasonable and moderate through all this; they don't want to give the Russians an excuse for further intervention,” said Timothy Ash, an analyst at Standard Bank. “The danger of being obstinate might be that Russians would decide to intervene around Crimea to secure water and utility supplies.”

#### SMALL CHANGE FOR RUSSIA

Even if all of these projects add up to billions of dollars, it may still be small change to the Russian government.

“For Russia's budget this is not a big deal,” said Nataliya Orlova, chief economist at Alfa Bank. “Even if you spend \$5 billion or \$10 billion, this is not money that dramatically changes things.”

Russia had a total of over \$170 billion stashed in two rainy day funds as of late February. It tapped into this money to try to shore up the regime of ousted Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich, who fled to Russia last month.

#### CORRUPTION

Orlova argued that Crimea's annexation could in fact turn out to be positive for Russia's economy in the short term, because investment could spur a consumption boom in Crimea.

But Crimea has long been known as an organized crime hub, and the Kiev government's longstanding reluctance to meddle in the autonomous region has meant that a culture of corruption has been tacitly allowed to flourish in the region since the Soviet collapse.

# Indian arms imports almost triple China, Pakistan: study

[The CSS Point](#) March 20, 2014



India remains the biggest buyer of arms in the world, importing nearly three times as many weapons as its nearest competitors China and Pakistan over the last five years, a Swedish think tank said.

The total volume of arms sales was up 14 percent in 2009-13 compared to the previous five years, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).

Indian imports of major weapons rose by 111 percent in the last five years compared to 2008. Its share of total global arms imports increased from 7 to 14 percent, SIPRI said.

India replaced China as the world's biggest arms buyer in 2010. With its domestic defence industry struggling to manufacture high-tech arms, India is in the midst of a defence spending

binge as it struggles to keep up with better-equipped Chinese forces and a range of military challenges in its volatile neighbourhood.

The main supplier of arms to India in 2009-13 was Russia, accounting for 75 percent of all imports — reflecting India's need to upgrade and modernise weapons systems dating back to their close relationship during the Cold War.

India has lately sought to diversify its sources, looking particularly to the United States.

Figures from IHS Jane's released in February showed that India became the biggest buyer of US weapons last year — with total imports worth \$1.9 billion, and a string of large-scale purchases including Boeing's C-17A transport aircraft and P-8I Maritime Patrol Aircraft.

In 2009-13, however, the US still accounted for only 7 percent of India's purchases according to SIPRI.

India's traditional rival Pakistan increased its weapons acquisitions by 119 percent, growing from 2 percent of the global total to 5 percent during that period.

The five largest arms suppliers worldwide between 2009 and 2013 were the United States (29 percent of global exports), Russia (27 percent), Germany (7 percent), China (6 percent) and France (5 percent).

They collectively accounted for 74 percent of total arms exports, SIPRI said.

The world's top five arms importers were now India, China, Pakistan, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

“Chinese, Russian and US arms supplies to South Asia are driven by both economic and political considerations,” said Siemon Wezeman, senior researcher with the SIPRI Arms Transfers Programme.

“In particular, China and the USA appear to be using arms deliveries to Asia to strengthen their influence in the region,” Wezeman said.

Arms exports to Africa between 2004-08 and 2009-13 jumped 53 percent. The three largest importers in the region were Algeria, Morocco and Sudan.

Imports by European nations decreased by 25 percent between 2004-2008 and 2009-13.

Britain was the largest importer of major weapons in Europe (receiving 12 percent of deliveries), followed by Azerbaijan (12 percent) and Greece (11 percent).

# Three Years of Revolt: What Has Become of Syria's Revolutionaries

[The CSS Point](#) March 20, 2014



By Christoph Reuter and [Raniah Salloum](#)

**They have fled, they are hungry, they are doing what they can to survive: The Syrian civil war has caused great suffering since the protests against President Bashar Assad began three years ago. We revisit some of those people we have met in our reporting.**

Omar thought he would never leave his homeland. “Damascus is my city,” the lanky young man with a furrowed brow said in May 2012. Even then, many of his friends had already left Syria, fleeing to places like Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Cairo.

Now, though, roughly two years later, Omar is sitting in a jail cell some 7,500 kilometers from Damascus in a Malaysian prison, locked up as an illegal immigrant. The 26-year-old’s parents and siblings are still in Syria. They are among nine people from two families who share a room in the Syrian capital. Their own home, a house in the Yarmouk district of Damascus, was destroyed in a bombing raid. Aside from the fact that Omar made it all the way to Malaysia, his family’s story is far from out of the ordinary. At least every second Syrian has had to leave his or

her home since 2011. They get by somehow, but for most of them, their situation becomes more precarious by the day.

It has now been three years since the protests began in Syria. Many of the people in Syria that SPIEGEL and SPIEGEL ONLINE has met with since then have had to leave the country in the meantime. But at least they are still alive. Since 2011, well more than 100,000 people have died in the fighting, according to United Nations numbers released last summer. Since then, the international community has stopped counting the dead.

What started as a government effort to suppress peaceful protests transformed into a civil war that has destroyed a country and its people. Syria is collapsing a little further each day and it has become the most costly humanitarian crisis in the history of the United Nations. The UN asked for \$6 billion for Syria in 2014, more than ever before.

### **‘Heart-Rending’**

“Syria has been set back 30, 35 years in its development,” Muhannad Hadi, the regional emergency coordinator for Syria for the World Food Program, told SPIEGEL ONLINE. He has been in the country on behalf of the UN since 2008. “The girls that we supported back then, we now encounter as beggars on the street. It is heart-rending.”

When SPIEGEL ONLINE met Omar in August of 2012, he was still living with his parents in the Yarmouk district of Damascus. One month later, electricity and power to their house were cut off, just at the height of summer. The neighborhood was repeatedly targeted by artillery.

Omar’s family fled to the center of Damascus in December, crowding into a single room which cost them \$100 per month. Prior to the war, they had belonged to the Syrian middle class, and the move was a luxury that they could still afford, if only barely. And it was one which likely saved their lives. Yarmouk has since come under siege and the people still living there are starving.

Omar was prepared to do almost anything to help support his family and managed to get a three-week visa for Malaysia. He figured that the job situation had to be better there than in the Middle East. In February 2013, he sold everything he still had, including his laptop and athletic shoes, and borrowed the remainder he needed to buy an airplane ticket. Last November, he was arrested by the Malaysian police due to his long-since expired visa and he has been behind bars ever since.

Omar had imagined his life differently. He had hoped to work in the marketing department of a company in Damascus once he finished university. But it is a dream he buried in 2012. He had also thought that Syria’s future would develop differently, having been convinced that the



country's economy would continue to move in a positive direction and that additional freedoms would be the result. In the spring of 2011, Omar took part in a student demonstration for the first and only time. Security forces chased them down and several were taken into custody and tortured. He decided not to take to the streets again.

Omar is just one of many people that SPIEGEL and SPIEGEL ONLINE has met with in the last three years of violence in Syria. Click through the photo gallery above to learn about the fates of others.



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# President Putin mocks US sanctions, vows not to retaliate

[The CSS Point](#) March 22, 2014



Vladimir Putin has mocked US sanctions imposed on Russia, saying he will open an account at US-sanctioned Rossiya Bank. During a meeting with the country's senior security officials he added that he won't introduce a visa regime with Ukraine.

Putin treated with irony the recent sanctions imposed on certain Russian lawmakers.

*"Yes, these are those so-called 'polite people in camouflage with guns',"* ironically said Putin hinting at Western accusations that Russian soldiers have taken bases in Crimea.

*"Look at them, typical Moskals [pejorative term for Russians – ED.],"* he added, pointing at US sanctioned prominent businessmen Arkady and Boris Rotenberg, Gennady Timchenko, head of the Volga Group and Yury Kovalchuk, the owner of Rossiya Bank. *"I need to avoid these citizens as they are 'compromising the country'."*

On Thursday the US [expanded](#) its sanctions list by adding 20 more names. US President Barack Obama announced a new executive order imposing further sanctions on top Russian officials and businessmen.

Aleksey Gromov, First Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration; Sergey Ivanov, Chief of Staff of the Presidential Executive Office; and Sergey Naryshkin, Speaker of the State Duma, the lower chamber of the Russian Parliament, are among those mentioned. Russian Railways President Vladimir Yakunin is also on the list.

The order also allows for measures against Russian energy, mining, defense, and engineering sectors.

Putin also commented on the latest sanction of the US authorities that concerned Russia's Rossiya Bank, to which international payment systems Visa and MasterCard stopped serving clients on Friday.

The Russian president said he will get his salary via the sanctioned bank.

*"I've already said that I was going to open an account in this bank, more than that I asked for my salary to be transferred to this account,"* he said.

Putin added that Russian authorities should provide any possible support for the clients of the blocked Rossiya Bank, as this "finance establishment has nothing to do with Ukraine crisis."

*"The clients of the bank must be taken under our protection. We also should make sure that neither clients nor the bank will sustain any negative outcome from this situation,"* he added.

Putin assured that Russia will refrain from retaliatory sanctions against the US and introducing a visa regime with Ukraine.

Putin believes that millions of innocent Ukrainian would suffer should Russia introduce a visa regime with Ukraine.

*"These people are not rich. They work in Russia to provide for their families. We shouldn't do this,"* he added.

Putin also said Russia will continue leading a project to repair helicopters in Afghanistan, which is run by NATO and Russia.

*"We should continue this cooperation despite our NATO partners vow to freeze our partnership,"* he said.

The so-called helicopter project, financed by both Russia and Western countries, aims at helping Afghanistan repair helicopter equipment produced in Russia and training special personnel to operate this equipment.

Putin's statement about the visa regime came after reports this week that Ukraine might introduce a visa regime for Russians, but Ukraine's coup-appointed PM, Arseny Yatsenuk, said the authorities are in no hurry to impose it.

## Malaysia asks for more help as search for missing MH370 continues: Minister

[The CSS Point](#) March 22, 2014



By The Straits Times Malaysia Bureau

KUALA LUMPUR – Search efforts for the missing MH370 plane are continuing as Malaysia asks for more help, said Malaysia's Acting Transport Minister Hishammuddin Hussein on Friday.

He will be speaking to US Defence Secretary Chuck Hagel on Friday night on deploying more assets for the search and rescue operations, Mr Hishammuddin said at a daily press briefing.

Malaysia is also obtaining help from French experts who recovered the black box of Air France Flight 447 after two years, said Mr Hishammuddin, who is also Defence Minister.

“Malaysia is still awaiting information on whether the debris spotted in the Indian Ocean are linked to MH370,” he said.

Japan is sending two aircraft to Perth to assist in the search in the southern Indian Ocean while China is sending five ships and three ship-borne helicopters to the southern corridor.

Malaysia is awaiting confirmation on whether Kazakhstan can be used as a staging point for future investigations but Kazakhstan has said it has not found any trace of MH370, he added.

The search for the missing Malaysia Airlines jet resumed on Friday morning in the remote southern Indian Ocean, where satellite images indicated “credible” evidence of large debris.



Earlier on Friday, Mr Hishammuddin told reporters that no concrete evidence has been found so far.

“We have been very consistent in making sure every lead is corroborated,” he said. Australia’s Defence Minister David Johnston had said it could take two to three days to know anything more definite. Australia cautioned that it may be difficult to find the debris due to ocean drift.

Australian officials have also warned that the objects might be parts of containers.

# US and Saudi Arabia discuss military ties and Qatar row

[The CSS Point](#) March 22, 2014



WASHINGTON // The defence secretary Chuck Hagel hosted Saudi Arabia's deputy defence minister for talks, reaffirming US military ties to Riyadh despite discord over Washington's Iran and Syria policies.

While Mr Hagel made clear to Prince Salman bin Sultan that the United States would continue its diplomacy with Iran, he underscored the importance of US-Saudi military cooperation.

Saudi Arabia harbours reservations about attempts by Washington and other major powers to negotiate a deal with Iran over its nuclear programme, but "Hagel stressed our position on Iran has not changed," said a US defence official said.

The official said the two on Thursday discussed tensions among Gulf states, as Qatar has angered Riyadh and other members of the Gulf Cooperation Council over its support for the Muslim Brotherhood in the region and harder line extremists in Syria.

“The two leaders reaffirmed the strength of the US-Saudi relationship, with secretary Hagel emphasising the commitment of the United States to security in the region,” the Pentagon spokesman Rear Admiral John Kirby said.

“They also discussed regional challenges and the importance of regional cooperation in addressing common security issues.”

It was Prince Salman’s first visit to Washington since taking over as deputy defence minister in August and came before the US president Barack Obama’s trip to Riyadh, which is expected this month.

The son of late crown prince and veteran defense minister Sultan bin Abdul Aziz who died in 2011, he previously served in the Saudi embassy in the US capital.

The Obama administration’s diplomatic opening with Iran and its reluctance to intervene in the Syrian conflict have frustrated the Saudi leadership and caused serious tensions in the decades-long strategic alliance.

The Saudis are sceptical of the interim nuclear deal with Iran negotiated by major powers, viewing it as a risky venture that could embolden their rivals in Tehran.

The Saudis were bitterly disappointed over Obama’s eleventh-hour decision last year to back away from military action against the Syrian regime.

Saudi Arabia spends billions of dollars every year on US weapons but officials said no specific arms deals were discussed in Thursday’s talks.

The US government has approved more than US\$86 billion (Dh315.62bn) in weapons sales to Saudi Arabia since 2010, including a fleet of upgraded F-15 fighter jets, Apache attack helicopters, an array of missiles, Patriot batteries and other hardware.

# Crimea crisis: what does the US know about Putin's oil wealth?

[The CSS Point](#) March 22, 2014



The most startling part of [Washington's sanctions on Russian businessmen loyal to President Vladimir Putin](#) may be a single sentence that contains an explosive allegation: that Putin himself profits from the world's fourth biggest oil trading company, Gunvor.

Among the people the United States sanctioned on Thursday as part of its drive to put pressure on Russia for its intervention in Ukraine was businessman Gennady Timchenko, a long-time acquaintance of Putin and, until this week, co-owner of Geneva-based Gunvor, which trades nearly 3% of the world's oil.

In announcing the sanctions, the US treasury went a step further, adding a single sentence that hits squarely at one of the most controversial topics that Putin has faced in 13 years as the Kremlin ruler and head of the government.

"Timchenko activities in the energy sector have been directly linked to Putin. Putin has investments in Gunvor and may have access to Gunvor funds," the statement said.



The treasury declined further comment on what information it has about Putin's investments in Gunvor and how exactly he could have access to Gunvor's funds.

It provoked a quick and furious response. Gunvor said the statement was "outrageous" and "blatantly false."

"Gunvor categorically denies that Vladimir Putin has or has ever had any ownership or that he is a beneficiary of our business directly or indirectly," it said.

Gunvor has repeatedly said that Timchenko and chief executive officer Torbjorn Tornqvist had equal stakes each of around 45% and the remaining 10% was owned by the staff.

Timchenko has repeatedly denied that Putin helped him create his vast business empire, yet because of his long and close relationship with Putin speculation has persisted.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov called the sanctions "unacceptable" and said the Kremlin was studying the impact of the inclusion of Timchenko on the list.

He did not comment on the allegations that Putin has investments in Gunvor.

Later in the day a treasury official clarified that Timchenko's designation would not affect Gunvor since Timchenko owned less than 50%.

At the same time, Gunvor announced that Timchenko had sold his share to Tornqvist on Wednesday, a day earlier. Tornqvist now owns 87%, while 13% belongs to the employees.

Still, the growing concern among analysts is that the accusation, and the direct blow at Putin's closest allies, may provoke an even more dramatic response from Moscow – potentially even using its vast energy supplies as a weapon against the west.

The wording of the treasury statement goes far beyond anything that has been said previously about Putin. He has faced accusations for years, typically from political opponents, that he helped Timchenko create the Gunvor empire.

None have ever provided any evidence, and no media outlets have ever reported any proof of ownership interests in Gunvor.

Putin worked in the mayor's office in the early 1990s when Timchenko and his friends, Putin said, spun off an oil trading unit of the Kirishi oil refinery.

Gunvor has grown spectacularly since then with a turnover of \$93bn in 2012 compared with \$5bn in 2004. It traded large volumes of oil of Russian state companies such as Rosneft at the

end of last decade but since then ceded its leading positions and now focuses on trading in Europe and Asia.

[According to WikiLeaks cables](#) revealed by the Guardian in 2010, John Beyrle, the former US ambassador to Moscow, reported that Gunvor’s “secretive ownership is rumoured to include prime minister Putin”.

A call made by Reuters to Eurasia Foundation, where Beyrle works now after leaving the foreign service, was not answered late on Thursday evening.

The first time Putin addressed the issue directly was in 2011.

“I assure you, I know that a lot is being written about it, without any participation on my part... I have known the citizen Timchenko for a very long time, since my work in St. Petersburg,” Putin told a group of Russian writers.

“I never interfered with anything related to his business interests. I hope he will not stick his nose into my business either,” Putin said.

Putin has repeatedly said that he has read in the press reports about his immense wealth and that he was even the world’s richest man but denied those reports as nonsense.

“Yes it is true. I’m not only the richest man in Europe but in the whole world. I’m collecting emotions,” he told reporters in 2008. Talk of vast personal riches “is all rubbish.”

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# Plagiarism detected in CSS paper

[The CSS Point](#) March 22, 2014



ISLAMABAD: Though the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has investigated over 200 cases of plagiarism against students and teachers since 2006, it is shocking that professors who prepare question papers for competitive examinations are also involved in ‘copy pasting.’

It has been learnt that a question asked in the Central Superior Services (CSS) examination held under the Federal Public Service Commission (FPSC) was copied from an entry test paper of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI).

A faculty member of a university who marked the answer sheets of the CSS examinations requesting not to be identified said the paper of journalism, an elective subject, was held on February 18, 2014.

“As I was supposed to get the answer books for checking, I decided to see the question paper of the CSS paper. At the first glance, I felt that I have already seen question number seven. I read it again and remembered that the same question had been asked in the entry test for MS in the IIUI because my son had appeared in the test on January 17,” he said.

“I checked the IIUI question paper and was shocked to see that both the questions were the same. Even there was no difference of commas and the question mark. I have no objection to asking

similar questions in different papers but the paper setter should use their own language and way of asking questions.”

He added that by looking at the question papers, one can easily understand that the CSS paper setter had copied the question from the IUI question paper.

May be the other questions were also copied from some recently held exams.

According to the question papers, the three-line question was “In elections 2013, the social media were used as a vehicle of political advertising by the leading political parties of Pakistan. Do you think that social media had considerable effects on the election results? Please support your answer with concrete examples.”

A faculty member of the Quaid-i-Azam University (QAU) added that the FPSC should ensure that questions for the CSS exams were not carried from any recently-held exam because if someone has already attempted a question it becomes easier to solve it again.

“CSS is the most important exam and the cream of the country is selected through it. So this sort of blunders should not be made at such an important level,” he said.

“As far as I know, each paper setter sends three question papers for the CSS exam so rather than doing hard work they pick questions from different question papers and send them to the commission,” he said.

When contacted, former minister and eminent educationist Dr Attaur Rahman said if some part of a question accidentally matched with some other question it can be ignored but if a three liner question is similar to the other question it is not allowed.

“This is also plagiarism and the paper setters are not allowed to copy questions from anywhere. It is also dishonesty because questions should be written in the question setter’s own words,” he said.

“I cannot imagine that these things can be done at the CSS level. The paper setters hired should stop plagiarism,” he said.

An official of the FPSC, who was not authorised to speak to the media on record, said sometimes paper setters made blunders but the FPSC should not be blamed for it.

“I will inform the examination department about the issue and hopefully appropriate action will be taken,” he said.

# Obama Says U.S., EU United On Punishing Russia

[The CSS Point](#)

March 25, 2014



U.S. President Barack Obama has said the United States and Europe are united in holding Russia to account for its actions in Crimea.

“Europe and America are united in our support of the Ukrainian government and the Ukrainian people,” he told reporters after meeting with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte in Amsterdam on March 24. “We are united in imposing a cost on Russia for its actions so far.”

Obama told the Dutch newspaper “de Volkskrant” that his message to European leaders is that Russian President Vladimir Putin needs to “understand the economic and political consequences of his actions in Ukraine” but that “it’s important that Ukraine have good relations with the United States, Russia, and Europe.”

He called Europe Washington’s closest partner on the world stage and said Europe is the cornerstone of American engagement with the world.

Obama will travel later on March 24 to The Hague for talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping and to attend a Nuclear Security Summit.

He is then due to sit down in a meeting with other leaders from the Group of Seven (G7) leading industrial nations — Germany, France, Canada, Italy, Japan, and Britain — to discuss their response to Russia’s unrecognized annexation of Crimea.

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov are also expected to hold face-to-face talks on the Ukraine crisis on the sidelines of the nuclear summit in The Hague.

The United States and the EU have separately already imposed visa bans and asset freezes on some members of the inner circle of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In Kyiv, meanwhile, acting Ukrainian President Oleksandr Turchynov has given orders to the Defense Ministry to withdraw all Ukrainian military forces from Crimea.

He said the order was given due to what he said are threats by the Russian military to the lives and health of Ukrainian servicemen and their families in Crimea.

The announcement came just hours after Russian troops forced their way inside a Ukrainian marine base in Feodosia.

Russia has been taking control of scores of military institutions across Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu arrived in Crimea on March 24 to inspect the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol and meet with secessionist Prime Minister Sergei Aksyonov.

Shoigu appointed Rear Admiral Denis Berezovsky as deputy commander of Russia’s Black Sea Fleet.

Berezovsky had been appointed commander of Ukraine’s navy earlier this month but announced he was instead supporting the pro-Russian government in Crimea.

Russian forces have seized dozens of Ukrainian naval ships in the past few days.

The hastily called G7 meeting in The Hague comes one day after NATO’s top military commander, General Philip Breedlove, said Russian troops massed on Ukraine’s borders pose a threat to Moldova’s separatist Transdniester region.

“There is absolutely sufficient force postured on the eastern border of Ukraine to run to Transdniester, if the decision was made to do that,” he said. “And that is very worrisome.”

Breedlove accused Russia of acting more like an adversary than a partner, saying Moscow was using frozen conflicts and the possibility of confrontation with Russia as a “tool” to discourage EU and NATO membership.

Acting Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchytsya told U.S. television on March 23 that he believed the chances of war between his country and Russia are growing.

## **Afghanistan furious over speculated US 7 billion military aid to Pakistan**

[The CSS Point](#) March 25, 2014



A report in the Washington Post claiming that US military authorities have been in discussions with their Pakistani counterparts to hand over approximately 7 billion US dollars worth of military hardware to Afghanistan’s neighbour has stunned and enraged much of the Afghan media, reigniting old Durand Line wounds.

Despite Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and NATO troops fighting insurgencies in Afghanistan side-by-side in the last decade, a source in the report claims Pakistan is close to securing nearly 1,600 mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles and other modern military hardware which Afghan forces were hoping to receive.

“No final decision has been made on the handover of the equipment and it is still being discussed,” said Sedid Sediqi, spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Interior Affairs (MoIA), talking on Farakhabar, a program on Tolo News. “We hope that this decision will not be made and the equipment is not handed over to Pakistan”.

Sediqi says that Afghan forces have become accustomed to handling and using MRAP vehicles. “We really need them. We desperately need modern equipment,” added Sediqi.

### **“Afghanistan Betrayed”**

Afghanistan Times ran with the headline: ‘Afghanistan Betrayed’, asking why such valuable military equipment should go to Afghanistan’s neighbour and not Afghan forces themselves. “The US has deliberately preferred Pakistan over Afghanistan. The latter has been fighting terrorism sincerely and bleeding profusely, but the US largesse has always showered on Pakistan,” wrote Afghanistan Times on the morning of March 24.

In its lead editorial on March 18, Hasht-e Subh – Afghanistan’s most-circulated daily – said others were benefitting from Afghanistan’s sacrifice.

“The people of Afghanistan, Afghan National Security Forces and the government of Afghanistan all want this equipment handed over to Afghan forces. According to the Declaration of the NATO Summit in Lisbon (ED: November 2010), NATO member states committed themselves to equipping Afghan Security Forces. But now that they are withdrawing from Afghanistan, they are going to hand over their equipment to Pakistan. We should not forget the war is devastating Afghanistan and Pakistan has one of the mightiest militaries in the region. Afghanistan’s National Army needs mine-resistant ambush-protected (MRAP) vehicles far more than the Pakistan army does.”

“According to the Declaration of the NATO Summit in Lisbon, NATO member states committed themselves to equipping Afghan National Security Forces.” Hasht-e Subh.

Jawed Kohistani, a military analyst talking to Afghanistan Today, says Afghanistan is being punished for Hamid Karzai’s refusal to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) with the US. “Not signing the Bilateral Security Agreement and criticizing the policies of the United States of America in Afghanistan in the media, especially calling the US a competitor as opposed



to a partner, while challenging their policies on combating terrorism, has deprived of us some opportunities we had,” said Kohistani.

Dowlat Waziri, a spokesman for the Afghan Ministry of Defence (MoD), strongly rejected claims NATO-trained Afghan forces cannot operate the equipment in question. “All Afghan security forces have been trained by US and NATO forces and they are fully capable of operating equipment currently used by Western troops in Afghanistan,” said Waziri, urging the US military to hand over the equipment to the Afghan National Army (ANA).

Fazel Sancharaki, a spokesman for presidential candidate Abdullah Abdullah, described the possibility of the weapons transfer to Afghanistan’s volatile neighbour as a form of punishment.

### **Old friend’s revenge?**

“This decision by the USA is a kind of revenge towards President Karzai, but the people of Afghanistan will pay for it,” said Sancharaki. “Should Afghan security forces not be equipped and funded well, Afghanistan will again turn into the centre of international terrorism. In that case, the international community will be hurt.” Many observers in Afghanistan believe the Pakistan army directly or indirectly supports insurgent networks.

“President Hamid Karzai’s refusal to sign the Bilateral Security Agreement has led to this decision by the United States of America,” added Fahim Kohdamani, a spokesman for Islamist candidate Abdul Rab Rassoul Sayyaf. “Attacks by Afghan security forces on foreign troops may also have caused the US not to count Afghanistan as an ally,” added Kohdamani.

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# UN rejects Russian annexation of Crimea

[The CSS Point](#) March 28, 2014



**THE UN General Assembly has adopted a Western-backed resolution declaring Crimea’s breakaway referendum illegitimate and refusing to recognise Russia’s annexation of the peninsula.**

The non-binding measure passed with a comfortable majority in the 193-member body, with 100 votes in favour and 11 votes against. But 58 abstained and more than 20 did not vote.

Ukraine, which drafted the resolution, welcomed its adoption and called for a “stronger and more concrete” united, international front against Russian aggression.

“I’m very much satisfied with the vote ... (an) overwhelming majority of nations in the world supported this resolution,” acting Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Deshchytsya said.

He had urged the international community to back the text, hoping an overwhelming show of support would ward off further Russian intervention on Ukrainian territory.

“I am convinced that a strong vote today will help to deter further aggressive moves,” Mr Deshchytsya told the assembly.

“It sends an essential message that the international community will not allow what has happened in Crimea to set a precedent to further challenges to our rules.” Western diplomats wanted a strong majority vote to press home what they say is Russia’s isolation, but there had been fears that a high number of countries would abstain.

Moscow’s UN envoy Vitaly Churkin claimed the vote was a “moral victory” for Russian diplomacy, saying that “almost half” the UN membership refused to support the resolution.

“An increasing number of countries are beginning to understand the complexity of the situation and the motives behind the actions of Crimea and the Russian Federation,” he said.

But the resolution did garner more support than a similar text passed in 2009 over the Georgia crisis.

Ukraine submitted the draft resolution, writing the text in moderate language in the hope of attracting a maximum number of votes, and it makes no direct reference to Russia.

The text is similar to a US-drafted resolution submitted to the Security Council on March 19, which Russia vetoed. China abstained and the other 13 members of the council voted in favour.

Thursday’s resolution repeats that the March 16 referendum in Crimea has “no validity” and asks countries not to recognise any alteration of the status of the Black Sea peninsula.

It calls on all states to refrain from any attempts to modify Ukraine’s borders through the threat or use of force or other unlawful means and calls for dialogue to resolve the crisis.

Ukraine said that a vote for the resolution was a vote for the UN charter, while a vote against or an abstention undermined it.

“One month has cost us dearly. More inaction may cost us this organisation,” Mr Deshchytsya said.

The United States backed Ukraine’s request and criticised Russia. US Ambassador Samantha Power told the assembly it was “disheartening in the extreme to see Russia carry on as if Ukrainians have no legitimate interest in Crimea.” “Ukraine is justified in seeking our votes in reaffirming and protecting its borders,” she said.

“We urge you to vote ‘yes’ on a resolution that enshrines the centrality of territorial integrity and that calls for a diplomatic not a military solution to this crisis.” Russia stuck to its position, saying it had no right to refuse support to Crimeans in their right to self-determination.

The 11 countries that voted against the text were Armenia, Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, North Korea, Russia, Nicaragua, Sudan, Syria, Venezuela and Zimbabwe.

NATO and Western powers voted overwhelmingly in favour. Among the abstentions were Afghanistan, China, India and Pakistan, as well many South American nations.

Israel and Iran were among those that did not vote.

## Analysis: Pakistan and Iran: Friends or foes?

[The CSS Point](#) March 30, 2014



**AS Pakistan and Iran squabble over the fate of the latter's recently abducted border guards, Islamabad's security establishment is confronted with an almost nightmarish question.**

Following Iran's claims that the kidnapped guards were brought to Pakistan, does Islamabad face the deeply troubling possibility of its only secure frontier with Iran joining the ranks of other frontlines which remain insecure? The answer to that riddle may set the pace for a key foreign relationship and perhaps provide a sense on future internal security trends.

Historically, Pakistan has always looked upon its 1,200km frontier with Iran with a sense of relative comfort, notwithstanding Islamabad's repeated and heavy confrontation with separatists in Balochistan.

Under Iran's former Pahlavi dynasty, swept away by the Islamic revolution of 1979, Iranian helicopter gunships joined the Pakistan Army's attacks against separatists holed up in remote parts of Balochistan's treacherous terrain.

To date, it is the only known example of a foreign military force coming to join Pakistan's internal battle against separatists, and that too during the depressing days after the fall of Dhaka. That Iranian gesture paved the way for Pakistan's military victory over Baloch separatists and helped to keep the country's former western half together.

In sharp contrast to the comfort of yesteryear surrounding the Iranian border, Pakistan's eastern frontline and a maritime southern boundary are both surrounded by India's considerably larger land and naval presence. Additionally, Pakistan is forced to maintain a constant watch on its northern frontlines with Afghanistan and India — barring a slice of land with China being the only comfort zone in the Himalayas.

It is therefore hardly surprising that Dr Abdul Malik Baloch, the chief minister of Balochistan, considers “any deterioration in our relations with Iran as a matter of major concern”. Dr Baloch, a veteran politician who spoke this week to this writer, has good reason to be worried.

Provincial officials in Quetta speak of at least a couple of instances every month when Iranian border forces fire a few rockets in Pakistan's territory — ostensibly to target Iran's opponents who the Iranians say operate from Pakistan's soil in Balochistan. While Islamabad denies the presence of abducted Iranian guards on its soil, Pakistan's position is no better than semi-tenable. Reports of an emotional backlash across Iran over the abduction of the guards have coincided with unconfirmed reports of Iranian forces under orders to strike at will inside Pakistan's territory if they find proof of anti-Iran hardcore members on Pakistan's soil. Even if such orders never translate into reality, Tehran's mere decision to reach such a conclusion must trouble decision-makers in Islamabad.

At the same time, just as it takes two to tango, Iran cannot justifiably hold only Pakistan responsible for its sliding security conditions. A number of reports from Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province on Pakistan's border speak of unsettled conditions on the Iranian side of the border.

Clearly, Shia-majority Iran is yet to bring peace to a part of its own country where the majority are Sunnis, in contrast to the majority of Iranians being Shias. The dwellers of Sistan-Baluchestan clearly feel left out of the Iranian mainstream and need to be pacified.

Ultimately, however, Pakistan can ill afford an aimless new confrontation on its only secure border which may one day demand the deployment of more forces on the frontlines, as if Pakistan's forces weren't already over-stretched. The reported killing of one of the border guards has not helped to pacify the strains.

These tensions have coincided with recent reports of Pakistan's discussions with Saudi Arabia and Bahrain to dispatch uniformed or formerly uniformed troops to help the two states meet their security challenges. Notwithstanding Finance Minister Ishaq Dar's refusal to name the 'friendly country' which recently gave a staggering \$1.5 billion to fill Pakistan's depleting coffers, an overwhelming number of Pakistanis believe that the funds came from Saudi Arabia. While Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's government insists that it is not about to dispatch troops to serve on a foreign soil, scepticism is visible all around.

Against this background, relations with Iran need to be put through a firm salvage operation. Mr Sharif's government must try to be equidistant from Riyadh and Tehran as a matter of top priority for Pakistan's foreign policy. A gesture such as a high-profile visit to Tehran by the prime minister could help build up a more positive image around this relationship than the present one.

Known security commentators such as retired Lieutenant General Abdul Qayyum even go as far as suggesting that Pakistan must "try to bridge the gap between Saudi Arabia and Iran. That would be a great service".

While breaking the ice between Riyadh and Tehran could be far-fetched, Pakistan could at least work more aggressively to protect its very obvious interests.

In Quetta, a particularly telling example of the bloodshed that has engulfed Pakistan lies no further than the 'Behesht-i-Zainab' graveyard, the main final resting place for members of the mostly Hazara community of Shias in that region who were killed in sectarian violence.

Once a large sprawling stretch of land, the graveyard has begun to shrink in size with the growing demand for graves. Iran has protested sectarian killings in the past, though this is a matter which must become central to a narrative by Islamabad for securing its own interests.

In the words of a notable leader of the Hazara community, "You have to live our ordeal to know what it's like. There are mohallahs [neighbourhoods] where someone has been martyred from every second or third home."

Mr Baloch believes that ending the radicalization that has evolved in Pakistan over the past three decades and threatens to break the country apart, requires long overdue social reforms. Clearly, this is the vital domestic policy angle which must be followed in tandem with the country's

foreign relations, especially given that the growing number of Pakistan’s radicalised youth will only reinforce the country’s image as a haven for terrorists. While setting the pace for a more cordial relationship with Iran is vital for Pakistan in the short term, the long-term stability of this country must depend on tackling radical trends through sustainable policies.

*Farhan Bokhari is an Islamabad-based journalist who writes on politics, economy and security issues*

## **U.N. Security Council members condemn North Korea missile launch**

[The CSS Point](#) March 31, 2014



UNITED NATIONS – Members of the U.N. Security Council on Thursday condemned North Korea’s recent ballistic missile launch as a violation of U.N. resolutions and will continue discussions on an “appropriate response,” the council president said.

The remarks were made by Luxembourg's U.N. Ambassador Sylvie Lucas, president of the 15-nation Security Council for the month of March, after a closed-door meeting on North Korea requested by the United States.

"Members of the Security Council condemned this launch as a violation of Security Council resolution(s)," she said. "Council members agreed to consult on an appropriate response."

"There was unanimous condemnation of the launches," Lucas told reporters, adding that, "We also all agreed that this response should be given quickly."

North Korea fired two medium-range Rodong ballistic missiles into the sea at 2:35 a.m. Japan and Korea time on Wednesday (1735 GMT Tuesday), Tokyo and Seoul said.

North Korea's first firing in four years of mid-range missiles that can hit Japan followed a series of short-range rocket launches over the past two months.

Several council diplomats said negotiations on possible council action would likely continue into next week.

There is a possibility, the diplomats said, of the Security Council's North Korea sanctions committee expanding the current U.N. blacklist to include additional North Korean entities involved in Pyongyang's missile program. But they said it could take weeks to reach agreement.

"That (expanding the blacklist) would be an appropriate response by the council," a Western diplomat told Reuters on condition of anonymity. "The first step will be some kind of more formal statement condemning the launch."

The ability of the council to take such steps will depend on China, a veto-wielding council member and North Korea's traditional ally and most significant trading partner. Beijing issued a muted response to the North Korean launch on Thursday.

"In the present situation, all sides ought to dedicate themselves to maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula," Foreign Ministry spokesman Hong Lei told a regular briefing.

During Thursday's closed-door council session in New York, Beijing's delegation reiterated that the Chinese wanted de-nuclearization of the Korean peninsula and to resume stalled six-party aid-for-disarmament talks among the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States, a Western diplomat said.

The diplomat, who was inside the closed-door meeting, said China's delegation also made clear that any council response to North Korea should be proportional to Pyongyang's actions.



Ballistic missile launches are banned under U.N. Security Council resolutions adopted in response to North Korea's multiple nuclear tests and rocket firings. The council expanded its existing sanctions after Pyongyang's February 2013 atomic test, its third nuclear detonation since 2006.

The Security Council's sanctions on Pyongyang target the country's missile and nuclear programs and attempt to punish North Korea's reclusive leadership through a ban on the export of luxury goods to the country.

## Russia sets tough conditions for diplomatic solution in Crimea

[The CSS Point](#) March 31, 2014



Russian foreign minister and US secretary of state enter talks again as 40,000 Russian troops mass on Ukraine border

Russia set out a series of tough conditions on Sunday night for agreeing a diplomatic solution to the crisis over its annexation of [Crimea](#), demanding that the US and its European partners accept

its proposal that ethnic Russian regions of eastern and southern [Ukraine](#) be given extensive autonomous powers independent of Kiev.

Emergency talks between Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, and [John Kerry](#), the US secretary of state, got under way at the Russian ambassador's residence in Paris after a day in which tensions over Ukraine deepened appreciably. Neither man made any substantive comment before the talks began. Suggesting it might be a long session, Lavrov told reporters: "Good luck and good night."

The meeting took place against an ominous backdrop of the massing of an estimated 40,000 Russian troops on Ukraine's eastern border and warnings from [Nato](#) and the Pentagon that the Russian military activity, ostensibly relating to routine exercises, was abnormal and could be a prelude to an invasion.

General Philip Breedlove, Nato supreme allied commander [Europe](#) and the head of the US military's European Command, was ordered back to his post in Brussels during a visit to Washington after Chuck Hagel, the US defence secretary, pointed to "a lack of transparency" from Russia about the troop movements. Unlike Moscow, Washington has said it will not resort to force to resolve the crisis.

The US has called on Russia to disarm irregular forces in Crimea, admit international observers and pull its troops back from the eastern border. But speaking to Russian state television before the talks, Lavrov laid out Moscow's own quite different terms for a deal. Primarily, he said, Russia was seeking a federal solution for Ukraine as part of "deep constitutional reform".

"Frankly speaking, we don't see any other way for the steady development of the Ukrainian state apart from as a federation," he added. Under the Russian plan, which Barack Obama and Vladimir Putin reportedly discussed in a phone call initiated by Moscow on Friday, each region would have control of its economy, taxes, culture, language, education and "external economic and cultural connections with neighbouring countries or regions," Lavrov said.

"Given the proportion of native Russians [in Ukraine], we propose this and we are sure there is no other way."

The Russian proposal to radically alter the way Ukraine is governed and administered is certain to arouse strong opposition in Kiev, where it will be viewed by critics of Moscow's intervention in Crimea as a roundabout way of breaking up or partitioning the country.

In an apparent attempt to assuage concerns in Kiev and western capitals about Russian intentions, Lavrov said there were no plans to invade eastern Ukraine.

Latest US intelligence estimates based on satellite data indicate that Russia has amassed 40,000 troops on the Ukrainian border, including a wide range of special units, elite forces and equipment.

“We have absolutely no intention of, or interest in, crossing Ukraine’s borders,” Lavrov said. “We [Russia and the west] are getting closer in our positions.”

He said Moscow’s terms for defusing the crisis, the worst between the west and Russia since the end of the cold war, also included a pledge by Kiev’s government that Ukraine would not seek to join Nato.

The eastward expansion of Nato since the collapse of the Soviet Union was one of the main grievances [Putin expressed in a speech in Moscow](#) earlier this month when Crimea joined the Russian Federation.

Lavrov said Russia remained determined to protect the rights of Russian speakers in eastern and southern Ukraine and implied that it reserved the right to take appropriate action if its proposals for a federation and other settlement terms were not accepted.

Apparently seeking to exploit western unease to achieve long-standing policy aims beyond Ukraine, Putin reportedly told Obama that Moscow also wanted guarantees about the future of the Russian-backed separatist territory of Transnistria in Moldova, on Ukraine’s south-west border.

Putin told Obama the fate of the breakaway region should be solved not by force but by talks in the 5+2 format of Moldova, Transnistria, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Russia and Ukraine, with the EU and US as observers.

The Kremlin said Putin had suggested “examining possible steps the global community can take to help stabilise the situation” in the region.

It was unclear what response the US and its EU partners would make to the Russian demands as the Kerry-Lavrov meeting in Paris got under way.

The Obama administration has insisted Russia withdraw its forces from Crimea, reduce its military build-up on the eastern border, respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine and support national polls due in May to elect a new president and government.

The US and EU imposed limited sanctions on Russia following the annexation of Crimea. Lavrov said [the measures had had little impact](#). “I don’t want to say that sanctions are ridiculous and that we couldn’t care less, these are not pleasant things ... We find little joy in that, but there are no painful sensations. We have lived through tougher times.”

Lavrov made no mention of the Ukraine elections or any possible withdrawal from Crimea. Many analysts now predict that in any deal, the US and its western allies, and thus Kiev, will be forced to accept the annexation as a fait accompli.

In another sign of a possible compromise, Lavrov has offered to talk to representatives of Ukraine's interim government under certain conditions. Russia does not recognise the current leadership in Kiev, which it says mounted a "fascist coup" in February to oust Ukraine's elected president, Viktor Yanukovich.

In other developments, the Tatar assembly meeting in the historic capital of Bakhchisaray voted in favour of seeking "ethnic and territorial autonomy" within Crimea.

The 300,000-strong minority make up less than 15% of Crimea's population of 2 million and has strongly opposed the Russian annexation. The proposal to seek autonomy was seen as a sign that the group is now ready to accept the new status quo and negotiate their place in it with Russia.

In Kiev, the presidential election effectively became a two-horse race at the weekend when the boxer-turned-politician Vitali Klitschko pulled out and threw his weight behind the billionaire confectionery oligarch Petro Poroshenko, known as the Chocolate King. He will now face the former prime minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, on 25 May.

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