



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Russian Federation regarding military training by US troops in Ukraine

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
April 23, 2015

To respond to our Russian colleague's questions and points:

First let me say that I think the fact that our Russian colleague could neither confirm nor deny the presence of Russian air defenses or Russian participation in the training in Eastern Ukraine is progress: because neither confirming nor denying is at least not outright denying – so we've taken a half-step forward.

On the question of air defenses and why there would be air defense systems deployed, I think that's really more of a question for the Russian Ambassador's own government, and for his colleagues in the military, and the military leadership, as to what their rationale is. I am admittedly not a military expert, but my understanding is that, in general, often air defenses are deployed in order to provide cover for planned ground attacks. I just offer that general observation, but I think those best positioned to answer the question of the Russian Ambassador as to why his country's air defenses are deployed near the front lines, deep inside of Ukraine, are the military leaders' in Russia. In any case, no matter why they are deployed, they are clearly in violation of both the letter and the spirit of what the Russian government signed up to--several times now--in Minsk. So, whatever the rationale, the way forward would be for Russia to withdraw those, as well as its other military personnel and equipment.

In terms of the issue raised with training: the Russian Ambassador highlighted what has been a transparent agreed training program invited by the sovereign government of Ukraine. The United States had previously announced this – that we are, through our Global Security Contingency Fund, initiating training. There are approximately 290 US troops participating with various select units of the National Guard to help strengthen Ukraine's abilities with respect to internal security and territorial defense.

The Russian ambassador's question "what would you have us do? will Washington decide?" I think that goes to the heart of the matter: what makes this different from what Russia is doing is that, first of all, it's transparent. The Russian Ambassador himself was able to get plenty of information from US government websites. And secondly, and this is really important, that it is invited by the government of Ukraine and done with the government of Ukraine, on the territory of Ukraine. The training is happening in the far west, near to the

Polish border. If colleagues would like more information on this – and it is publicly available: this is part of a long-standing engagement that we've had with Ukraine, as part of NATO's Partnership for Peace program.

I'm glad that the Russian ambassador raised this because it is really important to draw a distinction between the kinds of training that goes on government-to-government, that are invited by the host government, and the activities that the Russian Federation is carrying out in continuing to fuel a conflict in a neighboring country.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.