

Russia's attack on Crimea
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Introduction

On 27 February 2014 the Russian Federation launched a coup attack on the Crimean government and parliament, and annexed the peninsula in less than a month. Ukraine, while in turmoil and transition after months of protests and ousting of President Yanukovich, has struggled to respond adequately. The aim of this paper is to flesh out the main aspects of the Russian operation in Crimea that could serve as background for planning counter-steps in similar scenarios. The line of thought presented here is based on media reporting and other open-source information.

Preconditions for successful coup attack in Crimea

- Large share of Russians or pro-Russian people among the Crimean population allowed their right to self-determination to be used as a cover and pretext for the attack;
- Russian intelligence bases in Crimea with freedom of action for:
 - Indoctrinating, organising and coordinating local separatists;
 - Conducting reconnaissance of Ukrainian military units and objects in the area;
 - Recruiting agents among Ukrainian politicians, military, and law enforcement;
- Possibility of concentrating the attacking force unopposed in close proximity to its targets, and of swiftly isolating Crimea after the attack;
- Surprise launch of the attack and the inactivity of defending forces/law enforcement agencies once the attack became apparent;
- Possibility of quickly reinforcing the attacking troops;
- Credible threat of a large-scale military action along the Russian-Ukrainian border to coerce the national government of Ukraine to refrain from immediate military response.

Russia's main actions in Crimea and their timeline

- Military exercise that involved Russian special forces and fleet in Crimea: **a year before the coup**;
- Concentration of attacking forces in Crimea and its vicinity: **3-4 days before the attack**;
- Coup attack, establishing a pro-Russian government, taking control over and/or closing entry points to Crimea: **in 24 hours** (27 February 2014);
- Arrival of first Russian reinforcements and air assets in Crimea: **30-40 hours after the attack**;

- Russian Federation Council authorises the use of force in Ukraine: **two days after the attack**;
- President Putin and Defence Minister Shoygu deny Russia's actions in Crimea: **5-6 days after the attack**;
- Establishing cordons around all Ukrainian military and border guard units/assets in Crimea: **within 7 days after the attack**;
- Referendum on the status of Crimea: **17 days after the attack**;
- The first clear use of human shields (after Ukrainian government authorised the use of force in self-defence): **20 days after the attack**;
- President Putin signs a law on incorporating Crimea into the Russian Federation: **22 days after the attack**;
- Last Ukrainian warship captured, and the Ukrainian group of forces in Crimea ceases to exist: **26-27 days after the attack**;
- President Putin admits that Russian forces have been operating against Ukraine in Crimea: **50 days after the attack**.

Summary and conclusions

- Russia developed its swift attack capabilities and practiced them in Crimea long before the actual operation took place. However, the actual operation was launched in such a hurry that Russian forces remained clearly identifiable despite the efforts to conceal them;
- The highest leadership of the Russian Federation actively participated in efforts to create confusion regarding the situation in Crimea, and thus to delay an effective response from Ukraine and its supporters in the EU and NATO;
- The whole process of annexation took three weeks, which was sufficient to achieve a *fait accompli* and create a political situation where restoring the *status quo ante* means forcing Russia to give up one of its regions;
- The presence of Russian bases and forces in Crimea, combined with virtual inactivity of the SBU, the Ukrainian security service, created the necessary preconditions for the coup attack;
- If there were no post-revolution turmoil, and if the Russian-friendly policies of President Yanukovich had not left Ukraine so vulnerable to Russia's subversive actions, it would be very hard even to imagine such a bloodless annexation of Crimea.