

RUSSIA FACES SANCTIONS AFTER PUTIN MOVE

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People waving Russian flags in Donetsk after President Vladimir Putin recognised the two breakaway regions AP/Alexei Alexandrov | Photo Credit: Alexei Alexandrov

Russia faced the prospect of harsh new Western sanctions on Tuesday after President Vladimir Putin recognised two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine and ordered the deployment of troops there, deepening Western fears of a major war in Europe.

Ukraine said two soldiers had been killed and 12 wounded in shelling by pro-Russian separatists in the east in the past 24 hours, and reported new hostilities on Tuesday morning.

A military convoy of more than 100 trucks with soldiers was seen heading in the direction of the Ukrainian border in Russia's Belgorod region, a witness told Reuters on Tuesday. Western leaders are trying to work out what Mr. Putin will do next, and whether Russia plans a full-scale invasion of Ukraine after massing troops near the borders and demanding a redrawing of security arrangements in Europe.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said his country may break off diplomatic relations with Moscow.

Parliament's approval

Russia's Parliament ratified treaties with the two separatist regions on Tuesday. It also approved deployment of armed forces abroad for what it described as a "peacekeeping mission" in the breakaway regions. The developments pushed oil prices to a seven-year high.

Mr. Putin's announcement on Monday, and his signing of a decree on the deployment of Russian troops to "keep peace" in the two breakaway regions, drew international condemnation.

U.S. President Joe Biden signed an executive order to halt U.S. business activity in the breakaway regions.

The White House began referring to Russian troop deployments in eastern Ukraine as an "invasion" after initially hesitating to use the term — a red line that President Joe Biden has said would result in the U.S. levying severe sanctions against Moscow. Britain on Tuesday imposed sanctions against five banks and three individuals — Gennady Timchenko and two other billionaires with close links to Mr. Putin.

The EU agreed to impose new sanctions that will blacklist more politicians, lawmakers and officials, ban EU investors from trading in Russian State bonds, and target imports and exports with separatist entities.

Linda Thomas-Greenfield, U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, said the description of the Russian troops as peacekeepers was "nonsense".

"We can, will and must stand united in our calls for Russia to withdraw its forces, return to the diplomatic table and work toward peace," she told reporters after an emergency meeting of the White House Security Council late on Monday

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov brushed off the threat of sanctions, saying the West would impose them regardless of events.

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