

U.S. Lawmakers Want Russia Provisions Included in Annual Defense Bill

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Michael Turner, a member of the U.S. House of Representatives Armed Services Committee.

WASHINGTON — U.S. lawmakers have said they would include a ban on military contact with Russia and other measures to punish Moscow's aggression against Ukraine in the annual defense authorization bill, bringing their push for a more assertive U.S. reaction to a new front.

Three Republican leaders of the House of Representatives Armed Services Committee — California's Buck McKeon, the panel's chairman, and subcommittee chairmen Mike Rogers of Alabama and Michael Turner of Ohio — on Tuesday backed legislation they called a "to do" list for President Barack Obama's administration in response to the Ukraine crisis.

"It is unconscionable that the Ukraine is facing this and the U.S is staying on the sidelines and not even actively advising their military," Turner told a news conference.

The administration has slapped sanctions on Russia and sent economic aid to Ukraine, but lawmakers have been demanding more.

Among other things, the package announced Tuesday calls for ending all military-to-military cooperation between the Pentagon and Russian authorities until U.S. authorities certify that Russian forces are no longer occupying Crimea.

It also would condemn Russia for "intimidating Ukraine," back enlargement of NATO and require a plan to provide advice and assistance to Ukraine's military.

Turner said committee leaders planned to include substantial portions of the package in the National Defense Authorization Act, a comprehensive bill written by the committee that Congress passes every year.

U.S. military officials testified to the panel on Tuesday that they are trying to demonstrate support to the Kiev government, reassure allies and deter further Russian military threats.

"Russia's unlawful actions in Ukraine have dire implications for international and regional security," said Derek Chollet, assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs.

The measure does not include direct military assistance or authorize sending any U.S. troops to Ukraine.

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