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Tillerson: Sanctions on Russia Will Remain ‘Until Crimea Is Returned’

By Jason Ditz
April 24, 2017



Hopes that the US sanctions against Russia would be quickly rolled back when President Trump was elected in November didn't pan out, and the latest comments from Secretary of State Rex Tillerson suggest that the administration has no intention of removing the sanctions at all.

Speaking with Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko over the weekend, Tillerson reportedly told him that the US sanctions on Russia will remain wholly in place “until Russia returns control of the Crimean peninsula to Ukraine.” Needless to say, Russia isn’t going to do that.

Crimea was an autonomous oblast within Ukraine until 2014, when they held a referendum and seceded. After that secession, they sought and gained accession into the Russian Federation, which the US doesn’t recognize. US officials have repeatedly presented this as Russia “invading Crimea” or “taking Crimea by force,” though the peninsula’s ethnic Russian majority was able to effectively secede outright without anything nearly so dramatic happening.

Nobody seriously expects Russia to “give back” Crimea, even if there was a mechanism by which they could conceivably do so, which there isn’t. Conditioning sanctions relief on that is tantamount to announcing the sanctions as a permanent feature of US policy, a stance which will likely suit the many Russia hawks in Congress and across Western Europe quite well.