

CRIMEA ESCALATION: WHAT COMES NEXT?

Situation around temporary occupied Crimea, August 7-11, 2016

On August 11, 2016 the situation around temporary occupied Crimea has dramatically escalated. Russian authorities has accused Ukraine in “invading” Crimea and preparation of “terrorist acts”, what Ukrainian authorities have denied. President Petro Poroshenko has ordered troops into a state of military alert. While the situation remains unclear, Heinrich Boll Foundation Kyiv releases the present report summarizing available information.

What has happened in Crimea and at the administrative border within the last days?

On August 7, 2016 the Russian border police has partly suspended the operation of checkpoints at the administrative border with Crimea. The following days witnessed concentration and maneuvers of Russian military around the administrative border and within the peninsula. On August 10 the Russian Federal Security Service made an official statement reporting that the terrorist acts organized by Ukraine had been prevented, the terrorists detained, a Russian soldiers had been killed, 10 wounded. Following that Russian President Vladimir Putin has declared “necessary protection measures” would be taken. On August 11 the Security Council of the Russian Federation has discussed scenarios for “anti-terrorist security” around Crimea. The Ukrainian authorities reacted accusing Russia in provocations and denied any military action in Crimea. The Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko has ordered the state of military alert at the administrative border with Crimea and non-government controlled areas of eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian intelligence reported on firearms clashes on the border to Crimea, saying it were (obviously unintended) clashes between Russian troops and Russian border service.

What other available sources reports?

On August 7, 2016 rumors about incidents at the administrative border and Armiansk (northern Crimea) due to a group of deserters from the Russian army appeared in Ukrainian and Russian social networks. The same day Russian media reported a shooting was initiated by the Crimean Tatars in Dzankoy (northern Crimea). Three days later Russian authorities provided their version saying that a group of “terrorists” entered the peninsula from the mainland of Ukraine under “massive shelling” by the Ukrainian military. The only suspect whose personality known is Evgeniy Panov, a resident of Energodar, Zaporizhka region (230km northeastern from Crimea, Ukrainian mainland). He is an ex-soldier of Ukrainian army (demobilized on August 2015), a head of a charitable foundation assisting Ukrainian ex-soldiers. He has no reported connection to Crimea. According to his relatives, Evgeniy was kidnapped and transported to Crimea three days ago.

On August 7, the arrival of Russian military vehicles has been observed in Kerch (eastern Crimea), on August 8, Russian military was concentrated in Armiansk (northern Crimea). These nights Russian border police has illuminated the Ukrainian positions at the administrative border, the movement of helicopters and other military vehicles near the administrative border was observed. The checkpoints has been organized at the main roads within the peninsula, the military in Sevastopol and Simferopol has increased in numbers, patrolling the cities.

What is the situation at the administrative border?

From August 6 to August 10 one checkpoint (out of three) has functioned for crossing from Crimea to the mainland of Ukraine. These days crossing the administrative border to the mainland took 20-24 hours, and crossing the border to Crimea took 8-10 hours. The Russian border police took special control measures to men, screening and gathering personal data. Since early morning of August 10 all three checkpoints started to function in normal mode, the queues has significantly decreased. As for August 11 the situation at the administrative border remains stabile.

Will the armed conflict between Russia and Ukraine escalate?

There are several versions for Russian actions, including escalation of armed conflict and trading around sanctions by blaming Ukraine in terrorism. Within the last two years Russia has contributed to the militarization of the peninsula, increasing its military from 25 thousand persons to 60-80 thousand, modernizing the weaponry and military hardware and increasing its numbers.

Still, as on August 11, there is no solid ground to believe that the situation will transform to full-scale armed conflict as both sides have no obvious interest in armed confrontation. In the same time, a temporary escalation as a part of political game can take place.

What does that situation mean for Crimean residents?

During the last week the security measures within the peninsula has significantly increased: there are newly-created Russian checkpoints within the peninsula, massive checks and searches of the Crimean residents together with blockade of Internet connection and access to the Ukrainian media take place. At least eight suspected “terrorists” were detained, one of them is a Ukrainian citizen, seven persons are residents of Crimea. The new wave of repressions and persecution of the Crimean Tatars and pro-Ukrainian citizens is to be expected.

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