

Nato military chief: Russia could take Ukraine in three days

Gen. Philip Breedlove says Russian forces are ready to invade the country within 12 hours of an order from on high

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/10740256/Nato-military-chief-Russia-could-take-Ukraine-in-three-days.html>



Nato chief Gen. Philip Breedlove says an invasion could be launched in the next 'three to five days' Photo: REUTERS

By Roland Oliphant, Moscow

5:46PM BST 02 Apr 2014

Russian forces are positioned and prepared to launch an invasion of Ukraine within 12 hours of the order being given, Nato's top general has said.

Gen. Philip Breedlove, Nato's top military official and the man in charge of drafting a response to the Russian annexation of Crimea, said in interviews on Wednesday that Russian forces on the border are poised for a three to five day operation.

"It's my opinion that they could move within 12 hours of a 'go'," Gen. Breedlove said in an interview with CNN. "So essentially they could move right away if given the 'go'."

Gen. Breedlove said 40,000 Russian troops remain in border areas, despite earlier reports that Russia had withdrawn some elements of an earlier troop build-up in recent days.

But he added: "40,000 doesn't tell the story."

"This is a combined arms army with all of the pieces necessary should there be a choice to make an incursion into Ukraine," he said. "All of the logistics required in order to successfully make an incursion if they needed [are present]."

Earlier Gen. Breedlove said an invasion could be launched in the next “three to five days.”

Western intelligence agencies have expressed concern at what they have described as worrying troop buildups on Ukraine's border in the past week.

While journalists scouring the border region have failed to find signs of a large troop movements in recent days, security sources have said they believe the troops are camouflaged or located on ministry of defence land closed to the public.

Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, has said Russia has no interest in moving troops across the border.

Gen. Breedlove's comments come after Nato suspended all military and civilian cooperation with Russia in response to the annexation of Crimea last month.

Nato commanders have also been ordered to devise ways to better protect alliance members that feel threatened by Russia.

At a meeting of alliance foreign ministers in Brussels on Tuesday, Poland asked Nato to station 10,000 troops on its territory.

Viktor Yanukovich, the ousted Ukrainian president, said in an interview on Wednesday that the annexation of Crimea is a “tragedy” for Ukraine and he hoped to persuade Vladimir Putin to reverse the decision.

In an interview with AP and Russia's NTV television station, Mr Yanukovich said he had been “wrong” to invite Russian troops onto the peninsula.