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Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a snap readiness inspection of forces in southwestern Russia and the Crimean Peninsula beginning February 8 including air, naval, and air defense assets as well as up to 8,500 troops. The drills may have been a show of force in response to revelations of Western plans to deploy troops in Eastern Europe and the Baltics. NATO members agreed to increase the alliance's forward presence along its eastern flank, reportedly with up to 6,000 troops, days after the U.S. revealed a proposal to deploy a new rotating contingent to the region. Increased Russian-NATO tensions coincided with a February 11 international agreement calling for a "cessation of hostilities" in Syria. Despite the agreement, Russia signaled its intent to continue launching airstrikes against the Syrian armed opposition, which it classifies as terrorists, thus jeopardizing any possibility of a true ceasefire in order to bolster the position of the Assad regime. Russia meanwhile continued to escalate its confrontation with Turkey, inviting the dominant Syrian Kurdish political group to open its first European representative office in Moscow and casting Turkey as the spoiler of a potential ceasefire. Russia deployed its advanced Tu-214R spyplane on February 15, days after agreeing to halt hostilities, increasing its ability to strike opposition targets. Russia continued to advance its economic interests in the Middle East, including with U.S. allies, despite its polarizing operations in Syria. Russia reached an agreement to boost bilateral trade with Iraq and a preliminary agreement with Saudi Arabia aimed at stabilizing the slumping price of oil. Iran voiced its opposition to the oil production freeze despite reportedly sending its defense minister to Moscow to discuss major arms deals, demonstrating the competing effects of sanctions relief on Russian-Iranian relations.

1 NATO. 09 FEB: Reports emerged of British plans to deploy a frigate, a destroyer and three minesweepers to the Baltic Sea, the North Sea, the Mediterranean Sea, and the North Atlantic as the country's first contribution to NATO's naval forces in six years.

10 FEB: NATO member defense ministers agreed to increase the alliance's troop presence along its eastern flank. NATO is reportedly considering the deployment of up to 6,000 troops to rotate across the Baltics, Poland, Bulgaria, and Romania.

11 FEB: NATO deployed a naval contingent to disrupt human trafficking in the Aegean Sea, where Russian vessels frequently transit to and from Syria.

2 Hungary. 17 FEB: Kremlin ally Hungarian PM Viktor Orban met with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow to discuss energy cooperation and called for the normalization of EU-Russian relations.

3 Belarus. 09 FEB: Belarus's air force commander reported that Russia had completed the transfer of three sets of S-300 long range surface-to-air missile systems.

4 Ukraine. 09 FEB: Ukrainian security officials reported that Russian-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine launched exercises in sync with the Russian military's snap readiness inspection in southwestern and central Russia, suggesting interoperability.

11 FEB: Russia conducted a large-scale air defense drill involving a "strengthened" troop contingent in Crimea as part of an ongoing snap inspection.

11 FEB: Russia conducted a large-scale air defense drill involving the Black Sea Fleet in Crimea as part of wide snap drills involving Russia's southwestern military district.

5 Russia. 08-12 FEB: President Vladimir Putin ordered a snap combat readiness inspection in southwestern and central Russia. The drills reportedly involved air and air defense assets, up to 8,500 troops as well as the Black Sea Fleet and Caspian Flotilla.

6 Turkey. 04, 10 FEB: Russian government officials accused Turkey of preparing to advance into in Syria, possibly under the "pretext" of creating refugee camps, and claimed that any Turkish attempt to create an 'ISIS-free zone' would constitute a "violation of all principles of international law."

11 FEB: NATO members agreed to increase intelligence and surveillance activity on the Turkish-Syrian border.

7 Syria. 03, 05 FEB: Secretary of State John Kerry called on Russia to stop airstrikes against opposition-held civilian areas and condemned Russia for pursuing a "military solution" to the conflict.

10 FEB: Russia allowed the People's Democratic Party (PYD), the dominant Kurdish political group in Syria, to open its first European representative office in Moscow, further escalating its conflict with Turkey. Russia has been calling for the inclusion of the Kurds in Syrian peace talks and supporting the advance of Kurdish forces against Syria's Aleppo-based opposition with airstrikes.

12 FEB: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry announced that the International Syrian Support Group in Munich had agreed to a "cessation of hostilities" across Syria on February 18, which will not affect operations against ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliate Jabhat al Nusra (JN). Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov state that "affiliated" organizations to ISIS and JN would also continue to be targeted, signaling Russia's intent to continue to strike the Syrian armed opposition.

14 FEB: Russia deployed the newly built *Zheleny Dol* missile corvette equipped with *Kalibr-NK* cruise missiles and the *Kovrovets* minesweeper from the Crimean city of Sevastopol to the Syrian coast.

15 FEB: A Russian Tu-214R intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance aircraft was deployed to the Russian airbase in Latakia Province.

15-16 FEB: The UN reported that five medical facilities and two schools in Aleppo and Idlib provinces were targeted in strikes, which were carried out by either the Russian air force or the Assad regime. The Kremlin "categorically" rejected accusations that it may have committed war crimes.

8 Iraq. 11 FEB: Russian Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin and Iraqi Foreign Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari signed a memorandum of understanding that could reportedly double trade between the two countries.

9 Persian Gulf. 02, 04 FEB: Ali Akbar Velayati, the senior foreign affairs adviser to Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, visited Moscow to meet with senior Russian officials including President Vladimir Putin. Velayati discussed expanding military cooperation in Syria and economic cooperation.

08 FEB: Russian President Vladimir Putin met with King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa of Bahrain, a Saudi ally, to discuss increased bilateral economic and military cooperation.

16 FEB: Russian President Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu met with Iranian Defense Minister Brig. Gen. Hossein Dehghan to discuss efforts to increase military cooperation. Brig. Gen. Dehghan reportedly visited Moscow to advance a series of proposed arms agreements worth up to \$8 billion days after he announced Tehran's intent to purchase Russian Su-30 fighters.

16-17 FEB: Russia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Venezuela reached a preliminary agreement to freeze oil production at January levels in order to stabilize slumping oil prices. Iran expressed its opposition to the agreement, which is contingent on other major producers also freezing production.

10 Afghanistan. 12 FEB: An unnamed U.S. intelligence official reported that Russia was supporting "certain elements" of the Taliban through training camps in Tajikistan, arms, and financial assistance.