

## Embattled Turkish Leader Rallies Allies, Crows Over Downed Syrian Jet



**TOUGH TACTICS:** With key elections a week away, supporters rallied in Istanbul for Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who dismissed criticism over silencing political opposition. Earlier, he gloated after Turkey shot down a Syrian warplane it said had breached airspace. A6

### WITHOUT WARNING

# U.S. Scurries to Shore Up Spying on Russia

U.S. military satellites spied Russian troops amassing within striking distance of Crimea last month. But intelligence analysts were surprised because they hadn't intercepted any telltale communications where Russian leaders, military commanders or soldiers discussed plans to invade.

*By Adam Entous, Julian E. Barnes and Siobhan Gorman*

America's vaunted global surveillance is a vital tool for U.S. intelligence services, especially as an early-warning system and as a way to corroborate other evidence. In Cri-

mea, though, U.S. intelligence officials are concluding that Russian planners might have gotten a jump on the West by evading U.S. eavesdropping.

"Even though there was a warning, we didn't have the information to be able to say exactly what was going to happen," a senior U.S. official says.

To close the information gap, U.S. spy agencies and the military are rushing to expand satellite coverage and communications-interception efforts across Russia, Ukraine and the Baltic states. U.S. officials hope the "surge" in assets and analysts will improve tracking of the Russian military and tip off

the U.S. to any possible intentions of Russian President Vladimir Putin before he acts on them.

The U.S. moves will happen quickly. "We have gone into crisis-response mode," a senior official says.

Still, as Russia brings additional forces to areas near the border with eastern Ukraine, America's spy chiefs are worried that Russian leaders might be able to cloak their next move by shielding more communications from the U.S., according to officials. *Please turn to page A12*

◆ In Crimea, holdout soldier on edge..... A12



# After Missing Invasion Clues, U.S. Shores Up Spying on Russia

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miliar with the matter.

The Obama administration is "very nervous," says a person close to the discussions. "This is uncharted territory."

It all comes amid the backdrop of a jumpy government in Kiev. Ukraine's foreign minister said Sunday that the troop buildup is increasing the possibility of war with Russia.

Months before the takeover, U.S. spy agencies told White House policy makers that Mr. Putin could make a play for Crimea, home to strategically important Russian naval installations. That led to an unsuccessful diplomatic push by the Obama administration.

When the moment arrived, U.S. attention was focused on the troops on Russian soil. Instead, forces already inside Crimea were spearheading the takeover of the peninsula, before U.S. spy agencies fully realized what was happening.

Citing conflicting assessments from intelligence agencies, Rep. Michael Rogers, Republican chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, has launched a review of whether spy agencies misjudged Mr. Putin's intentions. Agency officials say the differences were relatively small and reflected the competing analysis that policy makers expect intelligence agencies to conduct.

Some Obama administration, military and intelligence officials say they doubt the U.S. could have done much differently. Even with a clearer understanding of Mr. Putin's plans, the Obama administration thought it had few options to stop him. U.S. spy chiefs told President Barack Obama three days before the Crimea operation that Russia could take over the peninsula so fast that Washington might find

## The U.S. is scrambling to expand satellite coverage and communications-interception efforts.

out only when it was done.

Some U.S. military and intelligence officials say Russia's war planners might have used knowledge about the U.S.'s usual surveillance techniques to change communication methods about the looming invasion. U.S. officials haven't determined how Russia hid its military plans from U.S. eavesdropping equipment that picks up digital and electronic communications.

Since the end of the Cold War, U.S. spy satellites and other intelligence-gathering assets have been focused less on Russia and more on counterterrorism, the Middle East and Asia, reflecting shifting U.S. priorities.

"This is the kind of thing young military officers are going to be reading about in their history books," says one senior U.S. official.

As early as December, U.S. intelligence analysts and diplomats got indications that Mr. Putin had his eye on Crimea. Widespread protests in Kiev against then-Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich concerned the Kremlin. The analysts and diplomats warned that Moscow could



Russia might have evaded the U.S.'s eavesdropping in Crimea. Below, Crimean and Russian flags on the Crimean parliament Feb. 27. Above, armed men outside Simferopol airport.

take unspecified measures to protect Russian interests in Crimea if the situation worsened.

The U.S. military's European Command asked the Pentagon to increase intelligence-collection efforts in the region, including satellite coverage. Images showed what U.S. officials described as typical military movements at Russian bases in Crimea.

Looking back, some U.S. officials now suspect Russia might have been trickling more highly trained units into Crimea in small numbers. But U.S. intelligence analysts didn't pick up any such indications before the takeover, officials briefed on the intelligence-gathering effort say.

In early February, Geoffrey Pyatt, the U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, dispatched a team of embassy officers to Crimea. The details they brought back were sketchy but raised concerns in diplomatic circles.

Human-rights activists, members of the Tartar community and other local contacts told the American team that new political groups were being formed in Crimea with a clear anti-Kiev agenda. Yet nothing in the internal reports written about the visit made Mr. Pyatt and other diplomats think Russia was planning to invade, according to officials.

A turning point came after violence started to grow on Feb. 18, a U.S. intelligence official says. Officials began to examine whether a "rapid change in government" in Kiev would draw Moscow into the conflict militarily.

U.S. suspicions peaked on Feb. 25, four days before the Russians seized Crimea. Russia's Defense Ministry invited the U.S. military attaché in Moscow to a briefing, where officials spelled out plans

for a massive military exercise near Ukraine and Crimea.

U.S. defense and intelligence officials say they worried the exercise was cover for a move on Ukraine, a tactic Moscow used in 2008 before its intervention in Georgia. Intelligence assessments delivered to policy makers after the briefing put the word "exercises" in quotation marks, reflecting skepticism among analysts. Satellite images showed a clear troop buildup near Ukraine.

European Command officials again asked for more intelligence-collection resources. The military increased satellite coverage of Ukraine and Russia but couldn't steer too many resources away from Afghanistan, North Korea, Iran and other hot spots, U.S. officials say.

In Feb. 26 briefings to Mr. Obama and other policy makers, James Clapper, the director of national intelligence, and other spy chiefs singled out Crimea as a flashpoint. The assessment said the Russian military was likely making preparations for possible operations in Crimea. Mr. Obama was told the operations could be launched with little warning.

But U.S. intelligence agencies didn't have corroborating evidence. Mr. Putin and other Russian leaders gave little away in internal communications picked up by the U.S. "We didn't have someone saying: 'Let's do this,'" one U.S. official recalls.

It isn't clear if Russian leaders deliberately avoided communicating about the invasion or simply found a way to do so without detection by the U.S. Another possibility: Mr. Putin made a last-minute decision to seize Crimea—and told almost no one other than those responsible for carrying out the inva-

sion. Some U.S. and U.K. officials believe that Russia's takeover plan was drawn up in advance and ready to go, reducing the need to discuss it.

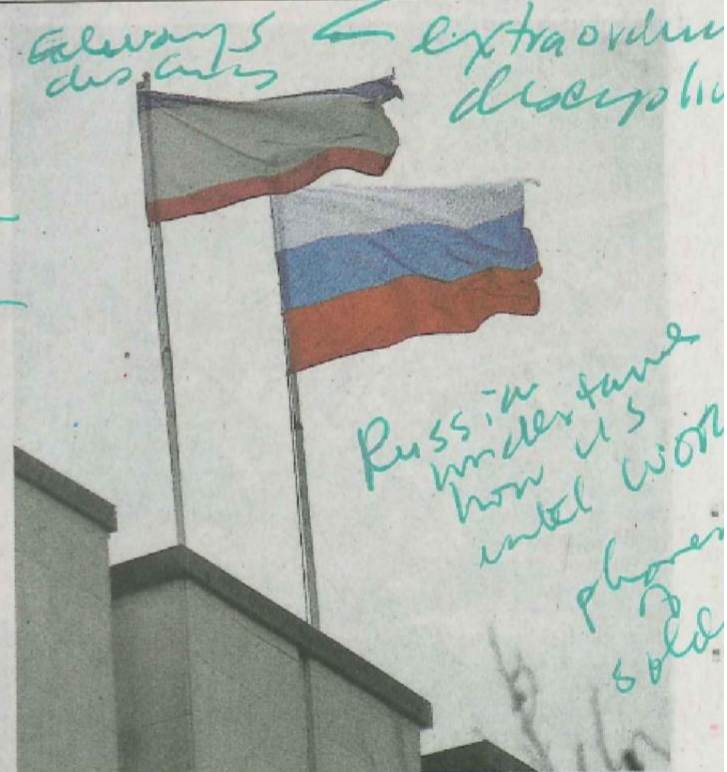
Inside Crimea, Russian troops exercised what U.S. officials describe as extraordinary discipline in their radio and cell-phone communications. Remarks that were intercepted by U.S. spy agencies revealed no hint of the plans.

On Feb. 27, Mr. Pyatt sent an urgent note to Washington. A picture attached to his note showed Russian flags flying at Crimea's parliament building. U.S. officials didn't know if the forces that seized the building were Russian or a rogue unit of the Ukrainian police force involved in the crackdown on protesters in Kiev.

There were no Americans on the ground in Crimea to check reports of Russian military movements, U.S. officials say. The U.S. also didn't have drones overhead to gather real-time intelligence, officials say. That increased the U.S.'s reliance on satellite imagery and information gleaned from an analysis of social media, which was muddled by Russian disinformation. State Department officials declined to discuss any technical-intelligence activities.

If Mr. Putin decided to launch a takeover, many U.S. intelligence analysts thought he would use troops participating in the military exercises. Officials now say they underestimated the quality of Russian forces inside Crimea.

One intelligence official says the U.S. had "definitive information that Russia was using its military to take control of the peninsula" by the night of Feb. 27, declining to be more specific. The next morning, as armed



gunmen in unmarked uniforms seized strategic points in Crimea, U.S. intelligence agencies told policy makers that the gunmen likely were Russian troops.

Still, the consensus assessment from Mr. Clapper's office to Mr. Obama couldn't assign "high confidence" to reports that Russia was seizing Crimea by force because of a lack of corroborating information.

Later on Feb. 28, Mr. Obama issued his final public warning to Mr. Putin about violating Ukraine's sovereignty. By then, though, the Crimean peninsula was under Russian military control, U.S. intelligence officials said later.

Pentagon officials say much of their real-time intelligence

came from local reports filed through the embassy in Kiev. The defense attaché and other embassy officials worked the phones, calling Ukrainian border patrol and navy contacts. Some of those contacts told the Americans they were burning sensitive documents and reported details of Russian movements.

U.S. military officials also made urgent calls to their counterparts in Russia. Not surprisingly, Russian military officials offered little information. Some of them claimed to be surprised. "It was classic maskirovka," says a senior U.S. official, using the Russian word for camouflage. Spies use the word to describe Moscow's tradition of sophisticated deception tactics.