

US Warns Americans to Leave Ukraine; War Looks Imminent

The State Department on Sunday ordered the families of all American personnel at the U.S. Embassy in Ukraine to leave the country amid heightened fears of a Russian invasion.

The department told the dependents of staffers at the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv that they must leave the country. It also said that nonessential embassy staff could leave Ukraine at government expense.

The move came amid rising tensions about Russia's military buildup on the Ukraine border that were not eased during talks Friday between Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Geneva.

State Department officials stressed the Kyiv embassy will remain open and that the announcement does not constitute an evacuation. The move had been under consideration for some time and does not reflect an easing of U.S. support for Ukraine, the officials said.

In a statement, the State Department noted recent reports that Russia was planning significant military action against Ukraine. However, the Russian Foreign Ministry has accused NATO countries of escalating tensions around Ukraine with disinformation.

The State Department added: "The security conditions, particularly along Ukraine's borders, in Russia-occupied Crimea, and in Russia-controlled eastern Ukraine, are unpredictable and can deteriorate with little notice. Demonstrations, which have turned violent at times, regularly occur throughout Ukraine, including in Kyiv."

The department's travel advisory, which had warned against

traveling to Ukraine because of COVID-19 as well as the tensions over Russia, was changed Sunday to carry a stronger warning.

“Do not travel to Ukraine due to the increased threats of Russian military action and COVID-19. Exercise increased caution in Ukraine due to crime and civil unrest. Some areas have increased risk,” the department advised.

The travel advisory for Russia was also changed: “Do not travel to Russia due to ongoing tension along the border with Ukraine, the potential for harassment against U.S. citizens, the embassy’s limited ability to assist U.S. citizens in Russia, COVID-19 and related entry restrictions, terrorism, harassment by Russian government security officials, and the arbitrary enforcement of local law.”

The State Department would not say how many Americans it believes are currently in Ukraine. U.S. citizens are not required to register with embassies when they arrive or plan to stay abroad for extended periods. {eo}

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