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## **MERKEL, HOLLANDE AND PUTIN TALK UKRAINE CLASHES**

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The leaders of France and Germany urged Russian President Putin to help calm the tensions in Ukraine, during in a joint phone call. The three are set to discuss the latest spike in violence at a G20 summit in China.

France's Francois Hollande warned against "an escalation of violence" in Ukraine, his office said on Tuesday, after a phone call between Hollande, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and Kremlin chief Vladimir Putin.

Hollande urged all sides to stick to the Minsk peace deal, and stressed that "there was no alternative to a peaceful solution," his officials said.

Both him and German leader Merkel urged Putin to do what he could to calm the situation down, a Berlin spokesman told reporters.

Ukrainian troops put on high alert

In turn, Putin pointed out a "gross provocation by the Ukrainian side" in the Russia-annexed Crimea, which allegedly sparked the tensions in the two-and-a-half year conflict, according to the officials in Moscow.

The Kremlin accuses Kyiv of sending in a group of "undercover operatives to commit terror strikes on Russian territory" earlier this month. Ukraine rejects the claim.

Weapons for peace

During the Tuesday phone call, Hollande also pointed out "the unchanged position of France, which states the annexation of Crimea cannot be accepted."

The three leaders agreed to discuss the issue on the sidelines of the G20 summit in China, which is set for the first week of September. It's not clear if Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko will attend the meeting, as Ukraine is not a member of the G20 format.

Ukraine is celebrating 25 years of independence from the Soviet Union on Wednesday.

Speaking near Kharkiv on Tuesday, Poroshenko announced the army would receive new weapons to fight the war in the east, including fighter jets and tanks.

"I believe that, after all the difficulties, we are heading to peace, prosperity and the European perspective," he said, "and these weapons and military hardware will bring the day of victory closer."

dj/jil (AP, Reuters, AFP, dpa, Interfax)

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