
RUSSIA WILL NOT PAY RENT FOR CRIMEA, KREMLIN SAYS AFTER MAVERICK PEACE PLAN EMERGES IN WHITE HOUSE

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The New York Times reported on Sunday that a plan drawn up by Andrei Artemenko, a Ukrainian MP, had made its way to the White House via a Russian-American business associate of Mr Trump and the presidents personal lawyer.

Mr Artemenko told Ukrainian media the plan would entail Russian forces withdrawing from eastern Ukraine and Ukrainian voters deciding in a referendum whether Crimea would be leased to Russia for a term of 50 or 100 years.

It would also see a general amnesty for those involved in the conflict (excluding those who committed serious crimes), and would leave the border to Russia open for 72 hours to allow anyone who desired to leave before Ukraine retook control of separatist-held areas.

Michael Cohen, Donald Trumps personal lawyer, reportedly left a sealed envelope containing details of the plan in the office of Michael Flynn, Mr Trumps short-serving national security advisor, earlier this month.

Mr Cohen said the plan was handed to him by Felix Sater, a Russian-American businessman who has worked closely with Mr Trump in the past.

Mr Flynn resigned last week after it emerged he misled Mike Pence, the vice president, over details of conversations he had with the Russian ambassador.

The initiative is likely to anger Petro Poroshenko, the Ukrainian president, who has explicitly ruled out swapping Crimea for Donbas and says Russia must stick to the Minsk peace agreement, the existing peace plan he negotiated with Vladimir Putin two years ago.

It comes at a difficult time for the Minsk agreements following a month of heavy fighting between Ukrainian and Russian-backed separatist forces.

Russia on Saturday said it would recognise travel documents issued by the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk Peoples Republics, a move Ukraine said amounted to abandoning the peace plan.

A new ceasefire that came into force on Monday appeared to be holding by afternoon, with both sides acknowledging that the other had largely ceased fire.

Kaynak/Source: