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General and Former Defense Official Urge Nonlethal Military Aid for Ukraine

Генерал і экс-радник міністра оборони США закликають надати Україні “нелетальну” військову допомогу

Згідно з новою доповіддю генерала Уеслі Кларка і колишнього співробітника Пентагону Філіпа Карбера, збройні сили України терміново потребують військової допомоги «нелетального» характеру, щоб захищатися від потенційного нападу Росії. Йдеться, наприклад, про бронезилети, прилади нічного бачення, обладнанні для зв'язку, авіаційне паливо. За словами авторів доповіді, адміністрація Обама неохоче допомагає Україні в цій сфері, побоюючись спровокувати Росію. Поки США відправили в Україну тільки 300 тис. армійських пайків. НАТО, за словами деяких чиновників, навряд чи надасть велику допомогу, поки в Україні не буде обраний новий президент і не вщухне криза у відносинах Заходу з Росією.

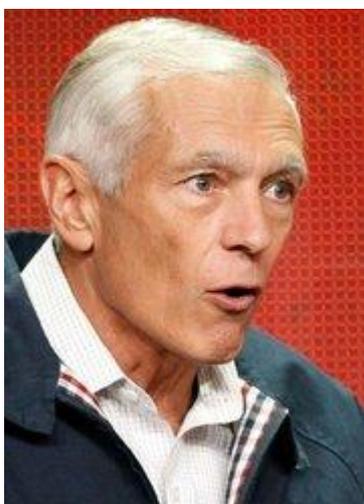
<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/16/world/general-and-former-defense-official-urge-nonlethal-military-aid-for-ukraine.html?ref=world>

Ukraine's military has an urgent need for nonlethal military assistance like body armor, night-vision goggles, communications gear and aviation fuel to defend against a potential Russian attack, according to a new analysis by a former NATO commander and a former Pentagon official.

But wary of provoking Russia, the Obama administration has been reluctant to provide it, they say.

“Implementation of U.S. nonlethal military aid is seriously flawed and needs immediate correction,” Gen. Wesley K. Clark and Phillip A. Karber wrote in a copy of the report that The New York Times obtained on Tuesday. General Clark, who is retired, is the former NATO commander who led the alliance's forces during the 1998 Kosovo conflict, and Mr. Karber is a former strategy adviser to Defense Secretary Caspar W. Weinberger.

The new interim government in Ukraine submitted a request to NATO nations last month for military assistance, including vehicles, mine-clearing equipment, communications gear, medical supplies, fuel and the sharing of intelligence. The United States has sent 300,000 M.R.E. — meals ready to eat — rations to Ukraine's forces, but the Obama administration has made it clear that it is not planning to send weapons or other forms of so-called lethal aid for fear of provoking Russia.



Gen. Wesley K. Clark went to Ukraine to help evaluate its need for military aid. Credit Mario Anzuoni/Reuters

NATO has also moved cautiously. Ukraine's foreign minister recently said a NATO team would assess his nation's military needs, but some Western officials say the alliance is unlikely to provide much assistance until a new president is elected on May 25 and the East-West crisis over Ukraine eases.

But General Clark and Mr. Karber say that Ukraine's forces have a pressing need for more nonlethal aid, and that providing it could help deter Russia, which has positioned about 40,000 troops near Ukraine's border, from intervening militarily in eastern Ukraine.

"The most important assistance currently needed to make the existing Ukrainian force as defensible as possible in the current crisis (between now and the elections of 25 May) is nonlethal equipment from the U.S.," they wrote after a recent visit to Ukraine.

The visit of General Clark, who ran for the 2004 Democratic presidential nomination, and Mr. Karber took place in late March and early April. They traveled at the invitation of Ukrainian officials, and the trip was paid for by the Potomac Foundation, an American nonprofit research center.

General Clark and Mr. Karber met with Ukrainian generals and defense officials, and Mr. Karber visited Ukrainian armored, mechanized and light infantry brigades on their northern, eastern and southern fronts.

According to their assessment, which has been provided to Obama administration officials and lawmakers, Ukraine's forces are facing a formidable military challenge. "The 1,000-mile-long front is three times the frontier that Ukraine's modest armed forces are designed to handle," they wrote. "Moreover, decade-long corruption has left their Air Force ill equipped, vulnerable and unready for modern air combat.

"Russian occupation of Crimea has virtually destroyed Ukraine's coastal defense from the south," they wrote, adding that threats from other directions "divert Ukrainian political attention and disperse badly needed forces to the southwest and northwest."

Ukraine, they say, needs more aircraft, and more anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles. But it also has a dire need for nonlethal assistance.

Without body armor, Ukrainian troops are vulnerable to snipers. Only one in 100 soldiers, they write, is equipped with body armor. Without night-vision gear, Ukrainian forces cannot detect Russian infiltrators.

Ukrainian troops also need satellite radios to coordinate forces along a broad front "with no reserve and no air support to fill in the gaps," they say. Another reason the radios are needed, they say, is that the Russian military would most likely cut and jam communications during an invasion as it did in Crimea.

Ukraine has such a shortage of aviation fuel that commanders are holding much of it in reserve in case Russia invades. But that means that Ukrainian helicopters do not have enough fuel for training or to effectively patrol the border.

General Clark and Mr. Karber urged the Obama administration to take a less restrictive approach on what nonlethal aid should be provided and appoint a top-level official to cut through red tape and ensure that aid is quickly delivered.

The Obama administration has been relying heavily on the threat of stepped-up economic sanctions to dissuade the Russians from invading eastern Ukraine and has rebuffed proposals from Senator John McCain that the United States provide light weapons to the Ukrainian military as too risky.

"We do not see a military solution to this crisis," Jay Carney, the White House spokesman, said Tuesday.

But according to Secretary of State John Kerry, the administration's efforts have not dissuaded Russia from sending intelligence agents and even small numbers of special forces into Ukraine.

Mr. Carney declined Tuesday to say whether the administration would consider an increase in nonlethal aid and, if so, when it might be provided.

"I just don't have any new information to provide today about forms of assistance that we're considering, except to say that we're not discussing lethal assistance," he added.

Some experts said that while it was important to avoid a provocation, more should be done to help Ukraine's forces.

"I understand the concern that we not start an escalatory process that we cannot control, but I do think that the U.S. and the West can and should do more than we are apparently doing so far to support Ukraine's legitimate defense capabilities," said Robert Nurick, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council.