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U.S. and Europe Working to End Ukraine Fighting

США і Європа докладають зусиль, щоб покласти край боям в Україні
Західні лідери почали робити злагоджені дипломатичні зусилля, щоб покласти край конфлікту, який зіпсував відносини з Росією. Але надії на домовленість затьмарюються глибокими підозрами, які викликають у Заході мета Москви щодо України. А арешт в Києві українського офіцера за передбачуване шпигунство на користь Росії пробудив побоювання, що в українську армію впроваджені іноземні агенти супротивника. Це ускладнить потенційні плани поставок зброї Києву. Недовірливе ставлення Заходу до цілей Москви щодо України корениться в тому, що, за словами дипломатів, Кремль грає роль в озброєнні та фінансуванні сепаратистів, а також у керівництві ними під час поточного спалаху бойових дій. Як кажуть дипломати, Кремль, як і наприкінці минулого літа, тепер втручається, щоб припинити бойові дії (раніше підігріті їм самим), але лише після того, як його мета досягнута: розширена територія, підконтрольна повстанцям. За даними газети, з вересня сепаратисти взяли під контроль приблизно 200 квадратних миль, а зараз загрожують місту Дебальцеве.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/06/world/europe/kerry-biden-hollande-merkel-ukraine-conflict.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=first-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=1



A city official in Donetsk, Ukraine, inspected a building that local residents said was damaged by shelling on Wednesday. CreditMaxim Shemetov/Reuters

With fighting intensifying in eastern Ukraine and the White House weighing whether to send arms to bolster the government's forces, Western leaders embarked on a concerted diplomatic effort on Thursday aimed at ending a conflict that has strained relations with Russia.

Despite the burst of activity, the prospects of achieving a new peace plan have been clouded by deep suspicion of Moscow's aims in Ukraine. At the same time, the arrest in Kiev on Wednesday of a senior officer on charges of spying for Russia has raised concerns that the Ukrainian military has been infiltrated, complicating any plans for sending arms to Kiev.

While the United States has provided weapons to allies in similarly unstable circumstances, including in Afghanistan and Iraq, Russia's long historical ties to the Ukrainian military and security apparatus present an unusual challenge.

"Very often one cannot tell where the F.S.B. stops and one of our military units begins," said Semyon Semenchenko, a pro-government paramilitary leader and member of the Ukrainian Parliament, referring to the Russian successor to the K.G.B.



Covering a broken apartment window in Donetsk with plastic. The United States is considering supplying Ukraine with basic defense systems like radar. CreditMaxim Shemetov/Reuters

Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and President François Hollande of France traveled to the Ukrainian capital, Kiev, on Thursday, where they met for more than five hours with President Petro O. Poroshenko of Ukraine. In a statement issued after 1 a.m. Friday, Mr. Poroshenko's office said the leaders had discussed how to implement a truce agreement in the conflict between the government in Kiev and rebel separatists in the country's east. The accord was brokered in September but never held.

On Friday, Ms. Merkel and Mr. Hollande are to continue to Moscow, to meet with President Vladimir V. Putin to discuss a new initiative from the Kremlin to end the fighting, which has killed more than 5,000 people and displaced hundreds of thousands over the past year. The German and French moves were announced as Secretary of State John Kerry arrived in Kiev for high-level talks. Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. prepared for parallel consultations on Friday with European leaders in Brussels.

The Western distrust of Moscow's aims in Ukraine has its roots in what diplomats say is the Kremlin's role in the arming, financing and guiding of the separatists in the current surge in fighting in eastern Ukraine, even after helping forge a cease-fire in September. As it did in late summer, they say, the Kremlin is stepping in to end fighting that it instigated, but only after achieving its objective of expanding rebel-controlled territory.

Since the accord was signed, the Russian-backed separatists have taken control of about 200 square miles in the east, including the airport at Donetsk, and they are currently threatening Debaltseve, a town that sits astride a critical rail hub.

Mr. Kerry did not mince words in a news conference Thursday in Kiev, laying blame for the renewed violence in eastern Ukraine at the door of the Kremlin: "We talked about the largest threat that Ukraine faces today, and that is Russia's continued aggression in the east." He called on Moscow and the separatists to "support and honor the commitment they made to implement a cease-fire, to pull back heavy weapons and troops" and to respect Ukraine's international border with Russia.

The accelerated Western diplomatic efforts came as the Obama administration was considering whether to send basic weapons like antitank missiles, battlefield radars, reconnaissance drones and other arms to help Ukraine's beleaguered forces stave off attacks by the separatists and build pressure on Moscow to seek a political settlement.

Mr. Obama's top national security officials — the so-called Principals Committee — met on Wednesday to discuss the matter, though no decision was made.

The head of the Ukrainian security service, Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, said at a news conference on Wednesday that the accused spy, Lt. Col. Mykhailo Chornobai, had been at the center of an espionage ring in the capital and had passed military secrets directly to an agent of the separatist Donetsk People's Republic, including the locations of volunteer regiments that were then used to pinpoint artillery attacks.

Dmytro Tymchuk, a military officer and member of Parliament, said that Colonel Chornobai was among about 300 people working in the military sphere who had been arrested since the start of the conflict.

The arrest further deepened mistrust of the leadership in Kiev that is already pervasive among the poorly equipped rank-and-file soldiers and midlevel commanders fighting on the front line. And it reinforced a view prevalent on the battlefield that the military leadership cannot be trusted to manage any weapons delivered by Western allies because of their ties to the Russian military and security service, the F.S.B.

Mr. Semenchuk, in an interview before he was wounded over the weekend in heavy fighting in Debaltseve, said that on a recent visit to Washington he had urged officials to send aid directly to the front, bypassing the general staff.

Igor Koziy, a military analyst at the Institute for Euro-Atlantic Cooperation, a research group in Kiev, said the arrest confirmed the worst suspicions of many Ukrainians about the military leadership and also suggested that Russia might have other — even higher-ranking — double agents.

"It's really a huge question: Should we completely change our armed forces structure," Mr. Koziy said, noting that one proposal was to build a second, new military structure. "Of course this idea seems very much crazy to create a whole new, parallel general staff," he said. "But on the other hand when you look at what's going on today inside this building, you think maybe it's the right decision."

An American military expert, while acknowledging problems with some units, did not think the problems were insurmountable. "While intelligence penetration is a risk in some units, it is highly unlikely in others," Michèle Flournoy, the former undersecretary of defense for policy, wrote Thursday in response to emailed questions. "There is also a risk that some of these weapons may be captured on the battlefield."

“But those risks do not outweigh the dramatic increase in defensive capability these weapons would provide to the Ukrainian military,” she added. “One has to consider the much larger risk of not providing additional defensive equipment: the risk that forces backed by Russia could soon move to occupy an even larger swath of eastern Ukraine, dividing and destabilizing the country indefinitely.”

The diplomatic challenge is to restore the peace agreement, which was negotiated in Minsk, Belarus, in September and has been repeatedly violated, more seriously by the separatists and Russia.

Mr. Kerry, who announced \$16.4 million in humanitarian assistance for eastern Ukraine, plans to press for a new cease-fire.

But it is the assessment of some senior Western officials that Mr. Putin is trying to supplant the Minsk agreement with a new arrangement that would expand the Kremlin’s influence over Ukraine and give the separatists a larger, and more economically viable, enclave.

“It is not a peace plan,” said the diplomat, who declined to be identified to comment on confidential diplomatic discussions. “It is a road map to creating a new Transnistria or Abkhazia in Ukraine. It is a cynical effort to get out of all the commitments made in Minsk.”

Transnistria is a pro-Russian enclave within Moldova; Abkhazia is a breakaway region of Georgia that is effectively under Russian control.

Correction: February 9, 2015

An article on Friday about efforts by European and American leaders to forge a diplomatic solution to the escalating conflict in eastern Ukraine misstated, in some editions, the day that the office of the Ukrainian president, Petro O. Poroshenko, issued a statement on a meeting he had with Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and the French president, François Hollande. It was Friday, not Wednesday.