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U.S. Considers Supplying Arms to Ukraine Forces, Officials Say

Офіційні особи: США розглядають можливість постачання зброї українським Збройним силам

З урахуванням того, що підтримувані Росією сепаратисти підсилюють наступ на Україну, командувач силами НАТО в Європі генерал Філіп М. Брідлав тепер виступає на підтримку поставок оборонних озброєнь і техніки Києву, що знаходиться у важкому становищі. І ряд чиновників адміністрації та військових посадових осіб, здається, схиляються до цієї позиції, як заявили американські офіційні особи. Президент Обама не приймає рішень з надання подібної допомоги засобами знищення. Але після низки несподіваних невдач, які зазнали українські сили в останні тижні, адміністрація Обами заново розглядає питання про військову допомогу. За словами чиновників, держсекретар США Джон Керрі, який планує відвідати Київ у, готовий знову обговорювати надання допомоги засобами ураження, як і генерал Мартін Демпси, голова комітету начальників штабів.

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/02/02/world/us-taking-a-fresh-look-at-arming-kiev-forces.html?_r=1



Ukrainian soldiers preparing on Sunday to go to the town of Debaltseve, which came under heavy fire from separatists. CreditManu Brabo/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

With Russian-backed separatists pressing their attacks in Ukraine, NATO's military commander, Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, now supports providing defensive weapons and

equipment to Kiev's beleaguered forces, and an array of administration and military officials appear to be edging toward that position, American officials said Sunday.

President Obama has made no decisions on providing such lethal assistance. But after a series of striking reversals that Ukraine's forces have suffered in recent weeks, the Obama administration is taking a fresh look at the question of military aid.

Secretary of State John Kerry, who plans to visit Kiev on Thursday, is open to new discussions about providing lethal assistance, as is Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, officials said. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel, who is leaving his post soon, backs sending defensive weapons to the Ukrainian forces.

In recent months, Susan E. Rice, Mr. Obama's national security adviser, has resisted proposals to provide lethal assistance, several officials said. But one official who is familiar with her views insisted that Ms. Rice was now prepared to reconsider the issue.

Fearing that the provision of defensive weapons might tempt President Vladimir V. Putin of Russia to raise the stakes, the White House has limited American aid to "non-lethal" items, including body armor, night-vision goggles, first aid kits and engineering equipment.

But the failure of economic sanctions to dissuade Russia from sending heavy weapons and military personnel to eastern Ukraine is pushing the issue of defensive weapons back into discussion.

"Although our focus remains on pursuing a solution through diplomatic means, we are always evaluating other options that will help create space for a negotiated solution to the crisis," said Bernadette Meehan, a spokeswoman for the National Security Council.

Fueling the broader debate over policy is an independent report to be issued Monday by eight former senior American officials, who urge the United States to send \$3 billion in defensive arms and equipment to Ukraine, including anti-armor missiles, reconnaissance drones, armored Humvees and radars that can determine the location of enemy rocket and artillery fire.

Michèle A. Flournoy, a former senior Pentagon official who is a leading candidate to serve as defense secretary if Hillary Rodham Clinton is elected president, joined in preparing the report. Others include James G. Stavridis, a retired admiral who served as the top NATO military commander, and Ivo Daalder, the ambassador to NATO during Mr. Obama's first term.

"The West needs to bolster deterrence in Ukraine by raising the risks and costs to Russia of any renewed major offensive," the report says. "That requires providing direct military assistance — in far larger amounts than provided to date and including lethal defensive arms."

In his State of the Union address last month, Mr. Obama noted that the sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies had hurt the Russian economy.

But American officials acknowledge that Russia has repeatedly violated an agreement, reached in Minsk in September. The agreement called for an immediate cease-fire in Ukraine, the removal of foreign forces and the establishment of monitoring arrangements to ensure that the border between Ukraine and Russia would be respected.

In recent weeks, Russia has shipped a large number of heavy weapons to support the separatists' offensive in eastern Ukraine, including T-80 and T-72 tanks, multiple-launch rocket systems, artillery and armored personnel carriers, Western officials say.

Some of the weapons are too sophisticated to be used by hastily trained separatists, a Western official said. NATO officials estimate that about 1,000 Russian military and intelligence personnel are supporting the separatist offensive while Ukrainian officials insist that the number is much higher.

Supported by the Russians, the separatists have captured the airport at Donetsk and are pressing to take Debaltseve, a town that sits beside a critical rail junction.

All told, the separatists have captured 500 square kilometers — about 193 square miles — of additional territory in the past four months, NATO says. The assessment of some senior

Western officials is that the Kremlin's goal is to replace the Minsk agreement with an accord that would be more favorable to the Kremlin's interests and would leave the separatists with a more economically viable enclave.

The administration's deliberations were described by a range of senior Pentagon, administration and Western officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were talking about internal discussions.

A spokesman for General Breedlove declined to comment on his view on providing defensive weapons, which was disclosed by United States officials privy to confidential discussions.

"General Breedlove has repeatedly stated he supports the pursuit of a diplomatic solution as well as considering practical means of support to the government of Ukraine in its struggle against Russian-backed separatists," the spokesman, Capt. Gregory L. Hicks of the Navy, said. But a Pentagon official familiar with the views of General Dempsey and Adm. James A. Winnefeld Jr., the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said they believed the issue of defensive weapons should be reconsidered.

"A comprehensive approach is warranted, and we agree that defensive equipment and weapons should be part of that discussion," the Pentagon official said.

Russian casualties remain an unusually delicate political issue for Mr. Putin, who has denied that Russian troops have been ordered to fight in Ukraine.

The report by Ms. Flournoy and the other former officials argues that the United States and its allies should capitalize on this fact to dissuade the Russians and the separatists from expanding their offensive.

"One of the best ways to deter Russia from supporting the rebels in taking more territory and stepping up the conflict is to increase the cost that the Russians or their surrogates would incur," Ms. Flournoy said in an interview.

The current stock of Ukrainian anti-armor missiles, the report notes, is at least two decades old, and most of them are out of commission. So the report recommends that the United States provide the Ukrainian military with light anti-armor missiles, which might include Javelin antitank missiles.

"Providing the Ukrainians with something that can stop an armored assault and that puts at risk Russian or Russian-backed forces that are in armored vehicles, I think, is the most important aspect of this," she added.

The Obama administration has provided radars that can locate the source of mortars. But the report urges the United States to also provide radars that can pinpoint the location of longer-range rocket and artillery fire. Enemy rocket and artillery attacks account for 70 percent of the Ukrainian military's casualties, the report says.

Ukraine, the report notes, also needs reconnaissance drones, especially since the Ukrainian military has stopped all flights over eastern Ukraine because of the separatists' use of antiaircraft missiles supplied by Russia.

The report also urged the United States to provide military communications equipment that cannot be intercepted by Russian intelligence.

Poland, the Baltic States, Canada and Britain, the report says, might also provide defensive weapons if the United States takes the lead.

The report was issued jointly by the Atlantic Council, the Brookings Institution and the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. The other officials who prepared it are Strobe Talbott, who served as deputy secretary of state in the Clinton administration; Charles F. Wald, a retired Air Force general who served as deputy commander of the United States European Command; Jan M. Lodal, a former Pentagon official; and two former ambassadors to Ukraine, John Herbst and Steven Pifer.