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Putin Hasn't Given Up His Designs on Ukraine

NATO is wise to bolster its eastern flank, but Kiev needs more defensive armaments right now.

*Путін не відмовився від своїх задумів на Україні
НАТО має сенс зміцнюючи свій східний фланг, але Київ зараз має потребу в
більшій кількості оборонних озброєнь*

"Явно реагуючи на продовження російської агресії на Україну, міністри країн НАТО минулого тижня схвалили перші після закінчення холодної війни розміщення військ на східному фланзі альянсу", - пишуть в статті для The Wall Street Journal екс-директор ЦРУ, генерал у відставці Девід Петреус і екс-посол США в Україні та в Узбекистані Джон Гербст. Однак це прямо не усуває сьгоднішні проблеми України. "В останні тижні сепаратисти, яких підтримує Росія, різко посилили атаки в Донецьку і Луганську, пишуть автори. Це суворе нагадування про те, що Путін не відмовився від своїх задумів щодо східної України", - йдеться в статті. Автори рекомендують США і їх союзникам по НАТО зміцнити український потенціал "стримування авантюризму Кремля" і чітко роз'яснити Росії, що розплата за авантюризм буде величезною, якщо стримування не спрацює. "Перший крок - забезпечити українські сили більш ефективним оборонним озброєнням", - йдеться в статті. Петреус і Гербст визнають: ніякі масиви західної військової техніки не допоможуть Україні взяти верх над Росією в бою. "Але правильно підібрана техніка може значно підвищити ціну такого бою для Росії, а Росія не в силах нескінченно терпіти військові і економічні втрати", - вважають автори.

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/putin-hasnt-given-up-his-designs-on-ukraine-1455751860>



NATO landing craft conducting exercises on Poland's coast, June 17, 2015. Photo: Associated Press

In a clear response to continuing Russian aggression in Ukraine, NATO ministers last week approved the deployment of troops on the alliance's eastern flank for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Under NATO's new "enhanced" forward presence, maritime forces will be increased in the Baltic Sea and land forces sent to reinforce defenses in Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

While these changes are prudent, none directly addresses the situation on the ground today in Ukraine, which remains a non-NATO member. In recent weeks, Russian-backed separatists have sharply increased their attacks in Donetsk and Luhansk—a stark reminder that President Vladimir Putin hasn't given up his designs on eastern Ukraine.

Mr. Putin invaded Russia's western neighbor two years ago because he saw its emergence as a stable, democratic country integrated with Europe as a fundamental threat. While he has scaled back overt Russian aggression, this appears to be a temporary tactic designed to win sanctions relief, even as he ratchets up Russia's military intervention in Syria.

In addition to NATO's recent announcement, the U.S. and its NATO allies would be wise to bolster Ukrainian deterrence against further Kremlin adventurism, and to make clear that the price of such adventurism for Russia will be high if deterrence fails. The first step is to provide more effective defensive weapons to Ukrainian forces.

The U.S. and its European partners have done an impressive job imposing economic costs on Moscow for its actions in Ukraine. But they haven't done enough militarily to support Ukraine, which in 1994 gave up the nuclear weapons it inherited from the Soviet Union in exchange for trans-Atlantic assurances about the safeguarding of its territorial integrity. These assurances have proven meaningless.

The equipment Ukraine could put to best use in deterring attacks on its territory includes more effective antitank and radar systems. Yet some Western policy makers have been reluctant to provide substantial military support to Ukraine because Russia has "escalation dominance"—i.e., whatever we give Ukraine, the Kremlin can always do more.

Technically, this analysis has merit. No amount of Western military equipment would help Ukraine defeat a determined Russia in battle. But such logic ignores the fact that the right equipment could significantly raise the costs of such a battle for Russia—and that Russia's tolerance for military and economic losses is not infinite.

Mr. Putin has gone to great lengths to cover up the extent of Russian involvement in Ukraine. He has made it illegal to publish figures on casualties, knowing that such losses are a potential liability. He also knows that the more overt Russia's intervention in Ukraine becomes, the harder it will be to secure sanctions relief from Europe, which the Russian economy badly needs, especially as falling oil and natural-gas prices reduce state revenues from exports.

Ukraine's military has acquitted itself well against Russian-supported separatists—largely fighting them to a standstill. It has also built strong defensive lines from the port city of Mariupol running north. Thousands of heavily armored troops would be required to punch through these Ukrainian positions. And with the right infusion of defensive weaponry, the West can make such an operation prohibitively costly for the Kremlin.

In particular, Ukraine desperately needs shoulder-launched antitank systems to offset Moscow's large advantage in armor, along with more counter-battery radars for identifying the locations of separatist artillery and rocket systems, thus helping to protect Ukrainian troops from long-range fire. The Obama administration has sent two such radar systems, but more are needed and their range should extend into the Russian border area, because Moscow has fired missiles from its own territory at Ukrainian forces. Finally, Ukraine would benefit from advanced drones and secure communications and control systems. None of these could be seen as offensive in nature.

The U.S. Congress understands the stakes in Ukraine. The 2016 National Defense Authorization Act, signed into law by President Obama, authorizes \$300 million in military assistance for Kiev, including \$50 million for lethal defensive armaments. It is now time for the U.S. to deliver the equipment needed to help Ukraine ensure its security and, in so doing, safeguard U.S. and trans-Atlantic interests that are under assault there.

Ultimately, Russia's bellicose actions in Ukraine are about more than Ukraine. By bolstering Kiev, we have the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to the most elemental rules and principles of post-Cold War Europe, particularly that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states shall not be breached and conflicts shall be resolved through negotiation not force of arms. By contrast, failing to respond adequately would very likely be an invitation to further aggression by Russia—in eastern Ukraine, and beyond.

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