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## Biden presses Ukraine president to find peaceful end to crisis



Vice President Joe Biden speaks at the Families USA's Health Action 2014 conference Thursday. (Alex Wong / Getty Images / January 23, 2014)

Vice President Joe Biden pressed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in a telephone call Thursday to halt his government's bloody battle with political protesters, warning that further bloodshed "would have consequences for Ukraine's relationship with the United States."

In the clearest sign yet of U.S. concern about the confrontation, Biden told Yanukovich the Ukrainian government held primary responsibility in the standoff.

"Only the government of Ukraine can ensure a peaceful end to the crisis," Biden told him, according to a White House statement.

Biden said the government needed to open talks with the protesters and find a way to "meaningfully address [their] legitimate concerns."

Protesters have been facing off with Ukrainian police in the streets of Kiev over the government's decision to reject a trade deal with the European Union and curtail civil freedoms. At least two demonstrators were killed in clashes Wednesday.

Though opposition leaders began talks with the government Thursday, U.S. officials worry that more violence, and a breakdown of civil order, could lie ahead.

U.S. officials say they are weighing sanctions against Ukraine. On Wednesday, they suspended the visas of some officials accused of inflicting violence on protesters late last year.

"We need to see concrete steps taken by the government," said Jay Carney, the White House press secretary.

U.S. officials have also condemned the violence of anti-government right-wing groups and pro-government *agents provocateurs* known as *titushki*.

Yet experts said U.S. leverage is limited, and predicted that Washington may not want to get too deeply involved in a conflict where there is little it can do.

Andrew Weiss, a State Department specialist on Ukraine during the Clinton administration, said the Obama administration has been mainly focused on pressing Ukraine to follow its constitutional framework.

While the administration and Congress may slap Ukraine with sanctions, “they won’t change events on the ground.... U.S. tools and leverage are extremely limited,” said Weiss, now vice president of studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

The United States had important influence in Ukraine during the 1990s, following the fall of the Soviet Union. But in recent years, the United States has wound down its role, content to largely follow the lead of the European Union, he said.

Washington is also not eager to have a dispute over Ukraine become another point of contention in its difficult relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin, he said.