

Endangering USA won't stop Putin

Kimberly Marten, Barnard College, Columbia University, February 2015

| NATO | U.S. FOREIGN POLICY | UKRAINE |

Supporting the democratically elected Ukrainian government with funding and advice is good policy. So is sending communications, monitoring and protective equipment to the struggling Ukrainian army. But supplying Kiev with lethal weaponry would endanger U.S. national security interests, while having little chance of stopping Vladimir Putin.

Ukraine lacks a reliable professional military organization, and Washington could not control how or where American weapons would be used on the ground. Even strong pro-Kiev advocates lament the growth of warlordism in western Ukraine, along with the corruption that corrodes the army.

The plan to send weapons to Ukraine assumes that if Putin faces a strengthened foe, he will be forced to negotiate. But if suffocating sanctions have not accomplished that, why assume weapons will? The Russian president is highly unlikely to back down. Compromise is not in his personality.

Supplying Kiev with lethal weaponry would endanger U.S. national security interests, while having little chance of stopping Vladimir

Putin.

Instead, he has built his reputation on standing up to Western pressure while stoking an increasingly ugly form of anti-Western nationalism. Putin controls the Russian media, and his KGB connections allow him to credibly threaten any opponent with public humiliation or arrest. He is in no danger of being deposed.

Indeed, in the past several weeks, Putin has made the case to the public — in direct statements, in a revamped military doctrine and in photo-shopped images shown on state-controlled television — that the conflict in Ukraine is not a civil war. Instead, Putin claims, it is a NATO attempt to threaten Russian sovereignty and security.

Sending U.S. and NATO weapons to Ukraine would only seem to confirm these false claims. Rather than prompting him to negotiate, this would give him an excuse to declare that Russian forces must go into Ukraine to defend Russia from American attack.

What would Washington do then? It is not in America's interests to risk direct confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia, in non-NATO territory that Russia claims as its sphere of interest.

This article originally appeared in [USA TODAY](#).

Printable PDF





Add a comment...

Comment using...

Facebook social plugin

[Terms & Conditions](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Site](#)

[Credits](#) | [Photo Credits](#)

© [Carnegie Corporation of New York](#), 2014



The views expressed on this site are the sole opinions of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Carnegie Corporation of New York.