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The US and the Debate over Arming Ukraine

Osama Abu Arshid | Mar 2015

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Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies

PO Box 10277

Street No. 826, Zone 66

Doha, Qatar

Tel.: +974 44199777 | Fax: +974 44831651

www.dohainstitute.org

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Introduction

The latest developments in eastern Ukraine have constituted a clear dilemma for the United States, as seen in sharp internal American debate on whether to arm the Ukrainian army, after more than a year of growing Russian intervention in support of separatists in the country. Amidst this controversy, US President Barack Obama's administration finds itself in a quandary. The administration's reluctance to supply the Ukrainian army with "non-offensive lethal weapons" has revived the previously made allegation that its approach to foreign policy shows weakness and absence of leadership, undermining the credibility of the United States among allies, and impinging on its prestige among adversaries. Similarly, hesitation on Ukraine has strained the Obama administration's relationship with the Republican Congress and those Democratic parties pushing the president to adopt a policy that goes beyond economic sanctions on Russia, toward arming and training the Ukrainian army. Beyond the usual suspects among media and think tanks, the American debate on arming Ukraine extends throughout an administration that is itself divided on the issue, recalling a similar dilemma back in 2012 on arming Syrian rebels. At that time, the White House resolved in favor of not arming the rebels, a decision seen by many in the United States and abroad to have paved the way to the expansion of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL).

In parallel with the internal pressures faced by the Obama administration to arm the Ukrainian army, Germany and France have exerted their own pressure against arming Ukraine, in fear of a possible escalation of tensions in Europe's backyard. Thwarting any US effort to arm the Ukraine, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande worked tirelessly with the Russian and Ukrainian sides to reach a peace agreement, succeeding in bringing together Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian Petro Poroshenko to sign the "Minsk Agreement" on February 12, 2015, in the Belarus capital of Minsk.

Under the agreement, both the Ukrainian and the separatist forces backed by Russia committed to withdraw heavy weapons from the front lines in eastern Ukraine, with observers from the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) monitoring the cease-fire. The clauses of the agreement also provide for exchange of prisoners, amnesty for those involved in fighting, holding local elections in some regions of eastern Ukraine, and the enactment of a constitutional amendment giving the

eastern regions greater autonomy, with Ukraine to take full control of its eastern border with Russia by the end of 2015.²

Although the agreement has eased tensions, it did not halt the fighting, with each side seeking to expand their areas of influence and to enhance their position in negotiating a final agreement. With violations of the agreement continuing, the Obama administration faces increasing pressure to arm Ukraine and “learn from the failure of the first Minsk agreement,” of September 2014.

The Argument in favor of Arming Ukraine

Advocates of arming the Ukrainian army presented their argument in a report written by 8 military officials and former US politicians, and published jointly by three American think tanks – the Atlantic Council, the Brookings Institute, and the Chicago Institute for Foreign Affairs.³ The report calls on the United States to provide Ukraine with 3 billion dollars of lethal and non-lethal defensive combat assistance over the next three years so that it can defend itself. The report states that if Russian President Vladimir Putin’s military intervention is not halted, the West should expect more provocations from the Kremlin in the future. Western economic sanctions on Russia, it argues, however effective, will not be sufficient to stop the Russian aggression. The report’s authors believe that US military assistance to Ukraine may deter Russia from expanding its aggression, or at least make it more difficult to occupy more Ukrainian territory. The following is offered as justification⁴:

First, reluctance of the United States and NATO to arm the Ukrainian army may encourage Russia to expand its intervention in eastern Ukraine and lead to Russian linkage with Crimea through an effective control of southeastern Ukraine.

Second, if the United States allowed this, it would threaten the West’s security system throughout Europe and Eurasia, as Moscow may feel emboldened to replicate its

² Ian Traynor, “Putin tried to delay Ukraine ceasefire deal, EU summit told,” *The Guardian*, February 13, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1MHqMW8>

³ Steven Pifer, Strobe Talbott, Ambassador Ivo Daalder, Michele Flournoy, Ambassador John Herbst, Jan Lodal, Admiral James Stavridis and General Charles Wald, “Preserving Ukraine’s Independence, Resisting Russian Aggression: What the United States and NATO Must Do,” Brookings, February 2015, <http://brook.gs/1zNAcvQ>

⁴ Ibid.

intervention in Ukraine in Estonia and Latvia, and attempt to force a change in borders under the pretext of protecting the large Russian-speaking minorities therein. Such a scenario would severely test NATO, whose Charter states, in Article V, that aggression against one Member State is an aggression against all members.

Third the United States, Britain and Russia pledged, in the Budapest Memorandum of 1994 and in exchange for its giving up its nuclear weapons, to respect Ukraine's sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and safety, and not to wield threat or use of force against it. Any lack of respect exhibited by the United States for these safeguards would send a negative message to America's allies with regard to any future guarantees it might offer, particularly in the cases of Iran and North Korea.

Fourth, the arming of the Ukrainian army, while unlikely to lead to the defeat of the Russian army, would make the cost of any new Russian military expansion in Ukraine so expensive as to bring the Kremlin to re-calculate and agree to serious negotiation of a real peaceful settlement.

The logic of the above argument is broadly supported in Congress, even within the Obama administration. Many members of both Democratic and Republican parties in Congress call for the president to arm Ukraine so that it can defend itself, and consider it to be the moral and strategic responsibility of the United States to do so.⁵ In December 2014 the House and Senate unanimously passed a bill that authorizes the President to send weapons to Kiev; Obama signed the bill, but with an added clause rendering implementation subject to Presidential discretion. Now, another effort is underway in Congress to pass a law obliging Obama to start the process of arming Ukraine.⁶

Sources inside the administration confirm that Vice President Joe Biden supports arming Ukraine, something he hinted at in his speech February 7, 2015 at the Munich security conference in Germany, where he pledged the administration's continued support of

⁵ Nancy A. Youssef and Tim Mak, "Democrats Are Now Pushing Obama to Give Guns to Ukraine," *The Daily Beast*, February 10, 2015, <http://thebea.st/18SoGnf>

⁶ Andreas Rinke and Aleksandar Vasovic, "Obama says still weighing decision on arming Ukraine forces," *Reuters*, February 9, 2015, <http://reut.rs/173bPxE>

"Ukraine's security needs".⁷ In fact, according to one US official, Biden's speech had originally included additional lines in support of arming Ukraine that were deleted by a representative of the National Security Council – though this is denied by Biden's office.⁸

Members of Congress reported that Secretary of State John Kerry voiced a similar position during the Munich Conference, and although State Department spokesperson Jen Psaki stressed that the weaponry under discussion was entirely "defensive", and that the focus at the moment was on finding a diplomatic solution, she did not deny the report.⁹ Ashton Carter, the new Secretary of Defense, had already expressed his support during the Senate confirmation hearings installing him in his post.¹⁰ Commander of NATO forces in Europe, General Philip Breedlove has for some months called for broader US military support to Ukraine.¹¹

The Argument against Arming Ukraine

In opposition to those in favor of arming Ukraine is a US current of political realism that argues that arming Ukraine will not result in affecting the balance of power on the ground in favor of Russia, and its separatist allies in eastern Ukraine. According to proponents of this view, represented most prominently by Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer, military aid from the United States, regardless of its extent, could never rival the size and swiftness of military aid Russia would supply its allies in response. They argue that proponents of arming Ukraine ignore Russia's geo-strategic interest in its regional domain, and particularly in Ukraine; Russia could never remain inert,

⁷ "Remarks by the Vice President at the Munich Security Conference," The White House, Office of the Vice President, February 7, 2015, <http://1.usa.gov/1C8YqvI>

⁸ Josh Rogin, "Kerry Tells Lawmakers He's for Arming Ukraine," *Bloomberg View*, February 9, 2015, <http://bv.ms/1DBOHUR>

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Luis Martinez, "Defense Secretary Nominee Supports Arming Ukrainian Military," *ABC News*, February 4, 2015, at: <http://abcn.ws/1LMCNZU>

¹¹ Eli Lake, "Key General Splits With Obama Over Ukraine," *The Daily Beast*, April 4, 2014, <http://thebea.st/R9pJGq>

confronted with a NATO expansion into its strategic space. Their argument goes as follows:

First, in their opinion, proponents of arming Ukraine do not quite comprehend the fact that Ukraine is strategically more important to Russia than it is to the West; directly tied in with Russia's national security, it reigns supreme in the country's defense analysis. Russia would thus never agree to retreat in Ukraine, or allow for a defeat in a confrontation with the West, no matter how great the military or economic pressure, and cost. The logic here is the same as that governing the position of the United States conveyed by the "Monroe Doctrine", which will not accept Canada and Mexico becoming members of a rival military alliance.¹² In sum, the fate of Ukraine is more important to Moscow than it is to any other Western capital, and the idea that Putin would be the first to blink is simply wishful thinking.¹³

Second, the balance of power on the ground is skewed heavily in favor of Russia and its allies, so the United States would have to send large amounts of military gear and weapons. But the impact of that would be temporary, because Russia would act quickly to readjust the balance in its favor.¹⁴ Even the proponents of arming themselves admit this; the Ukrainian army will not, in any case, be able to inflict a defeat upon Russia, even with "tremendous support from the West".¹⁵ In short, the United States will not be able to win an arms race with Russia in Ukraine.

Third, Russia may consider the presence of troops from NATO on the ground, training Ukrainian troops in the use of new Western weaponry against old Soviet weapons, as an open declaration of war, and then the subsequent course of events cannot be

¹² John J. Mearsheimer, "Don't Arm Ukraine," *The New York Times*, February 8, 2015, <http://nyti.ms/1DTLIn1>

¹³ Stephen M. Walt, "Why Arming Kiev Is a Really, Really Bad Idea," *Foreign Policy*, February 9, 2015, <http://atfp.co/1DOOtUR>

¹⁴ Richard Norton-Taylor, "US weapons to Ukraine 'would be matched by Russian arms to rebels'," *The Guardian*, February 11, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1G0oSe9>

¹⁵ Steven Pifer et al.

predicted, including the possibility of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine and a threat to European regional security as a whole.¹⁶

Fourth, Russia's willingness to go to war in order to maintain Ukraine in its orbit should never be underestimated.¹⁷

Fifth, while one may exclude Russia resorting to the threat of nuclear weapons, one should not test Putin's resolve and determination, especially if cornered with little room to maneuver. This would be a dangerous game with a leader whose reactions are difficult to predict.¹⁸

Sixth, there is no real difference between "defensive-lethal" and "offensive-lethal" weapons; it depends on how they are used.¹⁹

Seventh, the situation in Ukraine is not suitable as a model for deterrence with Russia; no economic or military threats would lead Russia to retreat, and Putin has proven that Russia is prepared to pay a big price for Ukraine.²⁰

Eighth, an escalation of war with Russia would have disastrous economic and social consequences for Ukraine, economically and socially, especially that it is now on the brink of bankruptcy.²¹

The current against armament therefore considers that the solution in Ukraine should be a diplomatic rather than a military one; it should afford the eastern Ukraine regions of Donetsk and Luhansk broad autonomy including safeguards to protect Russian-speakers, and include the establishment of a demilitarized buffer zone; Ukraine and the West should forget Crimea, as Russia will never relinquish in view of the West's

¹⁶ Ishaan Tharoor, "3 reasons the U.S. should not arm Ukraine," *The Washington Post*, February 11, 2015, <http://wapo.st/1B9zshX>

¹⁷ Jeremy Shapiro, "Why Arming the Ukrainians is a Bad Idea," *Brookings*, February 3, 2015, <http://brook.gs/1zZKmUQ>

¹⁸ Walt.

¹⁹ Alina Polyakova, "Diplomatic Maneuvers," *U.S. News*, February 12, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1vpfATi>

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Mearsheimer.

adventure on the Russian border. Russia will grant Kiev control of its border with her in return, and contribute, along with the West, to rescuing the collapsed Ukrainian economy.²² In short, the West and Russia should agree to Ukraine remaining forever a buffer state between them; Putin would never allow Ukraine to become a base for NATO missile interceptor systems that would disturb the strategic military balance between the parties.²³

The White House's Position

Between the two previous approaches the White House appears to stand bewildered, hesitant and incapable of deciding either in favor or against of arming. There is pressure from Congress and within the administration to arm, and opposing pressure from some influential European allies to refrain from arming. It is clear that the White House, thus far, tends towards the non-armament option though it has not decided its final position.

Obama hinted during a press conference in Washington with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, on February 9, 2015, that he is thinking of arming the Ukrainian army if diplomatic efforts failed to reach a cease-fire. He said: "I asked my team to consider all options ... and the possibility of providing lethal weapons is one of the options being considered...But I did not reach a decision yet." He noted that months of diplomatic and economic sanctions did not prevent Putin from "maintaining the same approach that he does today." Referencing his own reluctance, and his approach, in line with the arguments of those skeptical of the efficacy of armament, Obama alluded to his skepticism that the reinforcement would contribute to defusing tensions in Ukraine, asking: "Can we be sure that any lethal assistance we provide to Ukraine will be used properly, and that it will not fall into the wrong hands, and that it would not lead to an escalation in hostilities the Ukrainians couldn't counter?" He added: "What kind of reactions would it provoke not only among the separatists, but also among Russians? All these issues should be taken into account." He added that the bottom line in making such decisions must be the extent to which decisions taken can be effective; in the

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

same vein, at the press conference Obama rejected setting forth any “red line” that Putin should not cross.”²⁴

It is clear that there is a current within Obama’s national security team that rejects the idea of arming the Ukrainian army because it could lead to an unpredictable escalation, including possible open war, whether a proxy war on Ukrainian territory or open war between the West and Russia. Russia, according to this approach will not retreat in the face of any US escalation, regardless of the price, for the reasons mentioned above. According to some members of Congress, Susan Rice, adviser to the president on national security, along with Valerie Jarrett presidential adviser, are behind the White House reluctance to arm Ukraine.²⁵

Along similar lines, there are those who believe that President Obama’s remarks in his press conference with Merkel, on the possibility of arming the Ukrainian army were directed not at pressuring the Russians but at pressuring, if only indirectly, European partners frightened of wide-ranging war in their backyard, so as to encourage them to find a political solution. According to this reading, the implicit threat issued by Obama in this context translated, in practice, into the Minsk agreement between the Russians and the Ukrainians, under German and French auspices.²⁶ Thus, although the Minsk agreement eased domestic pressure on the White House to arm the Ukrainian army, it did not put an end to such pressure, particularly in view of separatist attacks continuing after the signing of the agreement, in their effort to expand their areas of influence. On February 19, 2015, one week after the signing of the Minsk agreement, separatists forces took control the strategic town Debaltseve in eastern Ukraine, with its converging rail lines, without provoking any strong reactions from the West, apparently in the hope that the Russians remained committed to the cease-fire; during the negotiations they had insisted on the surrender of Ukrainian troops in the town.²⁷ Indicative of the administration’s hesitation was Secretary of State spokesperson Jen Psaki’s condemnation of separatist attacks near the coastal city of Mariupol and Debaltseve,

²⁴ “Remarks by President Obama and Chancellor Merkel in Joint Press Conference,” The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, February 09, 2015, <http://1.usa.gov/1DycDq>

²⁵ Rogin.

²⁶ Polyakova.

²⁷ Traynor.

and warning of "other consequences" in the event of non-compliance with the ceasefire agreement – while at the same time stressing that Washington still believed diplomacy to be the best way to end the war.²⁸

Contrasting Calculations from the US and Europe

During his press conference with Merkel, Obama also stressed that "Russian aggression" against Ukraine, had effectively "cemented unity between the United States and Europe."²⁹ Merkel affirmed the same thing, but in reality Obama hinted at the possibility of the United States providing "defensive weapons", while Merkel repeatedly rejected that in favor of a diplomatic solution. The only agreement between the two was on the need to escalate economic sanctions should Russia fail to accept a diplomatic solution that would preserve the independence and unity of the territory of Ukraine.

The German position generally reflects that of Europe; the last thing Europeans want is open warfare on European territory, pitting American weaponry against Russian. Europe has as much to lose as Russia as a result of the Ukraine crisis, and Germany has the most to lose, among European countries³⁰. Germany has wide-ranging economic and political relations with Russia, and Merkel does not want to antagonize the strong commercial sector in Germany linked to massive economic ties with the ruling class in Russia: there are 6,200 German companies doing business in Russia, with Germany investing more than 22 billion dollars, investment generating about 300,000 German jobs.³¹ German energy sources also rely heavily on Russia, with about 40% of Germany's gas coming from Russia, as well as one-third of its oil.

The German exports to Russia represent a third of total European exports. Moreover, Germany is wary of the cost of absorbing Ukraine within the European Union or NATO, since Ukraine is economically devastated, and on the brink of bankruptcy; any attempt

²⁸ "America: Russia's moves in Ukraine threaten the global system," *Reuters*, Feb 20, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1B5FL7z>

²⁹ "Remarks by President Obama and Chancellor Merkel in Joint Press Conference"

³⁰ Alina Polyakova, "Diplomatic Maneuvers". Ibid.

³¹ "German firms in Russia: Lovers, not fighters," *The Economist*, March 15, 2014, <http://econ.st/1ib87mf>

to integrate it in the European Union or NATO would be cost-prohibitive, and Germany would have to pay the bulk of such costs, as the strongest European economy.³²

The strategic security cost is figured in German and European calculations; the expansion of the borders of Europe and NATO to Russia's borders would mean the creation of a new security system with two poles on the "old continent". With the United States currently "pivoting" to the Asia-Pacific arena, Germany is particularly reluctant to have to play a major role in any new security arrangements.³³ It is true that Germany is a great economic power, but it is also an untested military power, as a result of post-World War II military force protocols, so it is wary of strategic exposure. The Germans and Europeans are subject to perform a difficult balancing act – between alliance with the United States and the demands of complex geographical realities.

In contrast, the United States does not face comparable geopolitical dilemmas to those faced by Europe, in its relationships with Russia. The United States is geographically distant from Europe and Russia, and its economic relations with Russia are very slim, thus mitigating any Russian possible economic retaliation.³⁴ The United States, with its increasing domestic production of natural gas and shale oil and its orientation towards energy sufficiency, feels none of the pressure on energy supplies that the Europeans would do, in the event of escalating tensions with Russia.³⁵ But the weakness of the US - Russian economic relations also limits the ability of the US to sanction Russia economically in the absence of European participation. Thus, the United States finds itself, like Europe, in a precarious position: it does not want to be held hostage to European considerations and sensitivities, but at the same time it cannot afford to lose its European alliance.

Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe Lamberto Zannier voiced the rationale underlying European wariness in arming Ukraine,

³² Matthew Sussex, "Should the West arm Ukraine?" *The Interpreter*, February 12, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1zNh8r8>

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

describing it as "risky"³⁶; the European-German conviction considers that there is no level of armament that the West can offer that Russia would not be able to overcome.³⁷ This is the same position that Merkel emphasized in her speech before the recent security conference in Munich. It is clear that the Russians appreciate this, just as they are well aware of the extent of European fears at the prospect of open warfare in the European arena. Hence the warning voiced by Russian member of the Duma close to Putin, Aleksei Pushkov, speaking to some 100 members of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the European Parliament, to the effect that US sending arms to Kiev could "expand the war, and turn into a real threat to the entire European security system."³⁸

Europeans still favor imposing economic and political sanctions on Russia and its officials, such as the prohibition of entry visas for some whom Europe and America consider are involved in supporting the separatists in Ukraine, the freezing of funds, and so forth. Economic sanctions have certainly hurt the Russian economy a great deal, especially with the decline in oil prices. Nevertheless, Russia has not had to renounce its ambitions in eastern Ukraine, within its strategic calculations aimed at preventing any expansion of NATO along its borders.

The Obama administration appears to feel at ease with this European approach to Russia, while continuing its attempt to intensify pressure on everyone, mostly via the threat to arm the Ukrainians, with the hope of forcing Russia to provide greater diplomatic concessions.

Conclusion

It seems that the West in general, and the United States in particular, today faces a real challenge to the structure of the uni-polar global system that arose after the collapse of the Soviet Union. After about a quarter of a century of American-Western expansion

³⁶ Julian Borger, "Arming Ukraine army may escalate conflict, west warned," *The Guardian*, February 8, 2015, <http://bit.ly/1w64Ui8>

³⁷ Norton-Taylor.

³⁸ "Ukraine crisis: 'Don't arm Kiev' Russia warns US," *BBC*, February 10, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-31356372>

and Russian retreat from the dominion of the former Soviet Union, it seems that Russia has decided that it can no longer turn a blind eye to Western attempts to breach the strategic military balance between the two sides, or encircle it geographically via the former Soviet republics. It is true that Russia invaded Georgian territory in 2008, generating at the time a tense relationship with the administration of President George W. Bush Jr, but the military intervention in Georgia was not on such a large scale, and did not bring about the current level of tension with the West. Russia today senses that there are clear American-Western attempts to contain it. According to the Russian narrative, the revolution against deposed Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich in late 2013, with his sequestration in February 2014, was orchestrated by the United States and some other European countries in order to draw closer to the Russian border, and perhaps even to launch a similar revolution in Russia.³⁹ According to this account, the United States offered Yanukovich 25 billion dollars for the development of missile interceptor pads on the Russian border in violation of the strategic balance between the two sides; his rejection of the offer effectively launched the revolution against him that had been prepared in the West.⁴⁰ Russia consequently considers that it had no choice but to act decisively to protect itself. The United States is looking for reasons to contain Russia, whether Ukraine is the pretext or someplace else. Thus, according to the Russians, what Russia has done is simply to repel Western aggression against it, rather than attempt to launch a war or revive the Russian Empire.⁴¹

Putin himself expressed this Russian conviction by saying that America "wants to freeze the international system established after the collapse of the Soviet Union and to remain the dictator who can do whatever he wishes, while others have only to comply with his interests. Maybe some would like to live in semi-occupied countries, but we do not accept that."⁴² In addition, the new Russian military doctrine, signed by Putin in December 2014, considers the strengthening of NATO's offensive capabilities on the

³⁹ "What Russia wants: From cold war to hot war," *The Economist*, February 14, 2015, <http://econ.st/1yvIwcB>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

Russian border and attempts to deploy missile defense systems in Central Europe as constituting the biggest threats facing Russia today.⁴³

The West has found itself surprised exactly where it sought to surprise Russia; seeking to re-draw the map of Russia's regional geo-strategic space, Russia took advantage of the opportunity to impose its own new maps, in line with its interests. Ukraine was nothing more than the arena for a proxy war between the two sides, after Western planners misread the expected Russian reactions and the extent of Russia's determination to confront Western pressure. Thus, Ukraine may be the gateway to a new European security system, in which it comes to constitute a buffer state between the West and Russia, with Russia maintaining its influence over large areas in the east, along with Crimea and possibly some surrounding areas, to link geographically with Mother Russia. It is striking in this context that the Minsk peace agreement between the Russian and Ukrainian parties made no mention of the Crimean peninsula. The other option is that of total war, which no one seems to want to engage in. Now that the nail-biting stage is over, the West, in general, seems likely to acquiesce to the new geo-strategic maps. Ukraine emerges as the biggest loser from the miscalculated Western adventure. Putin's penchant for adventure and gambling with the possibility of war puts him clearly at the helm.

In the broader context, there can be no doubt that Russia has paid dearly, economically and politically, for its intervention in Ukraine, but the West has paid a high price as well, possibly double the cost, including to the United States itself. The fact that the United States, unlike Europe, is immune from any substantial Russian economic retaliation does not mean that Russia is defanged, confronting the United States. There are many international arenas that Russia can kindle, such as the North Korean nuclear issue, negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program, or even Syria and Libya. According to a high-level adviser in the Russian Defense Ministry, the Russian response to US and Western pressure may go beyond Ukraine. Russia may reconsider delivery of advanced sensitive military technology requested by China, which could render it capable of inflicting significant damage to the US Navy in the Pacific, in the event of war between the two countries. According to the official, China has long requested this technology, but Russia has hitherto refused to supply it so as not to offend the United States.

⁴³ "Russia's new military doctrine names NATO as key risk," *Reuters*, December 26, 2014, <http://reut.rs/1zZNtMz>

Additionally, Russia may arm Iran and lend it support in any military conflict with Saudi Arabia, and thus raise oil prices significantly.⁴⁴

In sum, the West and the United States can inflict political and economic damage upon Russia, but a wide-ranging engagement in the Ukrainian conflict would be like entering a briar patch, in which one cannot forever avoid the thorns. As a consequence the solution in Ukraine will most likely be found in diplomacy, and will be one that takes into account Russia's interests.

⁴⁴ Matthew Bodner, "Russia Would See U.S. Moves to Arm Ukraine as Declaration of War," *The Moscow Times*, February 9 2015, <http://bit.ly/195BUg1>