

Ukraine Sanctions, Visa Restrictions Possible, U.S. Official Says

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Pro-European integration protesters arriving at a rally in the center of Kiev. **Gleb Garanich**

The U.S. is open to imposing sanctions and visa restrictions should Ukrainian authorities violently quash anti-government protests in the ex-Soviet nation, a senior U.S. diplomat said Wednesday.

Testifying at a Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing, State Department official Victoria Nuland was asked by the committee's chairman, Senator Bob Menendez, whether the U.S. administration "remains open" to sanctions and visa restrictions in response to violence against peaceful protesters in Ukraine.

"All tools of government are on the table, including those," Nuland, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, responded.

Last Tuesday, the Senate passed a resolution calling upon the President and Congress to

consider applying targeted sanctions against individuals, should the violence against peaceful protestors continue in Ukraine.

Mass street protests in central Kiev have been ongoing since Ukraine stunned the European Union on Nov. 21 by halting a long-expected association agreement to strengthen political and trade ties with the bloc. Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich opted instead for stronger ties with Moscow.

The protests took a more radical turn after riot police violently cleared downtown Kiev's Maidan on Nov. 30.

On Wednesday, a Ukrainian court banned rallies in the center of the city, raising fears that the government was preparing to tear down a large protest encampment that has been the epicenter of anti-government protests for weeks.

The Kiev court upheld a request by city authorities to ban large gatherings in the center of the capital until March 8. The ruling was dated Jan. 8 but only published Wednesday.

Opposition leaders saw the ruling as a sign that authorities were preparing to use force to disperse protesters on the Maidan, where several thousand people were gathered.

The U.S. and its EU allies have accused the Yanukovich government of going against the will of the Ukrainian people with the shift toward Russia, which provided Ukraine with a \$15 billion bailout package last month to stabilize Kiev's finances.

In testimony prepared for Wednesday's hearing, Nuland said the Ukrainian protesters "want to live in a country where their government truly represents the wishes of the people and where they can safely exercise their rights without the fear of oppression."

She also criticized acts of violence carried out by protesters, but said Washington has told Ukraine's government publicly and privately that the U.S. will "consider a broad range of tools" if "those in positions of authority in Ukraine employ or encourage violence against their own citizens."

Russia has repeatedly criticized what it describes as outside interference in the standoff between Ukrainian authorities and protesters.

Officials in Europe and the U.S., meanwhile, have accused Moscow of using economic levers to pressure Kiev into closer integration with its ex-Soviet neighbor — a charge Russian officials have denied.

Material from The Associated Press is included in this report.

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