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U.S. to Consider Delivering Arms to Ukrainian Forces, Report Says

By The Moscow Times

February 02, 2015

U.S. President Barack Obama delivers remarks at the armed services farewell in honor of Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel at Joint Base Myer-Henderson Hall in Virginia, Jan. 28, 2015.

WASHINGTON — U.S. President Barack Obama's administration is taking a new look at providing Ukrainian forces with defensive weapons and equipment in the face of a rebel offensive that shattered a five-month truce, the New York Times reported.

The newspaper on Sunday quoted U.S. officials as saying Secretary of State John Kerry and U.S. Joint Chiefs Chairman Martin Dempsey were open to discussions of the idea and that NATO military commander General Philip Breedlove now supported providing such lethal aid.

One official was quoted as saying that U.S. national security adviser Susan Rice was also prepared to reconsider her previous resistance to providing such assistance.

Kerry will visit Kiev on Thursday for talks with President Petro Poroshenko and other

Ukrainian officials. Obama voiced concern last week about renewed fighting between Russian-backed separatist and government forces in eastern Ukraine and said the U.S. was considering all options short of military action to isolate Russia..

The New York Times said eight former senior U.S. officials would issue an independent report on Monday urging Washington to send $3 billion in defensive arms and equipment to Ukraine, including anti-armor missiles and reconnaissance drones.

Fighting raged in eastern Ukraine on Sunday as pro-Russian separatists used artillery fire to try to dislodge government forces from a strategic rail hub after peace talks collapsed.

NATO and Kiev accuse Russia of sending thousands of troops to support the rebel advance with heavy weapons and tanks. Moscow denies it is directly involved in fighting over territory that the Kremlin refers to as "New Russia."

European Union foreign ministers agreed on Thursday to extend for another six months economic sanctions against Russia that had been due to expire soon. Washington has promised to tighten its own sanctions, which have helped feed an economic crisis in Russia.

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