

Russian Top Officials Warn Arming Ukraine Will Lead to Full-Blown War

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February 12, 2015



Russian President Vladimir Putin arrives in Minsk, Belarus, on Wednesday.

With increasing calls in the U.S. to supply weapons to Ukraine, senior Russian politicians have underscored fears that arms deliveries would lead to an escalation of the conflict, warning of a full-blown war.

Russia's envoy to the European Union, Vladimir Chizhov, on Wednesday suggested Moscow could respond to the U.S. arming Kiev by escalating the conflict.

Weapon supplies to Ukraine would "firstly, mean adding fuel to the fire of the conflict, and secondly and more dangerously, would increase the risk of Russia's counter-involvement, and the risk of a direct confrontation," he was quoted by Interfax as saying.

Chizhov was echoing the remarks made by senior Kremlin allies this week, including lawmaker Alexei Pushkov, who heads the State Duma's International Affairs Committee,

and President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov.

"This war can grow and turn into a real threat for the whole European security system," Pushkov said, TASS reported.

The lawmaker, who is among Putin allies sanctioned by the U.S. over the Ukraine crisis, also called weapon supplies an "extremely dangerous path," and denounced "trigger-happy" politicians in Washington, according to an interview this week with Europarl TV — the web television channel of the European Parliament.

"I don't think it [weapon delivery plan] will serve European security," he added.

Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, warned against any attempts to pressure Russia, saying that "plans to strengthen the sanction regime, isolation, weapon supplies and so on are steps that, unfortunately, are aimed at destabilizing the situation in Ukraine," the Russian News Service reported.

The dispute about whether the U.S. should heed Ukraine's appeals for military aid — and how Moscow would be likely to respond — has become a central issue in Western attempts to end the bloodshed between Russian-backed separatists and government forces in eastern Ukraine.

Supporters argue that weapon supplies would add leverage to Kiev's diplomatic efforts and make the cost of involvement too high for Moscow, forcing it to back down. Critics warn that the Kremlin is unlikely to be deterred but would respond with another round of escalation, increasing the bloodshed that has already claimed more than 5,300 lives.

U.S. President Barack Obama has indicated that he is weighing the possibility of arms supplies if diplomacy fails, having asked his staff to "look at all options," but said that he is yet to make a final decision.

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