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Ukraine Wants 'Just 1,240' U.S. Javelin Missiles to Fight Rebels

By The Moscow Times

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Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko wants more than 1,000 U.S.-made anti-tank missiles to repulse possible attacks from Russia-backed rebels, a move that would overturn Washington's policy not to send lethal weapons into the war zone in eastern Ukraine.

In an interview with The Wall Street Journal, Poroshenko said Ukraine's armed forces were seeking “just 1,240 Javelin missiles” to fend off separatist armor.

“This is absolutely fair,” Poroshenko said in the interview, which was published Tuesday, explaining that 1,240 is the same number of nuclear warheads that Ukraine voluntarily surrendered to foreign powers under the 1994 Budapest Memorandum in exchange for guarantees of territorial sovereignty — guarantees that were violated by Russia's annexation of Crimea last year and alleged meddling in eastern Ukraine.

Ukraine's government under Poroshenko has repeatedly requested lethal military assistance from the U.S. and its Western allies, something that Russia has warned against.

However, U.S. President Barack Obama's administration has so far committed only non-lethal aid — such as financial assistance, medical supplies, armored cars and radars to detect the origin of rebel artillery positions.

Javelin missiles are some of the most advanced anti-tank weapons in the U.S. arsenal. Designated a "fire-and-forget" system, the Javelin locks on to enemy tanks before firing the missile high in the air, and the warhead guides itself down on top of the target — where armor is generally thinner.

Javelins can also be used to attack buildings and take down low-flying helicopters, making them exceptionally lethal.

Though some prominent members of the Washington foreign policy community have advocated arming Ukrainian forces with anti-tank weapons to destroy rebel armor, they have stopped short of calling for Javelin missiles to be sent.

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