

The Case for Arming Ukraine

Opinion

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Sending weapons to Kyiv would reaffirm America's commitment to the post-Cold War global order while raising the cost of Moscow's continued territorial aggression.

Photo: Ukrainian soldiers at the Yavoriv Combat Training Center in June. (Photo: US Army Sergeant Anthony Jones)

By Casey Michel for the National Review, Aug 8, 2017 Last week, Michael Brendan Dougherty wrote a piece here calling for the U.S. to refrain from sending further arms to Ukraine. Unfortunately, the piece betrayed a lack of familiarity with the post-Soviet space and a broader ignorance of regional dynamics and came to a conclusion anathema to American interests, both current and future. Dougherty's conclusion — that President Trump, despite support from Congress and those in the White House, should hold off on delivering anti-tank missiles to Ukraine — rests on a handful of points. First, to Dougherty, the delivery of such missile systems would "not meaningfully deter Moscow's aggression" because the "Russian public [has] proven willing to lose troops in battle over the last two decades in vicious wars in Chechnya." To those unfamiliar with the subject, there's a whiff of truth to this argument, insofar as no amount of proposed American weaponry will allow Ukraine to defeat Russia outright. But the notion that defeating Russia outright would be the goal of any effort to arm Ukraine is simply false. No serious analyst has argued that American anti-tank arms would allow Kyiv to "beat" Moscow. Indeed, the Kremlin's regional "escalation dominance" remains one of the facts on which both sides agree. Contra Dougherty, the purpose of sending weapons to Kyiv would be to heighten the costs of continued conflict for the Kremlin, which is currently slogging through yet another year of negligible growth. Because while Dougherty may view Russia, especially its government, as willing to sacrifice sufficient troops to defend the beleaguered separatists in eastern Ukraine, all available evidence suggests the opposite.

There's a reason Russian authorities have effectively shunned public acknowledgment of the Russian forces fighting in Ukraine. Authorities have already gone so far as to arrest elderly women attempting to understand Russia's role in the region, and the country has seen lawmakers beaten simply for attempting to document Russian soldiers' deaths. This is because while many within Russia continue to support the Russian-backed separatists in the region, their support is purely rhetorical, and will remain so as Russians' belts keep tightening. At last check, barely 10 percent of Russians were willing to send their children to fight on the state's behalf in eastern Ukraine — a reality the Kremlin, recently shaken by sudden, unprecedented protests, must recognize. Dougherty, unfortunately, fails to discern between Chechnya (a constituent republic within Russia proper) and eastern Ukraine (a slice of the fanciful "Novorossiya" whose star has only waned since 2014). He may believe that Russians stand ready to sacrifice for greater autonomy in eastern Ukraine, but such claims only highlight his thin understanding of post-Soviet dynamics. Read more at: <http://www.nationalreview.com/article...serves-american-interests>