

Trump authorizes \$41.5 million sale of lethal US weaponry to Ukraine

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The Trump administration approved the sale of \$41.5 million worth of US-made “lethal defensive weapons” to Ukraine this month. It is the largest deal since Congress authorized such sales in 2014 after the government that was brought to power in a US-backed, fascist-led coup met stiff resistance from pro-Russian separatists in the country’s eastern provinces. This latest weapons deal portends an escalation in the nearly four-year-old war in Ukraine, which continues to claim victims and remains a flashpoint between the US and Russia.

First reported by the *Washington Post*, the latest deal, which was signed off on by President Donald Trump, allows for the sale of M107A1 sniper rifles, .50 caliber Browning machine gun rounds and associated parts and materiel for maintenance of the weapons. Utilizing the large rounds, the M107A1 is particularly effective against light armored vehicles and fortifications.

The report of Trump’s decision to begin selling lethal weapons to Kiev was denounced as a “dead-end technique, which would unleash bloodshed again,” by Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, according to TASS.

While the Trump administration reportedly informed the leaders of a handful of Congressional committees of the decision on December 13, no public announcement was made of the measure, which will only further heighten tensions and increase the possibility of war between the US and Russia, the world’s largest nuclear armed powers.

The Obama administration backed the rabidly nationalist movement to oust pro-Russian President Victor Yanukovych, which erupted in February of 2014 after he backed out of signing an association agreement with the European Union. The Kremlin responded to

Yanukovych’s ouster by supporting pro-Russian separatists in the east and annexing Crimea after a popular referendum in the majority Russian-speaking peninsula registered popular support for joining the Russian Federation.

With the support of Washington, Kiev deployed its military and openly fascist militias against the separatists in the east in an effort to crush any opposition to the newly installed pro-Western regime of billionaire oligarch Petro Poroshenko.

Since April of 2014, more than 10,000 soldiers and civilians have been killed and nearly 25,000 wounded in the fighting; more than 2 million Ukrainians have been displaced from their homes.

Alleged Russian military intervention in eastern Ukraine has been used, initially under Obama and now under Trump, to justify a provocative buildup of US and NATO military forces throughout Eastern Europe and in the Baltic States.

Approximately 4,000 US soldiers are currently stationed on Russia’s western flank on a permanent rotating basis as part of a buildup initiated by the Obama administration to check “Russian aggression.” Additionally, several hundred soldiers from the US Army National Guard have been deployed to western Ukraine to participate in training exercises with the Ukrainian military.

Prominent Republican critics of Trump in Congress praised the president’s decision to deliver arms to Kiev and pressed him to go further.

“I welcome reports the administration has taken the long-overdue step of approving the sale of lethal defensive weapons to help the Ukrainian people defend themselves from Russian aggression,” Arizona Senator John McCain, chair of the Senate Armed Services Committee, said in a tweet. However, he went on to

declare that it “must only be a first step. I urge the President to authorize additional sales of defensive lethal weapons, including anti-tank munitions.”

Tennessee Senator Bob Corker, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, released a statement in which he said the decision to provide the Ukrainian regime with American weaponry “reflects our country’s longstanding commitment to Ukraine in the face of ongoing Russian aggression.”

While the weapons deal is scaled back from a plan which had been drawn up by US Defense Secretary Gen. James Mattis and officials at the State Department earlier this year, including the sale of Javelin anti-tank missiles and antiaircraft weapons, the decision opens the floodgates for the much larger and lethal weapons deals that have been demanded by Kiev and pushed for in Congress.

“We have crossed the Rubicon, this is lethal weapons and I predict more will be coming,” a senior Congressional official told the *Washington Post*. The 2018 defense budget signed by Trump on December 12 authorizes the US government to provide as much as \$500 million worth of “defensive lethal assistance” to the Ukrainian government.

The Obama administration had publicly contemplated delivering the same range of lethal weapons but held back, supplying only “nonlethal” military equipment, in part to assuage concerns raised by Germany, France and other EU countries which opposed the move. The European powers, which receive a significant portion of their natural gas from Russia, in particular Germany and France, have sought to cement a ceasefire deal in the Ukrainian conflict while maintaining a pro-EU regime in Kiev.

The Trump administration’s decision on weapons sales follows the public announcement earlier this month that the cabinet of Liberal prime minister Justin Trudeau had approved the commercial sale of lethal weaponry by Canadian arms dealers to Kiev. Conservative MP James Bezan told reporters that the decision will allow for the sale of Javelin anti-tank missiles.

Next to Washington, the government in Ottawa has been the leading backer of the Poroshenko regime, first under Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper and now Trudeau. As part of Operation UNIFIER 200 Canadian soldiers have been deployed to western

Ukraine to participate in military training exercises. The Liberal government recently announced that the military mission will continue until at least March 2019.



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