

U.S. to Send Assistance to Ukraine

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WASHINGTON — The U.S. will send additional nonlethal military support to Ukraine, U.S. Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said Thursday, in the latest U.S. move to reassure allies following Russia's annexation of Crimea and a buildup of Russian forces on the Ukrainian border.

“Earlier this morning I called Ukraine’s acting defense minister to tell him that President Obama has approved additional nonlethal military assistance for health and welfare items and other supplies,” Hagel said, speaking at a Pentagon news conference after talks with Polish Defense Minister Tomasz Siemoniak.

The new support follows NATO’s announcement on Wednesday that it would send more ships, planes and troops to Eastern Europe “within days.” NATO has made clear it will not intervene militarily in Ukraine, which is not a NATO member.

The nonlethal aid to Ukraine is aimed both at bolstering the Ukrainian military as it seeks to halt the advances of pro-Russian forces in the east, as well as showing symbolic U.S. support for Ukraine’s efforts. But the aid is unlikely to satisfy the Obama administration’s critics, who say what the Ukrainians really need are weapons to defend themselves.

“We ought to at least, for God’s sake, give them some light weapons with which to defend themselves,” Senator John McCain, a leading Republican, said over the weekend.

The administration has said it is considering aid requests from Ukraine, but is not actively considering sending weapons, ammunition or other lethal assistance.

“We are obviously evaluating requests and looking at ways that we can support the Ukrainian government,” White House spokesman Jay Carney said Wednesday. “But our focus is on continuing to put pressure on Russia so that it understands that the international community is united when it comes to support for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

Speaking on this matter Tuesday, Carney sidestepped questions about whether the U.S. would supply military-style equipment like body armor that is not technically defined as lethal aid. However, U.S. officials said that type of assistance is not expected to be part of the new aid package under consideration.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly before the aid package is finalized.

U.S. assistance to Ukraine’s military has so far been limited to about 300,000 ready-to-eat meals, which were shipped in late March. The U.S. has also authorized a \$1 billion loan guarantee for Ukraine’s government.

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