

The Hill

Senators launch Ukraine Caucus



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Sens. Rob Portman (R-Ohio) and Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) are launching the Senate Ukraine Caucus to boost ties between Washington and Kiev.

The move comes as pressure grows on the Obama administration to supply lethal weapons to Ukraine's military to counter pro-Russian separatist groups backed by Moscow.

The "key focus" of the brand new Senate Ukraine Caucus "will be to play a prominent role in advocating for and coordinating more robust American efforts to support Ukraine," Portman said in a

statement.

“In the face of continued Russian aggression in the region and repeated assaults on the sovereignty of its borders, Ukraine needs a steadfast ally in the United States,” Durbin, the Senate’s No. 2 Democrat, added.

“This bipartisan group sends a clear message that Ukraine has the unflinching support of the Ukrainian community in Illinois and in the United States Senate.”

The announcement comes just hours after President Obama refused to rule out providing weapons to Ukraine if diplomatic efforts between Russia and other world powers fail.

In a joint press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, Obama said he had asked his team to “look at all the options” that could change Russian President Vladimir Putin’s behavior toward Ukraine.

However, no decision on arms has been made, and there is no “specific point” that would greenlight giving Ukraine weapons. Last week, Portman and Durbin led a bipartisan group of 15 senators in a **letter** to the president urging him to provide weapons to Kiev.

That call was quickly **echoed** by members of the Senate Armed Services Committee.

Sen. Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), a member of the Armed Services panel, said Obama’s refusal to supply arms to Ukraine “is another low point in a presidency which has many to choose from.”

“This latest episode once again shows that under President Obama’s leadership it is better to be America’s enemy than her friend,” he added.

“It’s a sad fact that our enemies are seldom challenged while our friends are constantly undercut and abandoned.”