



Problems and Capability Gaps in Military Aid for Ukraine

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International support for Ukraine has played an important role in preserving its independence, but is still not enough to stop the Russian offensive in Donbas. With the current high-intensity conflict, military supplies to Ukraine are not at the necessary level and not arriving on time. Many political, administrative, and technical issues are slowing down necessary military aid. Western partners might turn to much better, already available options to replace Ukraine's damaged and lost heavy weapons, while also supporting the countries of Central Europe.

Political Issues. After more than [three months of Russia's full-scale aggression against Ukraine](#), military operations are focused on the Donbas region, where the growing intensity of the fighting has led to substantial personnel and equipment losses on both sides. The respective sides' military calculations and potentials suggest the fighting will last at least until winter, so the next 3-6 months are crucial for locking in territorial gains and minimising losses before a stalemate sets in or there is a political end to the conflict. Russia, even without official mobilisation of troop reserves, still has the advantage over Ukraine in many military capabilities, such as tanks, infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), heavy artillery, guided missiles, and air and naval forces. Russia increases the impact of its advantage by eliminating Ukrainian ammunition stores and repair centres, and is counting on the potential weakening of Western political will to support its enemy with equipment, weapons, and ammunition.

The military supplies for Ukraine reflect changes in the nature of the conflict, the accuracy of assessments, and the partners' individual interests. During the last phase of Russia's preparations for the invasion (December 2021-February 2022) [around 20 countries supplied Ukraine](#) with light infantry weapons, anti-tank guided missiles, and man-portable air defence systems. The prevailing assumption among the Western governments was that Russia would quickly take Kyiv, so the supplied weapons were to be useful in defensive operations and guerrilla-style resistance to occupier forces. In that period, 33 countries delivered to Ukraine huge quantities of medical first aid and personal protective equipment, which

also reduced losses among the defenders. Later (in March 2022), aid was expanded to ammunition, mobile short-range air defence systems, and air-to-air missiles compatible with Ukraine's Soviet-made platforms. In parallel, deliveries were initiated of Soviet-era tanks, IFVs, and heavy artillery from [Czechia](#), Poland, and [Slovakia](#).

Military supplies for Ukraine was for a few months bilateral in nature, without close coordination and detailed planning. Moreover, and particularly during the time preceding the war, Germany blocked the transfer of former East German D-30 howitzers from Estonia, as well as the use of the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA). Also, options for filling air force gaps in Bulgaria, Poland, and Slovakia if they were to give their MiG-29 airplanes to Ukraine were not supported by the U.S. and all of NATO. The protracted conflict and growing needs of Ukraine's military resulted in the U.S. launching the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (UDCG) in April 2022. This group works with more than 100 liaison officers from interested countries and Ukraine at the U.S. base in Ramstein, Germany. UDCG is organised into three working cells—intelligence information exchange, Ukraine's current military needs, and its future military needs—with a meeting each month at the ministerial level (the last one was in Brussels on 16 June). UDCG has expanded from an initial 43 to now 50 countries. In the context of [German and French policies](#), it is unlikely that the group will be using NATO structures like the NSPA. Moreover, formal and close cooperation between NATO and the UDCG would fuel [Russian propaganda of a "proxy war" between NATO and Russia](#).

Within the group, the leaders are the U.S.-[UK](#) tandem, with an important contribution of Central European countries, all of them interested at least in some return to the status quo before 24 February 2022.

Military Capabilities Gaps. Russia's air and missile strikes on the Ukrainian defence industry and repair plants are preventing the replacement of lost equipment or delivery of new or repaired weapon systems. At the same time, Ukraine's Western partners are limiting transfers of the most advanced weapons for political reasons and security of the technologies. Moreover, even older generations of NATO-standard weapons require many weeks or months of training, and their logistics needs take even more time to build up. In this context, the simplest option to help Ukraine is to provide it Soviet-era systems, ammunition, and spare parts from Central Europe but these will be exhausted in time.

The most important and urgent capabilities gaps are in heavy artillery and armoured weapons. The high intensity of the conflict means that for Ukraine, its stock of [Soviet-calibre ammunition soon will be running short](#). In Central Europe, there still are production lines and reserves that can supply Ukraine with Soviet-type Grad artillery rockets. Other opportunities are emerging, such as the 150 howitzers in the NATO 155 mm calibre already delivered by NATO member states and Australia, which should be accompanied by a constant ammunition stream, supported by counter-artillery radars and reconnaissance drones. Deliveries of loitering munitions (so-called kamikaze drones) might also help Ukraine but will not fill the quantitative gap between the Ukrainian and Russian artillery. The first tranche of seven HIMARS and MLRS rocket systems from the U.S. and UK does not even meet Ukraine's minimum needs in this area. Russia's initiative on the battlefield might be stymied by Ukraine with additional manoeuvring tactics and equipment, such as new tanks and IFVs. In this area, Ukraine has operational T-72-family tanks from Central Europe and others captured from Russia. The mobility of the Ukrainian land forces might be augmented by the delivery of around 250 M-113 and 100 BMP-1-family vehicles, as long as these deliveries are backed by more vehicles because significant losses are expected along the front.

The much more complicated challenges are linked to Ukraine's air and naval forces. In the short term, these gaps were filled with post-Soviet and Western [short-range air defence systems](#). The delivery of long-range Slovakian S-300 systems was a unique case, but Ukraine is appealing for further, particularly Western-made systems, to fill this important gap. As an interim solution, Ukraine might also see deliveries of missiles and spare parts for multi-role MiG-29 airplanes. Air support for Ukrainian land forces is currently filled by the lightly-armed Turkish [TB2 Bayraktar](#) drones and additional transfers of Mi-17 and Mi-24 helicopters. So far, though, there is no confirmation of media speculation about the U.S. intention to deliver heavier armed MQ-1C Gray Eagle

drones. Moreover, for Ukraine's long-term defence, there is the necessity to rearm its air forces with Western-made planes, for instance, the priority would be A-10-type ground attack airplanes. Ukraine's limited fleet and coastal defences likely cannot remove the blockade of its Black Sea ports. Despite the sinking of Russia's Moskva missile cruiser with Neptune missiles, such a success will be hard for Ukraine to replicate as it has only about a dozen of these weapon launchers, and its production facility was bombed. This gap might be filled with some shorter range anti-ship missiles like the U.S.-made Harpoon. Obviously, for effective sea and coastal deterrence and defence of Russia in the region, Ukraine needs longer-range missiles, as well as a feasible plan to reconstitute even part of its naval forces (Ukraine lost 75% of its vessels and bases in Russia's occupation of Crimea).

Recommendations. The next 3-6 months are crucial for the defence of Ukraine. The war is existential for Ukraine and should be seen as such by its partners. The risk of even more significant territorial, material, and human losses is still real due to Russia's advantage in the few categories of heavy weapon systems. Military aid to Ukraine is so far insufficient to match the high-intensity war taking place and the supplies need to be transferred on a larger scale and at a higher tempo.

The UDCG's work requires continued [American leadership](#) and a [high budget for military aid](#), fortunately envisioned in the U.S. Ukraine Lend-Lease Act. Due to multiple-month delays, the majority of Germany's promises of weapons are not credible for Ukraine. The declared amount, quantity, and timing of the German weapons will have relatively little impact on the current situation on the front. Short-term weapon transfers from the U.S. and UK to Ukraine must also factor in the need to preserve [defence capabilities in Central Europe in the context of potential threats from Russia and Belarus](#).

A coalition of willing states should continue with determination to support Ukraine with heavy weapons. Many of Ukraine's military needs and gaps might be filled in the interim by the UDCG with spare weapons and ammunition from geographically distant countries (even outside Europe, such as from Canada and Australia). Ukraine's main partners should also look at more than the current needs and temporary solutions for enhancing the Ukrainian air and naval capabilities. The strategic importance of these areas requires reconstitution of both capabilities to check the long-term threats from Russia in the region.

At the same time, there is also the necessity to increase international sanctions targeting the Russian military industry, with realism about the short-to-medium term impacts of these on Russia's capabilities to produce tanks and guided missiles. The cases of Iran and North Korea shows that such highly sanctioned states can still achieve some independence from advanced Western technologies, and Russia for sure will try the same.