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Military Assistance and War Outcomes

The First Year of Russia's Full-Scale War in Ukraine

Strategic Paper No. 18

Tony Lawrence

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Introduction

NATO and EU members, and several other states, provided considerable military assistance to Ukraine in the year following Russia's full-scale invasion of the country on 24 February 2022. This assistance included both financial mechanisms to support military ends and the donation of substantial volumes of a broad and growing range of weapons systems. NATO and EU member states also likely assisted Ukraine by providing military intelligence that impacted the course of the war.¹ However, given the lack of public information on the supply and use of intelligence, this aspect is not considered here.

According to estimates by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, whose 'Ukraine Support Tracker' is the most credible source of data on military and other assistance to Ukraine, supporting states provided some 68.5 billion euros' worth of arms and military equipment on a bilateral basis between 24 January 2022 and 24 February 2023; those supporting states that are also EU members provided an additional 3.6 billion euros' worth in the same period through common funding.² This support undoubtedly changed the course of the war: notwithstanding the enormous courage, spirit and adaptability of the Ukrainian people, it is almost certain that without foreign military assistance, Ukraine would not have been able to fight for so long, or to have achieved many of its successes on the battlefield.

Despite their public pledges to help Ukraine to the greatest possible extent, however, the supporting states provided far less military assistance than Ukraine requested, both in terms of quantity, and levels of sophistication and lethality. They worried about provoking a response from Russia, and about the depletion of their own inventories. They sometimes quarrelled openly about the level and nature of assistance they should provide, while setting red lines only to later step over them. Providing support to best match Ukraine's needs while at the same time preserving vital cohesion among the supporting states has thus proved complex.

Russia too was a recipient of military assistance, although this was not as visible as the support to Ukraine, or at anything approaching similar levels. It was also most likely on a more commercial basis. Nonetheless, this support too shifted the war's course. Perhaps the most notable example is Russia's ultimately unsuccessful attempt to force Ukraine to the negotiating table by attacking energy infrastructure in the winter of 2022 - 3 – a tactic that would have been difficult to implement without the supply of inexpensive Iranian loitering munitions.

Military Assistance to Ukraine

Donor states have assisted Ukraine's defence sector since its independence in 1991. Aside from the programme to dismantle the nuclear arsenal left in Ukraine upon the dissolution of the Soviet

¹ Julian Borger, "US intelligence told to keep quiet over role in Ukraine military triumphs," *The Guardian*, 7/5/2022, accessed on 11/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/2s38djux>

² Military assistance was provided bilaterally by EU and NATO countries (excluding Albania, Cyprus, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, Montenegro, and North Macedonia) and Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. Christoph Trebesch et al., "The Ukraine Support Tracker: Which countries help Ukraine and how?," *Kiel Working Papers*, no. 2218, Kiel Institute for the World Economy (February 2023), accessed on 23/5/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/4xcy78fu>

Union, assistance before 2014 mostly came under the rubric of security sector reform and included, for example, education and training programmes, and support to Ukraine's defence management reforms. After Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and intervention in eastern Ukraine in 2014, states such as Lithuania, Poland, the US, and the UK also supplied non-lethal military equipment including body armour, helmets, vehicles, night and thermal vision devices, heavy engineering equipment, radios, patrol boats, rations, tents, counter-mortar radars, clothing, and medical equipment.³ In 2017, the US decided to also provide lethal weapons including sniper rifles, rocket-propelled grenade launchers, Javelin anti-armour missiles, and systems for countering uninhabited aerial systems.⁴ While relatively small in scale, such donations provided the Ukrainian Armed Forces with niche advantages in the war in eastern Ukraine: night vision equipment, for example, allowed personnel to operate at times when Russian forces could not, while advanced radios protected troop locations.⁵

As Russia amassed forces on Ukraine's borders ahead of its full-scale invasion, the list of donors of non-lethal and lethal military equipment grew to include states such as Canada, Estonia, the Netherlands, and Slovakia.⁶ This list would increase rapidly once the invasion began, but already a pattern was emerging among European donors in which states to the east of the continent – those that feel more keenly the threat to their own security from Russia – were ready to provide military assistance of greater lethality, in greater volumes, and more rapidly than were states to the west. In terms of total bilateral financial, humanitarian, and military support to Ukraine relative to GDP, Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, and Poland occupied four of the top five ranked positions, while wealthier states such as France, Italy, and Spain provided considerably lower levels of support.⁷

Several factors motivated the supporting states to provide Ukraine with military assistance. These included a simple wish to help the Ukrainian people defend themselves and their sovereignty (as the Ukrainians so clearly indicated was their intention) against an illegal and brutal aggression, and to make this support concrete through practical action. More broadly, NATO member states were clear that Russia was “the most significant and direct threat to Allies' security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.”⁸ Russia's aggression in Ukraine was a clear and direct affront to international law, which European states, especially small states, regard as a bedrock of their own security. Furthermore, before the war, Russia had demanded a new, legally binding European security architecture, which would include the withdrawal of NATO forces and weapons from states that were not members of the Alliance in 1997 and effectively encode spheres of influence on the

3 Måns Hanssen, “International Support to Security Sector Reform in Ukraine: A Mapping of SSR Projects,” *Folke Bernadotte Academy* (2016), pp. 81-97; Christina L. Arabia, Andrew S. Bowen & Cory Welt, “U.S. Security Assistance to Ukraine,” *Congressional Research Service*, IF12040, 27/2/2023, p. 1.

4 Arabia, Bowen & Welt, pp. 1 - 2.

5 Sébastien Roblin, “Why U.S. military aid is working in Ukraine,” *NBC*, 15/5/2022, accessed on 4/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/47hyest8>

6 Trebesch et al.

7 Latvia: 1.24% of GDP; Estonia: 1.10%; Lithuania: 0.93%; [Norway: 0.70%]; Poland: 0.64%; France: 0.07%; Italy: 0.06%; Spain: 0.06%. Trebesch et al.

8 “Madrid Summit Declaration. Issued by NATO Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Madrid 29 June 2022,” *NATO*, 29/6/2022, accessed on 3/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/3v95s8bf>

continent, degrading the independence and security of many European states.⁹ If Russia's aggression in Ukraine succeeded, it might be emboldened to take further actions, including challenging NATO, in an attempt to enforce these demands. Yet at the same time, the Allies were clear from the start of the full-scale war that they would not become directly involved and risk a NATO-Russia conflict that could spiral out of control.¹⁰ Providing military assistance was, in effect, a compromise, both helping Ukraine's cause while alleviating pressure for direct intervention.

President Zelenskyy also used the high stakes for Europe as leverage in his requests for further military assistance.¹¹ Even so, most supporting states were still cautious in their risk assessments about the type of assistance they were ready to provide and the speed at which they were ready to do so. Throughout the first year of the full-scale war, they imposed limitations on themselves (although these were rarely explicitly declared in public) only to step over them later as the war proceeded. Thus, in the first weeks of the war, supporting states were ready to provide only small, portable, 'defensive' weapons. They later, step-by-step, ratcheted up support to provide heavier Soviet-made weapons, modern artillery pieces and air-defence systems of their own design and manufacture, and modern armoured vehicles. Along the way, they vigorously and publicly debated the merits of adding combat aircraft, which they excluded, and main battle tanks, which they announced in January 2023 they would supply.

In gradually stepping up assistance, the supporting states responded to three main external factors: the changing character of the war; Ukraine's demonstration of its abilities to make good and responsible use of increasingly lethal weaponry; and Russia's reaction. Fear of an adverse Russian reaction to their provision of military assistance was the main reason for caution among the supporting states. Sporadic upsurges in violence aside, however, Russia's reaction was minimal. Its rhetoric was menacing, including threats to attack arms shipments and allusions to the possible use of nuclear weapons, but it did not attempt to stop the delivery of donated equipment by direct means. Russia appeared to be as keen to avoid a war with NATO as NATO was to avoid a war with Russia, and its war remained confined to the territory of Ukraine and confined to the original warring parties. The supporting states were thus able to incrementally escalate their assistance without escalating the conflict – a form of 'salami tactics'.¹² It is unlikely, however, that they consciously defined this course at the start of the conflict, rather their strategy has been a response to events: to borrow from the language of business, their strategy has been closer to the 'emergent' than the 'deliberate' end of the strategy formulation spectrum.¹³

9 Stefan Meister, "The Future of European Security – What Does Russia Want?" *German Council on Foreign Relations*, 17/1/2022, accessed on 3/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/3d993ttb>

10 Nik Popli, "How NATO Is Responding to Russia's Invasion of Ukraine," *Time*, 25/2/2022, accessed on 3/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/5ewr8hnt>

11 "'We are defending you,' says Zelensky on EU visit," *Le Monde*, 9/2/2023, accessed on 12/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/2p9x48xs>

12 Thomas Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1966), p. 66.

13 Henry Mintzberg & James A. Waters, "Of Strategies, Deliberate and Emergent," *Strategic Management Journal*, vol. 6, no. 3 (1985), pp. 257 - 272.



The Early War

Russia's military performance in the weeks following its full-scale invasion was surprisingly poor. It displayed failings at all levels: from the planning assumptions that Kyiv would rapidly capitulate, and Russian troops be greeted as liberators; through a failure to establish air superiority, deeply inadequate logistic support to manoeuvre formations, and poor coordination between arms; to equipment inadequacies, and a lack of abilities and professionalism at the tactical level.¹⁴ This was a surprise for most security policy makers and analysts. The results of the 'new look' reforms initiated by Russia after the poor performance of its armed forces in Georgia in 2008, and the capabilities Russia had demonstrated in the war in Syria and in its annual command-staff exercises (Vostok, Centre, Kavkaz, Zapad) suggested that Russia's victory would be rapid and efficient.

Ahead of and immediately following Russia's 24 February invasion, supporting states thus limited their lethal military assistance to small, portable weapons such as Javelin (anti-armour) and Stinger (air defence) systems. These systems require little training and logistic support and were immediately available in relatively large numbers.¹⁵ Their extensive use in NATO and EU countries meant that the pool of countries able to donate them was large, allowing the burden of assistance to be widely shared. These weapons were certainly intended to enhance Ukraine's ability to defend against the type of attack Russia was expected to launch – airstrikes to paralyse Ukraine's air defences, large-scale armoured attacks with close air support, and airborne infantry insertions – but they would also be useful in the insurgency that was expected to follow Russia's inevitable victory and occupation.¹⁶

Military assistance has both military value, and informational value. In providing this type of assistance at this stage of the war, supporting states wanted to signal not only their determination to back Ukraine, but also their wish not to escalate the conflict. Their public communications thus stressed that their donations were limited to "defensive" weapons.¹⁷ In practice the distinction between "offensive" and "defensive" weapons is blurry and related at least as much to the way they are used as to their designation: for example, facing shortages in its own precision guided munitions, Russia has used air defence missiles in a ground attack role.¹⁸ Nonetheless, in stressing the "defensive" label, supporting states established the first of several informal limits on the type of assistance they would provide – limits that would soon be overtaken by the course of the war.

¹⁴ Robert Dalsjö, Michael Jonsson & Johan Norberg, "A Brutal Examination: Russian Military Capability in Light of the Ukraine War," *Survival*, vol. 64, no. 3 (2022), pp. 8 - 13.

¹⁵ By the end of 2022, the US alone had committed more than 8 500 Javelin and 1 400 Stinger missiles. "U.S. Security Cooperation with Ukraine," *U.S. Department of State*, 6/1/2023, accessed on 11/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/bdd8hfnt>

¹⁶ David Ignatius, "The Biden administration weighs backing Ukraine insurgents if Russia invades," *The Washington Post*, 19/12/2021, accessed on 16/1/2023 at: <https://tinyurl.com/47fjh8et>

¹⁷ For example: David Vergun, "U.S. Supplying Ukraine With Defensive Weapons as Rapidly as Possible, Says Defense Official," *U.S. Department of Defense*, 4/4/2022, accessed on 11/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/2p8yffzy>; "UK will continue providing Ukraine with defensive weapons -PM's spokesman," *Reuters*, 14/3/2022, accessed on 11/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/3mm5urxj>

¹⁸ "Britain says Russia has increased its use of air defence missiles," *Reuters*, 22/7/2022, accessed on 11/1/2022, at <https://tinyurl.com/42u83a9e>



Some supporting states were even more cautious and limited their assistance to just non-lethal military equipment. Germany, for example, was widely criticised for its offer to supply 5 000 helmets to Ukraine as a signal of support.¹⁹ This incident illustrated two other features related to military assistance that prevailed throughout the first year of the full-scale war. The first was the less than full consensus among supporting states on what should be supplied and when, despite a strong consensus on the need to support Ukraine. Dealing with these differences required a certain amount of management of the coalition of supporting states if they were to present a united front, both to the Kremlin and to their own populations. Another episode of the early war that made this very visible was the public relations debacle over Poland's proposal to supply MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine. Various versions of the proposal at various stages of progress were reported in the media, but ultimately Poland's requirement that the US should formally deliver the aircraft to Ukraine and replace them in Poland's inventory, proved too much for the Americans.²⁰ Ukraine got nothing, while the supporting states looked indecisive and disjointed.

The second, related feature was the role of peer pressure in increasing military assistance. Germany was heavily criticised throughout the first year of the war, for example for its early insistence that it would not send weapons or approve export licenses for third countries to re-export weapons of German origin, for making promises to supply weapons that were either delayed or not kept, and for its reluctance to provide heavy weaponry. Yet, partly due to external and internal pressure, Germany was persuaded to follow the lead of others and by the end of the year emerged as the third largest donor in monetary terms of military assistance to Ukraine (after the US and the UK).²¹

Disagreements were perhaps inevitable among the almost 30 states that provided military assistance to Ukraine, especially in the extraordinary circumstances of a major war in Europe. They should not, however, distract from the fact that the military assistance of this early period was immensely important on the battlefield.²² It also had strategic effect: backed by donated weapons, Ukraine's defensive efforts prevented Russia from reaching its initial strategic objectives, causing it to abandon its assault on Kyiv and focus on much more limited aims in eastern and southern Ukraine.²³ The war that proceeded from the late spring of 2022 was vastly different from the one Russia had envisioned.

¹⁹ Daniel Boffey & Philip Oltermann, "Germany's offer to Ukraine of 5,000 helmets is 'joke', says Vitali Klitschko," *The Guardian*, 26/1/2022, accessed on 11/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/bdzew278>

²⁰ Amber Phillips & Miriam Berger, "Why Washington shut down Poland's offer to give Ukraine fighter jets," *The Washington Post*, 10/3/2022, accessed on 11/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/t4k4jm6t>

²¹ Trebesch et al.

²² Stavros Atlamazoglou, "Easy-to-use handheld weapons provided by the US are helping Ukrainians shred Russian tanks and aircraft," *Business Insider*, 21/3/2022, accessed on 16/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/37kz4mkb>

²³ "Pentagon Press Secretary John F. Kirby Holds a Press Briefing," U.S. Department of Defense, 27/4/2022, accessed on 16/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/2pakc6mw>



The Assistance Ratchet

Russia's withdrawal from the Kyiv region allowed its forces to concentrate closer to their supply lines and thus capitalise on their advantages in indirect fire. Russian warfare places a high premium on various forms of indirect fire (self-propelled guns, rocket artillery, anti-tank artillery), which are used in great numbers to destroy adversary forces at distance from positions of relative safety.²⁴ The shift eastwards not only changed the course of the war, but also its character. To succeed in the war of attrition that would follow, Ukraine would also need longer-range fires in substantial numbers. If they were to continue to assist Ukraine militarily, the supporting states would no longer be able to hide behind the pretence of only providing "defensive" weapons. The stepping up of the supply of weapons that were more overtly "offensive" began with items such as artillery pieces, former Soviet tanks (some 250) and armoured vehicles, and US Switchblade drones.²⁵

The supporting states were still, at this point, somewhat reluctant to provide NATO-standard equipment, in particular armoured vehicles. The public rationale was that the Ukrainians already operated ex-Warsaw Pact equipment and would be more easily able to maintain and use it, but the coalition of supporting states, led by the US, seems again to have worried that providing NATO equipment would be seen by the Kremlin as an escalation.²⁶ Even when the US agreed to provide the 70-km-range High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) alongside varieties of multiple launch rocket systems donated by other supporting states, concern about how Moscow would react if Ukraine used it (or even had the potential to use it) to strike targets inside Russian territory prevented the Americans from also supplying the complementary longer-range (300 km) Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS). The US concern was probably unfounded: there is no evidence that Ukraine used foreign-donated weaponry to strike at targets beyond its borders, for example in high-profile attacks as those on the Belgorod oil depot and Engels air base (Ukraine had a policy of not commenting on operational matters and did not claim responsibility for these attacks).

HIMARS, which began to arrive in Ukraine in June 2022, proved very valuable and was used to strike key targets such as higher formation command and control centres and logistics depots behind the front lines, and to attrit Russian forces at far higher rates and ranges than was previously possible.²⁷ HIMARS, and other weapons donated by supporting states also allowed Ukraine to begin counter-offensives in the east and south of the country during the summer of 2022. The daring counter-offensive in Kharkiv clearly demonstrated the value of donated weapons in the hands of skilled Ukrainian operators, albeit in this case against a weakened Russian force. The impact was not only

²⁴ Scott Boston & Dara Massicot, "The Russian Way of Warfare: A Primer," Perspective PE-231-A, *RAND Corporation*, 7/12/2017, pp. 10-11, accessed on 16/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/mr29bf5y>

²⁵ Dan Sabbagh, "As Ukraine war enters new phase, can western arms turn the tide?" *The Guardian*, 6/4/2022, accessed on 16/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/5e56pe5j>

²⁶ Paul McLeary, "Biden resists Ukrainian demands for long-range rocket launchers," *Politico*, 18/5/2022, accessed on 16/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/yc3kwj5h>

²⁷ Xander Landen, "HIMARS Effectiveness in Ukraine War Explained by Officer Fighting Russians," *Newsweek*, 24/7/2022, accessed on 16/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/2p9fs2mw>

operational, but again had strategic effect in forcing Russia to mobilise thousands of troops, with the attendant risk of alerting the Russian population to the facts that the war in Ukraine was not the “special military operation” that had been presented to them, and that the annexation of the Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts was a sham.²⁸ The Kherson counter-offensive, while somewhat less dramatic, also saw Russia lose vast swathes of captured territory and its forces withdraw to east of the Dnipro river, their apparently chaotic withdrawal delivering another blow to their reputation.²⁹

It is possible that having put Russia on the back foot through these operations, Ukraine may have proceeded to liberate still more territory. However, at this point, its opportunities were limited by a lack of ammunition for both its Warsaw Pact equipment and NATO-standard donated weapons such as US 155mm howitzers.³⁰ Furthermore, although the need to shift donations from ex-Soviet to NATO weapons was entirely predictable if the supporting states were to continue to assist Ukraine's military efforts, caution had so far prevented them from providing the necessary armoured vehicles and longer-range air defence systems from their own inventories.³¹ In fact, decisions to do so would have been required much earlier, as Ukrainian operators and maintainers are unable to effectively use NATO systems without several weeks of training, while supporting states require a similar period of time to prepare their holdings for use on the battlefield, and perhaps a great deal longer for equipment held in storage at low readiness.

These decisions would come in the closing months of 2022 when, in anticipation of a return to a war of movement in spring 2023, the supporting states once again stepped over a self-imposed threshold and began to supply NATO-standard heavier weapons, many of which might be classified as “offensive”, from their own inventories. These commitments included medium- and long-range air and missile defence systems, multiple launch rocket systems, armoured personnel carriers and infantry fighting vehicles and, eventually, in January 2023, main battle tanks.

Kyiv had requested tanks for many months. Their modern-day employment in combined arms (counter-) offensives alongside armoured vehicles, artillery pieces, and other arms (which supporting states had already begun to supply) might suggest that the decision to provide them would be straightforward. However, the mythology associated with tanks and the huge combat power of modern NATO-standard designs ensured that the debate over their supply was especially intense, with Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz at the centre. Scholz's approval was necessary not only for German Leopard 2 tanks to be sent to Ukraine, but also, due to restrictions in their export licenses, for the Leopard 2s of many other NATO Allies to be transferred to a new end user. The Leopard 2 was by some measure the best

²⁸ Isabelle Khurshudyan et al., “Inside the Ukrainian counteroffensive that shocked Putin and reshaped the war,” *The Washington Post*, 29/12/2022, accessed on 1/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/d8muwsxt>

²⁹ Peter Beaumont et al., “Ukraine troops enter centre of Kherson as Russians retreat in chaos,” *The Guardian*, 11/11/2022, accessed on 1/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/36vv256k>

³⁰ Dan De Luce, Courtney Kube & Carol E. Lee, “Who will win in Ukraine? It could hinge on which side can secure enough artillery ammunition,” *NBC News*, 13/12/2022, accessed on 1/2/2023 at: <https://tinyurl.com/yc7sx4dh>

³¹ Frederick W. Kagan et al., “Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, January 29, 2023,” *Institute for the Study of War*, 29/1/2023, accessed on 1/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/mwrrhy47x>



solution for Ukraine as many units existed in the inventories of NATO states (although only a fraction of them at the highest levels of readiness) and the pool of potential donors was wide. Assembling a large fleet of a single vehicle type would simplify logistic support for the Ukrainian armed forces and allow the supporting states to share the burden of supply, training, and maintenance. But Scholz, who throughout the first year of the full-scale war was cautious on military assistance to Ukraine and had several times crossed his own firmly stated red lines, prevaricated. As a result, he was bitterly attacked by other NATO member states, especially those in the Alliance's eastern territories, by Ukraine, and by his own government coalition partners.³² Tensions rose further when the breakthrough expected at a 20 January meeting of the defence ministers of Ukraine's allies at Ramstein airbase failed to materialise, only for Scholz to announce a positive decision five days later.

The key to unlocking the deal was the parallel US commitment to provide Ukraine with M1 Abrams tanks.³³ The Abrams is a far less suitable option as it is maintenance heavy, has a gas turbine engine, which runs on aviation fuel, rather than the diesel engine of European tanks, and could not, in any case, be delivered for several months. Nonetheless, for Scholz, unity among the supporting states – or, at least, securing concrete US backing for the supply of main battle tanks – was sufficiently important for him to delay Germany's agreement. Somewhat ironically, the playing out of the whole episode on a very public stage showed Ukraine's allies at their most disunited since the invasion had begun, surely offering some hope to Russian president Vladimir Putin that he might yet succeed in his strategy of driving a wedge between the allies and undermining their military assistance to Ukraine.

Main battle tanks are not a panacea for any army, and Ukraine would inevitably require more military assistance: both larger volumes of what the supporting states had already provided, and more sophisticated and lethal weapons. One question, mainly for the US, was over the supply of ATACMS. The US resisted this and by the end of the first year of the full-scale war had only committed to a compromise solution: it would supply Ground Launched Small Diameter Bombs, a 150 km-range artillery rocket compatible with HIMARS launchers.³⁴ Another difficult question would be the supply of fighter aircraft, which Ukraine had also requested since the earliest days of the full-scale war. The favoured option would probably be the US F-16 which, like the Leopard 2, was in service with many of the supporting states, offering the prospect that it could be delivered in reasonably large quantities and the burden of maintenance, training and other logistic support shared by a coalition of willing partners. While some supporting states suggested that they would be ready to supply these aircraft, others, notably the US, which must agree to their re-export, and Germany, firmly stated that this would not happen.³⁵

32 Hans von der Burchard et al., "Tanks, no tanks: Scholz holds key to Leopards for Ukraine, but waits for Biden," *Politico*, 19/1/2023, accessed on 2/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/y9ab6bte>

33 "Germany, US agree to send battle tanks to Ukraine: Reports," *Al Jazeera*, 24/1/2023, accessed on 1/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/58xtcfsc>

34 Tom Balmforth & Dan Peleschuk, "Boost for Ukraine as U.S. expected to send longer-range rockets," *Reuters*, 1/2/2023, accessed on 1/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/2p96rv6m>

35 Dan Sabbagh, "Poland could supply Ukraine with F-16 fighters, Kyiv suggests," *The Guardian*, 30/1/2023, accessed on 3/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/dyb6z7sk>; Dan Sabbagh, "US and UK rule out sending fighter jets to Ukraine," *The Guardian*, 31/1/2023, accessed on 3/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/mvm7cjx3>



Assistance Considerations and Mechanisms

While the supporting states' developing attitudes to the pace and nature of military assistance to Ukraine were largely driven by external factors, internal considerations also influenced their thinking. Perhaps the most important was how to provide Ukraine with what it needed to defeat Russia's aggression, while retaining sufficient capability for their own defence and deterrence. On the one hand, it might be argued that Ukraine's immediate needs should be satisfied, and the problem of restoring NATO's capabilities left until less urgent times. As one prominent US commentator put it, "If there's anything that Ukraine can use in any NATO warehouse from Vancouver to Vilnius, that's a scandal. Empty every inventory."³⁶ On the other hand, supporting states, in particular those on NATO's eastern edges, believed that Russia remained a threat they must still be ready to defend against.³⁷ A further complicating factor was that the limited capacity of manufacturers to produce replacement equipment, while the global shortage of parts such as microelectronics, castings, and explosives meant that rapid replenishment of the supporting states' inventories would be difficult.³⁸ Thus, supporting states, including those most forward leaning on assisting Ukraine militarily, retained capability in their own inventories that Ukraine has repeatedly requested.

A second consideration was how to match donations most closely with Ukraine's needs. Ukraine's demands were, naturally, high, even sometimes unrealistic when measured against the rate and nature of deliveries.³⁹ If supporting states were unwilling or unable to meet these demands in full, it was important that they should coordinate their assistance to ensure that Ukraine received a balanced inventory of capabilities. Further, as the donations of the supporting states shifted more towards NATO-standard equipment, Ukraine, which had no experience in operating such systems may not have been the best judge of its own needs. One high-profile example is HIMARS, reportedly provided by the US in response to Ukraine's request for the more heavily armed, but slower, more maintenance heavy, and thus less suitable M270 MLRS.⁴⁰

A third consideration was the need to maintain public support. Among the supporting states, large majorities of the public agreed that their country should support another country that has been attacked but should also avoid becoming directly involved militarily.⁴¹ This would appear to be a strong mandate for a policy of military assistance. A worrying trend, however, was the growing

³⁶ David Frum, *Twitter*, 12/6/2022, accessed on 16/1/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/4rv3waks>

³⁷ For example: "Pevkur to German media: War has not greatly weakened Russia's armed forces," *ERR*, 27/11/2022, accessed on 3/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/mtzy7czy>

³⁸ Steff Chávez et al., "How arming Ukraine is stretching the US defence industry," *The Financial Times*, 31/1/2023, accessed on 9/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/z8wh2z67>

³⁹ In June 2022, for example, one of President Zelenskyy's advisers tweeted that Ukraine needed "heavy weapons parity" to include 1 000 155mm howitzers, 300 MLRS [Multiple Launch Rocket System], 500 tanks, 2 000 armoured vehicles and 1 000 drones. [@stevechavez](https://twitter.com/stevechavez), *Twitter*, 13/6/2022, accessed on 3/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/57kac44x>

⁴⁰ Jake Thomas, "HIMARS Better for Ukraine Than Multiple Launch Rocket System: Ex-General," *Newsweek*, 26/7/2022, accessed on 9/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/4h3k28fk>

⁴¹ Averages among 28 states of 70% and 71% respectively—these figures have barely changed throughout the war. European Parliament, "Public Opinion on the War in Ukraine," *European Union*, 2/2/2023, accessed on 13/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/yicywtfrx>



number of Americans who believed that the US was providing too much support for Ukraine – 25% after one year of full-scale war, up 19 points since March 2022 according to one poll.⁴² One factor may have been a perception among US observers that, in comparison with the US, Europe was not doing enough to assist Ukraine and that the burden was not being fairly shared.⁴³

In part to address these considerations, supporting states established various mechanisms to coordinate their assistance and support each other in supporting Ukraine. The least successful of these were the various bilateral backfilling schemes created in the early months of the war. Their intention was to enable countries in central and eastern Europe to supply ex-Warsaw Pact equipment to Ukraine on the promise that others would replace these donations with NATO-standard equivalents. Analysts identified four such schemes from open sources.⁴⁴ Through them, Germany was to replace T-72 tanks and BMP-1 infantry fighting vehicles donated by the Czech Republic, Greece, Slovenia, and Slovakia with vehicles from its own fleet. However, none of the deliveries from Germany have materialised, apparently due to disagreements among the parties on an appropriate calculation of equivalence.⁴⁵

Two other schemes, initially reported as backfilling, involved deployment rather than transfer of capability: the UK deployed British Challenger 2s to Poland for a six-month period to allow Poland to donate T-72s to Ukraine; while the US, Germany and the Netherlands deployed Patriot air defence systems to allow Slovakia to donate ex-Warsaw Pact S-300 air defence systems (the Dutch and US batteries were later withdrawn).⁴⁶ These deployments are probably better categorised as measures to bolster NATO's deterrence presence on its eastern flank in response to a deteriorated security environment, rather than backfilling. Given Slovakia's border with Ukraine, the Patriot deployment may well also have had a role in protecting the supporting states' weapons shipments. Finally, a third mechanism sometimes labelled backfilling was the injection of additional funds into the US Foreign Military Financing programme, which provides grants for allies to purchase replacement American military hardware.⁴⁷

A considerably more successful mechanism was the EU's innovative use of an existing financial instrument, the European Peace Facility, to provide Ukraine with 3.6 billion euros worth of military assistance.⁴⁸ The facility, established in 2021, has an operations pillar to finance the common costs

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Jeremy Shapiro, "The coming transatlantic rift over Ukraine," *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 3/10/2022, accessed on 13/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/42wzzdhy>

⁴⁴ Trebesch et al., pp. 21 - 22.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Rob Olver, "British Challenger 2 tanks stored at Sennelager head to Poland," *Forces.net*, 5/7/2022, accessed on 4/2/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/2p98zp3w>; "Slovakia to lose Patriot battery," *The Slovak Spectator*, 11/1/2023, accessed on 4/2/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/5n74bjvr>

⁴⁷ Joe Gould, "US pledges \$391 million for Euro allies to buy American to backfill weapons donations to Ukraine," *Defense News*, 25/4/2022, accessed on 4/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/2jynmw9>

⁴⁸ Council of the European Union, "Ukraine: Council agrees on further military support under the European Peace Facility," *European Union*, 2/2/2023, accessed on 4/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/3kukv9ma>

of certain EU operations and an assistance measures pillar to finance military and defence capacity building in third states.⁴⁹ The assistance measures pillar was used to compensate EU member states for the equipment they supplied to Ukraine. The member states pay into the peace facility proportionate to their gross national income, thus Germany, Europe's largest economy, provided a little over 25% of the funding.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, smaller EU member states, which would otherwise struggle to replace donated equipment, could expect to receive substantial reimbursements.⁵¹

The International Donors Coordination Cell, established at US European Command, Stuttgart, proved to be another valuable coordination mechanism. Here, Ukrainian personnel work alongside personnel from supporting states to best match Ukraine's demand for weapons and equipment with supplies from the supporting states. As part of this, the cell brokers multi-party arrangements that bring together, sometimes from many sources, elements including weapon systems, logistics vehicles, ammunition, and training packages, as well as transportation to Ukraine's borders, thus ensuring that Ukraine receives a complete capability that a donor state may be unable to provide alone.⁵²

The Ukraine Defense Contact Group, meanwhile, an initiative of the US Secretary of Defense, is a forum for defence ministers to coordinate military assistance to Ukraine. Operating at the political level, and attended by around 50 defence ministers, it allowed supporting states the opportunity both to consider how best to support Ukraine in the longer term, and to compare their own levels of support with a view to ensuring that the burden of providing military assistance was shared as fairly as possible.

Military Assistance to Russia

Military assistance to Russia in the first year of the full-scale war did not follow the same pattern as assistance to Ukraine – indeed, it is not clear that it should be classified as 'assistance' at all. The countries that supplied Russia risked international censure and potentially damaging secondary sanctions and were only prepared to do so covertly, and most likely on a commercial or otherwise mutually beneficial basis. Nonetheless, a handful of states that might be counted among those motivated to challenge the present global order supplied Russia with weapons and equipment that shifted the progress of the war in its favour.

Iran, Russia's closest supporter, provided military assistance with the greatest impact (aside from Belarus, whose support for Russia's invasion – albeit under great pressure from Moscow – made it,

⁴⁹ European Council and Council of the European Union, "European Peace Facility", *European Union*, 10/5/2023, accessed on 23/5/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/mwem8wjv>

⁵⁰ Trebesch et al.

⁵¹ Joakim Klementi, "Estonia hopes to recoup from EU full €400 million military aid to Ukraine," *ERR*, 23/1/2023, accessed on 4/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/akpzt674>

⁵² Vivienne Machi, "Inside the multinational logistics cell coordinating military aid for Ukraine," *Defense News*, 21/7/2022, accessed on 5/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/4nv2u2na>

in effect, a cobelligerent).⁵³ In autumn 2022, Russia adopted a new strategy of attacking Ukraine's civilian energy infrastructure with the clear intention of cutting energy supplies for the approaching winter and breaking the will of the civilian population. The attacks began on a large scale on 10 October. Within two weeks, more than a third of Ukraine's high-voltage nodal switching stations had been damaged or destroyed and by mid-November, around half of the population had experienced energy blackouts.⁵⁴ While some of the attacks were carried out using Russia's own long-range precision weapons (which had been in short supply throughout the war), it was the availability of large numbers of Iranian Shahed-136 loitering munitions that made the attacks economically and military feasible. Ukraine claimed high success rates in shooting down these systems – upwards of 85%.⁵⁵ But they were cheap enough to use in large numbers and only a small number needed to survive to cause extensive damage to unhardened energy infrastructure targets, which were then hard to repair or replace. Russia's strategy was ultimately unsuccessful. Nonetheless, it caused huge physical, economic, and psychological damage. Moreover, it forced Ukraine to divert resources, including vital air defence systems, from the front lines, to seek additional foreign assistance in securing spare parts and repair equipment, and even to plan for the huge logistic effort that would be required to evacuate large urban areas.

As a result of Iran's support for Russia, the defence partnership between the two states broadened and deepened significantly. Russia was reported to be considering supplying Iran with advanced weapons systems such as Su-35 fighter jets and S-400 air defence systems, with potentially destabilising impacts in the Middle East region. It launched an Iranian intelligence satellite (which is perhaps also supplying Moscow with intelligence data from Ukraine) and developed trade relationships that help both countries circumvent international sanctions.⁵⁶

Unlike Iran, North Korea publicly supported Russia in its war on Ukraine and was one of the very few states to recognise the independence of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics. According to US intelligence sources, in the first year of fighting North Korea also provided Russia with artillery shells, infantry rockets and missiles, including some for use by the notorious Wagner Group, in numbers that were described as significant, but unlikely to change the outcome of the war.⁵⁷ North Korea denied these claims. Like Iran, North Korea, a state with few allies or trading partners, stood to benefit politically and economically from its relations with Russia. Russia, for example, opposed further UN sanctions on North Korea and took steps to strengthen its economic

53 Riley Bailey, Kateryna Stepanenko & Frederick W. Kagan, "Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, December 11," *Institute for the Study of War*, 11/12/2022, accessed on 13/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/2wzah682>

54 "Ukraine: Russian Attacks on Energy Grid Threaten Civilians," *Human Rights Watch*, 6/12/2022, accessed on 6/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/ycxb6y7c>; Michael Birnbaum, David L. Stern & Emily Rauhala, "Russia's methodical attacks exploit frailty of Ukrainian power system," *The Washington Post*, 25/10/2022, accessed on 6/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/yckj6tv5>

55 "Ukraine shot down 85-86% of Russian drones involved in latest attacks - air force," *Reuters*, 17/10/2022, accessed on 9/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/mrxptmc8>

56 Robbie Gramer, "Iran and Russia Are Closer Than Ever Before," *Foreign Policy*, 5/1/2023, accessed on 6/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/5h8nht85>

57 David Brunnstrom & Idrees Ali, "White House says North Korea supplying Russia with artillery shells," *Reuters*, 3/11/2022, accessed on 9/2/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/4zp9tz2f>; "Press Briefing by Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre and NSC Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby," *The White House*, 20/1/2023, accessed on 9/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/ybw6zdw9>

ties with the country that included reopening rail links and considering the use of North Korean workers to rebuild breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine.⁵⁸

China's refusal to condemn Russia's aggression and to impose sanctions was part of a pragmatic international stance that attempted to balance indirect political support for Russia against a reluctance to damage its own economic and political relations with the rest of the world. China's quiet support likely contributed to Russia's confidence that it could reduce its own defence in its east by deploying forces to Ukraine, but there is no evidence that China provided Russia with the weapons that President Putin would likely have wished for, given that the military partnership between the two countries had substantially grown in recent years.⁵⁹ US sources suggested, however, that Chinese companies supplied Russia with non-lethal support, such as navigation systems, jamming technology and jet fighter parts, at least some of it with dual military and commercial use.⁶⁰

Conclusion

Throughout the first year of Russia's full-scale war in Ukraine, a coalition of NATO, EU, and other states, motivated by both moral considerations and their own security interests to see Russia's aggression fail provided substantial volumes of military assistance to support Ukraine's defence. This assistance took the form of financial aid for military purposes and, more visibly, donations of weapons and military equipment. Although the supporting states were consistently unwilling or unable to meet Ukraine's demands in full, they were emboldened by the progress of the war and Russia's limited reaction to their contributions to progressively provide growing numbers of weapons of greater sophistication and lethality.

In doing so, they had to balance Ukraine's immediate warfighting needs against the requirements to maintain their own defences and preserve cohesion amongst themselves. To assist with this, and to ensure that the burden of supporting Ukraine was shared as fairly as possible, they established a number of new cooperative mechanisms some, such as the EU's innovative use of its European Peace Facility, more successful than others.

Notwithstanding the great courage, innovation, and skill of the Ukrainian armed forces, it is highly unlikely that they would have achieved many of their spectacular successes on the battlefield, or even have been able to sustain the fight for so long, without military assistance from third states. More importantly, Ukraine was able to turn tactical- and operational-level successes achieved with these donations into strategic-level outcomes, for example in forcing Russia to abandon its assault on Kyiv and to mobilise tens, perhaps hundreds of thousands of reserves for a war it expected to win in days.

⁵⁸ Josh Smith, "Explainer: Russia and North Korea forge closer ties amid shared isolation," *Reuters*, 4/11/2022, accessed on 9/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/27n7bu8h>

⁵⁹ Brian Hart et al., "How Deep Are China-Russia Military Ties?," *CSIS* (2023), accessed on 11/2/2023, at: <https://tinyurl.com/3vpe35hx>

⁶⁰ Ian Talley & Anthony DeBarros, "China Aids Russia's War in Ukraine, Trade Data Shows," *The Wall Street Journal*, 4/2/2023, accessed on 9/2/2023, at <https://tinyurl.com/yahy6cyr>



Russia too received military assistance in the first year of its war. This was, however, covert, on a smaller scale and largely provided on a transactional basis. While this support shifted the course of the war, notably in enabling Russia's attempt to undermine Ukraine's resolve by attacking its civilian energy infrastructure, its impact was far smaller than that of the assistance provided to Ukraine.

After a year of intense fighting, the war showed no sign of ending. If Ukraine's allies wished to see Russia's aggression defeated, but were not ready to intervene directly, they would need to continue delivering military assistance in large volumes. Many of the obstacles to doing so had already been crossed but sustaining cohesion and public and political support against the background of likely further heated debates, for example over the supply of NATO-standard fighter aircraft, would continue to be a challenge. While Ukraine's victories were theirs alone, the supporting coalition could be inspired by the evidence that their donations had been instrumental in enabling Ukraine's tactical, operational, and strategic successes, and motivated by the consideration that the outcome of the war would depend, to a large extent, on their continued will to supply weapons and equipment.



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