

War in Ukraine: free to read

War in Ukraine

Military briefing: how the west started the biggest arms push since the cold war

Countries sending protective gear and missiles to Ukraine must overcome logistical hurdles



Ukrainian territorial defence forces with an anti-tank rocket launcher in the outskirts of Kyiv on Wednesday as the Russian military advances on the capital © Efremlukatsky/AP

John Paul Rathbone in London, **Roman Olearchyk** in Lviv and **Henry Foy** in Brussels 8 HOURS AGO

Stay across the latest Ukraine coverage

🔔 Get instant email alerts



A fighter jet is not always a fighter jet. Sometimes it is only a plane.

“It depends on what the jet carries,” said a European defence official. “A plane is just a platform; it depends on whether it carries weapons or not.”

The distinction is an important one that goes to the heart of the vast supplies of weapons that western countries are sending into Ukraine.

While Nato members are leading the effort, the transatlantic military alliance itself has played no role in shipments or co-ordination to avoid the risk of Moscow viewing it as an escalatory step that could expand the war following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

“It is a fine line to tread,” said one senior European official, who distinguished between offensive weapons, such as the fleet of MiG-29 fighter jets [Poland had offered to Ukraine](#) this week, and primarily defensive weapons such as anti-tank rockets or air defence systems that western countries are supplying in the largest European arms supply push since the start of the cold war.

Western military aid to Ukraine



Sources: House of Commons Library; Popular Mechanics; Euronews
© FT

Many countries have openly advertised the equipment they are dispatching.

Ben Wallace, the UK defence secretary, said on Wednesday that Britain had so far sent 3,615 NLAW anti-tank missiles and would soon start sending Javelin anti-tank weapons. It was also looking to supply portable Starstreak anti-aircraft missiles.

The Nordic states have also been transparent. Denmark said it had so far provided

2,700 anti-tank weapons, Norway 2,000 M72 anti-tank weapons and Sweden 5,000 Pansarskott m/86 anti-tank weapons.

“Please do not spread the word that certain countries provide weapons to our country. Refrain from commenting on this,” Oleksii Reznikov, Ukraine’s defence minister, said on Wednesday. It was, he added, “a very delicate area that requires an extremely balanced approach to public comment. Especially during the war.”



A Javelin anti-tank weapon of the type the UK says it will be sending for use by Ukrainian forces © MOD/PA

Even so, officials and analysts say Poland is already playing a central role as a supply hub, as are Slovakia and Romania. The main logistical challenge is to overcome border bottlenecks and deliver the supplies into the hands of the Ukrainian forces that need them.

“What we don’t want is for all the aid to go down one channel, because that puts it more at risk,” said a senior diplomat from a country sending both lethal and non-lethal aid. “If you look at the maps and the potential for chokepoints, that is something we are going to have to watch.”

One night on a road in central Ukraine last week, the highway was closed so that army convoys including trucks could have priority. Ukrainian fighter jets flew overhead.

So far, there is little public evidence that Russian forces have intercepted the supply convoys, although on Tuesday Jens Stoltenberg, Nato’s secretary-general, cautioned Russia that attacking allied supply lines would represent a dangerous escalation.

“The allies are helping Ukraine uphold their right for self-defence, which is enshrined in the UN Charter,” he said.

The US on Wednesday approved a \$13.6bn spending package for Ukraine, with \$6.5bn dedicated to defence spending. Adjusted for inflation, that is more than the landmark \$400mn package the US provided Greece and Turkey in 1947 in a move that marked the start of US cold war policy in Europe and, two years later, the foundation of Nato.

The next logistical challenge is to distribute weapons and protective equipment to troops in the field, who typically have only 10 days of supplies. That Ukrainian soldiers may be unfamiliar with the mix of weapons, be they German anti-tank weapons systems or Finnish sniper rifles, can also render them useless.

“Typically, requests are for body armour, secure radios, helmets and night-vision [equipment],” said Oleksandr Danylyuk, Ukraine’s former national security chief, who has joined the civilian territorial defence mission and shared with the Financial Times a screenshot of requests from one unit that included items ranging from drones to fleeces, boots and machine gun lubricant.

It is cold comfort that Ukraine’s Russian opponents are also suffering from over-extended supply lines, and lack ammunition, medical supplies, regular warm food and sleep. They also “have to sit in [cold] trenches or in vehicles without the engines running because they are short of fuel”, said one western defence adviser.

But the assault is less than three weeks old, Russia’s forces are regrouping and Ukraine’s need for supplies is only going to rise, say officials and analysts. The types of weapons they need will also change.

“If they can only be equipped with small arms, that will not be enough,” the adviser said. “It also needs military expertise to train new soldiers and long-range weapons to counteract those [such as artillery] that Russia is using.”

Danylyuk agreed: “Ukraine will need more anti-tank busters, anti-aircraft systems . . . [and] long-range anti-aircraft and anti-missile defence systems.”

But to continue fighting, and to win, “we will need modern western fighter jets and attack helicopters”, he added.

Additional reporting by Valentina Pop and Andy Bounds in Brussels, Erika Solomon in Berlin. Richard Milne in Oslo. Victor Mallet in Paris. Eleni Varvitsioti in Athens.

Marton Dunai in Budapest, Daniel Dombey in Madrid, Amy Kazmin in Rome, Jude Webber in Dublin

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2022. All rights reserved.
