

War in Ukraine

Nato chief says it is inevitable Ukraine will join defence alliance

Western leaders pledge to support Kyiv on second anniversary of Russia's invasion as doubts over US aid mount



Volodymyr Zelenskyy, speaking alongside Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni at Hostomel airport, said the war with Russia had to end on Ukraine's terms to endure the country's independence © Benoit Doppagne/Belga/dpa

Isobel Koshiw in Kyiv and **Amy Kazmin** in Rome FEBRUARY 24 2024

Jens Stoltenberg said there was no doubt that Ukraine would join Nato as western leaders gathered in Kyiv to pledge support and mark the second anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion.

The Nato chief said on Saturday that Russian President Vladimir Putin "started this war because he wanted to close Nato's door . . . but he has achieved the exact opposite: Ukraine is now closer to Nato than ever before".

He said Nato was helping Kyiv to make its forces "more and more interoperable" with the defence alliance and would open a joint training and analysis centre in Poland.

"Ukraine will join Nato. It is not a question of if, but of when," he insisted.

The anniversary falls as US funding for Ukraine's war effort falters, creating a shortage of arms and ammunition. With American aid in doubt, European support has grown increasingly important.

A \$60bn aid bill has been held up in Congress by a dispute between Democrats and Republicans over illegal immigration and security on the Mexican border.

On Friday, Biden called on Republicans to approve the bill "before it's too late" for

Ukraine.

Biden visited Kyiv in 2023, just before the first anniversary, but did not travel to Ukraine for this weekend's G7 meeting or send a representative.

After the meeting, part of which was held virtually, G7 leaders expressed confidence that Ukraine could still triumph against Russian forces.

“We are determined to dispel any false notion that time is on Russia's side, that destroying infrastructure and livelihoods has no consequences for Russia, or that Russia could prevail by causing Ukraine to fail economically,” they said in a statement.

“Russia should not be able to indefinitely delay payment it owes.”

Earlier on Saturday, at a ceremony at Hostomel airport, where in 2022 Ukrainian troops turned back Russian forces who were advancing on the capital, European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen lauded Kyiv's resistance, saying: “You saved your country, you saved Europe.”

Writing on X on Saturday, Von der Leyen said the EU would back Ukraine financially, economically, militarily and morally “until the country is finally free”.

Von der Leyen also said that the first tranche of a €50bn aid package — €4.5bn — would be transferred to Ukraine in March.

The EU Commission president was in Kyiv together with Italian prime minister Giorgia Meloni — who assumed the G7 presidency in January — Alexander De Croo of Belgium and Canada's Justin Trudeau for talks with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Canada and Italy announced after the talks that they had signed security guarantees with Ukraine, which are designed to formalise support for Ukraine for a period of 10 years. Ottawa also pledged an additional \$2bn in financial and defence aid.

[Nato](#) representatives, US senators and European and UK parliamentarians, as well as former British prime minister Boris Johnson, also travelled to Kyiv on Saturday to meet Ukrainian officials.

Speaking at Hostomel alongside western leaders, Zelenskyy said that the war must end on Ukraine's terms to ensure its independence. “Any normal person wants the war to end,” he said. “But none of us will allow our country to end.”

Ukraine's top general, [Oleksandr Syrsky](#), thanked Kyiv's partners for their support, adding on Telegram: "Every projectile, every tank, every armoured vehicle is, first of all, saving the life of a Ukrainian soldier."

Countries such as Japan, Sweden, Canada, Denmark and the Netherlands announced billions of dollars worth of military aid in the run-up to the anniversary of the invasion.

But military experts maintain those commitments are insufficient to plug the hole created by Congress's inability to pass the \$60bn aid package.

The US has been the biggest source of military aid for Ukraine, sending \$46bn since the beginning of the invasion, as well as a further \$28bn in other assistance.

The EU's four-year financial package of €50bn will struggle to cover Ukraine's economic needs. The country's budget deficit for 2024 alone is about \$40bn.

Last week, Biden blamed a lack of US support for Ukraine's retreat from the eastern Donetsk town of Avdiivka.

Zelenskyy recently criticised western allies for what he called an "artificial deficit of weapons". The EU has delivered less than half of the artillery shells it had promised by spring 2024.

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