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Security guarantees to Ukraine

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Summary

At the NATO summit in Vilnius in July 2023, President Zelenskyy sought firmer guarantees on Ukraine’s future membership of the alliance. Beyond the vague commitment set out at the Bucharest summit in 2008 that Ukraine would become a member of NATO, [President Zelenskyy instead wanted a clear timeframe for accession and security guarantees](#) from its member states.

In a [Summit Communiqué](#), NATO leaders said that “Ukraine’s future is in NATO” but that the alliance would be “in a position to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join the Alliance when Allies agree and conditions are met”.

Instead, allies agreed a “substantial package of expanded political and practical support” to bring Ukraine closer to NATO, including exemption from NATO’s Membership Action Plan process, the creation of a NATO-Ukraine Council and a multi-year programme of security assistance.

Long-term security guarantees were offered outside of the NATO framework by the G7 member states. While welcoming those security commitments, President Zelenskyy made clear that they could not be a substitute for Ukraine’s eventual membership of NATO.

The UK was the first country to conclude a bilateral security agreement with Ukraine on 12 January 2024. Germany and France followed suit on 16 February 2024.

1

What has NATO offered Ukraine?

“Support for Ukraine is not charity, it’s an investment in our own security”.

[NATO Secretary General](#), 16 January 2024

Although no timeframe was offered to Ukraine, NATO leaders provided a clearer path to membership at the Vilnius summit in July 2023. The summit agreed a three-part package of political and practical support.

Despite not offering a clear timeline for accession, President Zelenskyy said, “what’s most important is to have results” and that “we can see some specific points, making us close to NATO”.¹

¹ NATO, [Joint Press Conference](#), 12 July 2023

Exemption from Membership Action Plan process

Ukraine will not be required to complete [the Membership Action Plan process](#), which is a programme of advice, assistance and practical support offered to aspiring NATO nations. Ukraine's path to membership will now be a one-step process with an invitation extended when allies agree and conditions on membership are met.²

Creation of the NATO-Ukraine Council

The [NATO-Ukraine Council](#) replaces [the NATO-Ukraine Commission](#), which has, since 1997, been the main body through which the NATO-Ukraine relationship has developed and the forum through which consultation on issues of common security concern has taken place.³ To assist in the commission's work, in 2008 an Annual National Programme (ANP) was developed to help guide Ukraine's reform efforts.

At Vilnius, the decision was taken to replace the commission with the NATO-Ukraine Council, to reflect the strengthening of political ties and the increasing integration of Ukraine within NATO. The council is a joint body where allies and Ukraine sit as equal participants (as opposed to a meeting of NATO allies and a partner). It will provide for joint consultations, decision making (unlike the previous commission) and serve as a crisis consultation mechanism between NATO and Ukraine.

Unlike the NATO-Ukraine Commission, Ukraine will itself be able to convene a meeting of the council for crisis consultations. NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, has described the council as "a much stronger, much more important political entity" than the partnership established by the NATO-Ukraine Commission.⁴

The inaugural meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council took place on 12 July 2023. The Council has met several times over the course of 2023 and early 2024 to:

- [Address the security situation in the Black Sea and Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative](#)

² Those conditions are examined in greater detail in Library Research Briefing, [NATO enlargement: Ukraine](#)

³ The NATO-Ukraine Commission was established by the [NATO-Ukraine Charter on a Distinctive Partnership](#).

⁴ NATO, [Joint Press Conference](#), 12 July 2023

- [Take forward the measures agreed at Vilnius](#)
- [Discuss energy security](#)
- [Ukraine's Annual National Programme for 2024](#)
- [Discuss air defence.](#)

Military assistance to Ukraine

A multi-year programme of military assistance will help the Ukrainian armed forces rebuild, transition from Soviet-era doctrine and equipment, and become fully interoperable with NATO forces. That programme will be based on [the Comprehensive Assistance Package \(CAP\) which was established in 2016 and supplemented at the Madrid Summit in 2022](#).

Under the enhanced CAP, allies will also support Ukraine in dealing with the “physical and social consequences of war”, including support for demining efforts, medical assistance and examining lessons learned.⁵

2

G7 security guarantees

On the sidelines of the Vilnius summit, and outside of the framework of NATO, members of the G7 (the US, Canada, the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Japan) signed a [Joint Declaration](#) (PDF) committing to the creation of long-term security guarantees for Ukraine.

While the G7 Declaration creates a framework, those guarantees will be formalised through bilateral security commitments and arrangements, in accordance with the legal and constitutional requirements of each country.

To date, 30 countries have signed the Joint Declaration.⁶

Objectives of the security guarantees

Those bilateral agreements would be framed according to the following objectives:

⁵ NATO, [Relations with Ukraine: Practical support to Ukraine](#) (accessed 16 January 2024)

⁶ [“The West must provide security guarantees to Ukraine”](#) Geopolitical Monitor, 10 January 2024

- Ensuring sustainable Ukrainian forces capable of defending Ukraine and deterring Russian aggression in the future. To achieve that end, any arrangements will include:
 - Continued provision of security assistance and modern military equipment across the land, air and sea domains. Priority capabilities will include air defence, artillery and long-range weapons, armoured vehicles and combat air assets, such as fast jet aircraft. Increased interoperability with Euro-Atlantic partners will be a key objective.
 - Intelligence sharing and cooperation.
 - Training and training exercises for Ukrainian armed forces.
 - Support to develop Ukraine’s defence industrial base.
 - Support for cyber defence and to address security and resilience, including the ability to respond to hybrid threats.
- Strengthening Ukraine’s economic stability and resilience, including through reconstruction and recovery efforts.
- Providing technical and financial support for Ukraine’s immediate needs arising from the Russian invasion, as well as enabling Ukraine to continue implementing the reform agenda which underpins its aspirations to EU and NATO membership.

Commitments regarding future aggression by Russia

In the event of future aggression by Russia, the G7 declaration commits its signatories to “immediately consult with Ukraine to determine appropriate next steps”. Specific bilateral arrangements will set out the intention to provide Ukraine with “swift and sustained” security assistance, military equipment, economic assistance and to consult with Ukraine on its needs as it exercises its right to self-defence under the UN Charter. Economic and other costs will also be imposed on Russia.⁷ What the arrangements will not replicate is the [Article V mutual defence clause](#) that lies at the heart of the NATO alliance.

The Joint Declaration also reiterates the intention of the G7 member states to hold Russia accountable for its actions, including war crimes and other international crimes committed in, and against, Ukraine. Russian sovereign

⁷ Primarily through the sanctions framework. See Library research briefing, [Sanctions against Russia](#)

assets will also be held in the respective jurisdictions of each country until Russia pays reparations to Ukraine. To enable reparations, the declaration recognises the need for an international mechanism to be established.

The declaration also states that the EU and its member states, “stand ready to contribute to this effort” and welcomes the participation of any other countries that wish to contribute.⁸

Precedents for the Joint Declaration

The G7 declaration is the first time that this many countries have collectively agreed to establish comprehensive long-term security arrangements with another country.⁹ However, it is not entirely without precedent. After Sweden and Finland were formally invited to join NATO in June 2022, some allies, including the UK, offered bilateral security assurances to both countries should either be attacked during the accession period.¹⁰ President Biden has also compared any possible agreement to the [security assistance that the US provides to Israel](#) (PDF).¹¹

Not a substitute for NATO membership

President Zelenskyy welcomed the commitment to long term security guarantees for Ukraine but made clear that they cannot be viewed as a substitute for eventual Ukrainian membership of NATO. In a press conference on 12 July 2023, he said that while “these guarantees will be valid on our way to NATO... the best guarantee for Ukraine is to be in NATO”.¹²

This is a view that has been shared by Prime Minister Rishi Sunak. Calling the security guarantees a “new high point in international support for Ukraine”, he has firmly stated the view that the commitments “are not a substitute for NATO membership”.¹³

President Biden has said that Ukrainian NATO membership “is going to happen”, referring to the security commitments as “commitments we were going to make... until it becomes official”.¹⁴

⁸ G7, [Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine](#) (PDF), July 2023

⁹ Downing Street, [Press release](#), 12 July 2023

¹⁰ The UK Government signed non-binding political declarations with Finland and Sweden in May 2022: [United Kingdom-Finland Statement](#), 11 May 2022 and [UK-Sweden Political Declaration of Solidarity](#), 11 May 2022

¹¹ White House, [Remarks by President Biden before Air Force One departure](#), 12 July 2023

¹² NATO, [Joint Press Conference](#), 12 July 2023

¹³ HC Deb 13 July 2023, [NATO Summit](#), c493

¹⁴ White House, [Remarks by President Biden and President Zelenskyy](#), 12 July 2023

Acknowledging that Ukraine cannot join NATO until allies agree and conditions are met, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, described the need for “credible arrangements” for Ukraine’s security to be in place once the war ends. He has subsequently welcomed the plan to extend security guarantees independently of NATO.¹⁵

What was Russia’s initial response?

Speaking to reporters on 13 July 2023, President Putin responded to questions about the G7 security guarantees. Suggesting that there was “nothing unusual in what NATO and the G7 have announced”, and that Ukraine had the right to ensure its own security, he also went on to stress that it could only be done “if the Russian Federation’s security is provided for in full”.¹⁶

Russia’s arguments about the international principle of indivisibility of security, and that one country cannot ensure its security at the expense of another, dominated diplomatic discussions before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.¹⁷

Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov went one step further, however, and called the security guarantees “dangerous”, saying they were “doing us [Russia] harm and we will take this into consideration”.¹⁸

3

The UK becomes the first country to formalise security guarantees

On 12 January 2024, the Prime Minister announced that the UK and Ukraine had concluded a ten-year security cooperation agreement, making the UK the first country to deliver on the wider commitment to provide long-term security guarantees.¹⁹

The Government described [that agreement](#) (PDF) as “the first step in developing an unshakeable hundred-year partnership between Ukraine and the United Kingdom”.²⁰ It builds upon a [15-year Memorandum of](#)

¹⁵ NATO, [Secretary General welcomes President Zelenskyy to the NATO summit ahead of inaugural NATO-Ukraine Council](#), 12 July 2023

¹⁶ President of Russia, [Replies to journalist’s questions](#), 13 July 2023

¹⁷ These diplomatic efforts are examined in greater detail in Library Research Briefing, [Ukraine: Russia’s ‘red line’](#), February 2022 and [European security: The outcome of talks with Russia](#), January 2022

¹⁸ [“G7’s guarantees for Ukraine to encroach on Russia’s security – Kremlin spokesman”](#), TASS Russian News Agency, 12 July 2023

¹⁹ Prime Minister’s Office, [Press release](#), 12 January 2024

²⁰ Prime Minister’s Office, [Press release](#), 12 January 2024

[Understanding on defence cooperation that was signed in March 2016](#) and a [Political, Free Trade and Strategic Partnership Agreement](#) that was agreed in November 2020.

The new agreement is wide ranging in its ambition, but is centred around two main objectives:

- It formalises the support that the UK has been providing, and will continue to provide, including the provision of modern military equipment (primarily through Capability Coalitions),²¹ intelligence sharing, protection of critical national infrastructure, cyber security assistance, medical and military training and long-term defence industrial cooperation, including joint programmes, the localisation of repair and maintenance and the manufacturing of UK defence equipment in Ukraine.²² It also outlines long term support for defence governance and civil-military reform.
- It commits the UK to consult with Ukraine, within 24 hours, if it is attacked by Russia in the future and to provide “swift and sustained” security assistance.²³

The long-term aim is to:

support an independent, democratic, and sovereign Ukraine, within its internationally recognised borders, capable of deterring and defending against future attacks, as well as to deepen Ukraine’s interoperability with NATO, and to accelerate Ukraine’s transition to NATO equipment and standards.²⁴

Beyond the security sphere, the agreement also sets out the commitment to support Ukraine’s reconstruction, including through continued humanitarian support and for the country’s future integration into the EU and NATO, including support for continued political and economic reform.²⁵ The agreement notes that:

The legacy effect created by the war, such as the liberation of occupied territory, the transition from martial law, and the need to meet public

²¹ Such as the international Air Force capability Coalition and the Maritime Capability Coalition.

²² A UK defence industry delegation conducted its first trade mission to Ukraine in December 2023. Further trade missions are planned for 2024. See, Ministry of Defence, [Press release](#), 18 December 2023

²³ [Agreement on Security Cooperation between the United Kingdom and Ukraine \(PDF\)](#), 12 January 2024, part VIII

²⁴ [Agreement on Security Cooperation between the United Kingdom and Ukraine \(PDF\)](#), 12 January 2024, Part II, para.3

²⁵ In November 2023 the European Commission published its [latest assessment of Ukraine’s reform efforts](#) (PDF) and recommended that accession negotiations be opened. That recommendation was approved at the European Council in December 2023, although formal talks will not begin until further reform is achieved in relation to the treatment of minorities, Ukraine’s anti-corruption efforts and in limiting the powers of Ukraine’s oligarchs (European Commission, [Press release](#), 8 November 2023)

expectations, will require Ukraine's institutions to be well adapted to manage such challenges.²⁶

The provisions of this agreement came into force upon signature, and therefore the agreement will not be laid before Parliament under the terms of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 (CRAG).²⁷

What about the other G7 countries?

France and Germany both concluded security agreements with Ukraine on 16 February 2024. Both are similar in scope to the agreement concluded with the UK and have a ten-year duration:

- [Agreement on security cooperation between Ukraine and France](#), February 2024
- [Agreement on security cooperation and long-term support between Ukraine and the Federal Republic of Germany](#), February 2024

All the remaining G7 countries have begun negotiations on bilateral security guarantees.²⁸

Canada presented a draft agreement on security assurances to Ukraine on 15 January 2024, which, at the time of writing, remains under discussion.²⁹ At the beginning of February the Canadian Foreign Minister said she hoped the agreement could be concluded “in the coming weeks”.³⁰

Outside of the G7, the EU and several individual European countries, including the Netherlands, Lithuania and Romania, have also begun negotiations on long-term security guarantees.³¹

²⁶ [Agreement on Security Cooperation between the United Kingdom and Ukraine \(PDF\)](#), 12 January 2024, Part VII, para.1

²⁷ See Part 4 of Library research briefing, [How Parliament treats treaties](#), June 2021

²⁸ United States – [August 2023](#), Canada – [August 2023](#), Japan – [October 2023](#), and Italy – [November 2023](#)

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, [Press release](#), 29 January 2024

³⁰ [“Canadian FM says Canada-Ukraine security assurance deal could be reached in weeks”](#), Euromaidan Press, 5 February 2024

³¹ [“Ukraine and the Netherlands start security guarantee negotiations”](#), Ukrainska Pravda, 28 October 2023; [“Ukraine starts consultations concerning security guarantees with EU”](#), Ukrainska Pravda, 4 December 2023; President of Ukraine, [Press release](#), 10 January 2024 and [Press release](#), 14 January 2024

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