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UK Military Assistance to Ukraine

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Summary

UK military assistance to Ukraine is longstanding. However, in response to the crisis in Eastern Ukraine that assistance was stepped up in March 2015 with the provision of non-lethal equipment to the Ukrainian armed forces and the deployment of a 70-strong UK military training team to the country.

The decision to deploy a team of military advisers to Ukraine has been interpreted by some as the UK government putting 'boots on the ground', in breach of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. However, these personnel are not combat troops, they are not deployed in Eastern Ukraine and they are being provided in response to a request from the Ukrainian government.

To date, the Government has ruled out providing lethal arms to Ukraine. Other European leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande, have openly opposed arming Ukraine. In contrast the US administration remains open to the possibility of providing Ukraine with lethal weapons if "diplomacy fails to end the crisis".

1. Introduction

There have been contacts between the Ukrainian and British armed forces for a considerable period of time with the UK providing advice and training to the Ukrainian military and on broader measures such as crisis management, anti-corruption, defence reform and strategic communications. Much of that work is done bilaterally, but also through NATO capacity building initiatives. In September 2014 the MOD gave an overview of the military assistance that has been provided in the last six years:

Since April 2009 the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has spent approximately £3.9 million supporting Ukraine through the Defence Assistance Fund and the Conflict Pool. Many of the activities funded through these mechanisms support command, control and communications capabilities (C3), to a greater or lesser extent, including through the provision of joint exercising, military education and contributions to NATO coordinated activities. However, the MOD is unable to breakdown this cost further to provide a figure for financial assistance specifically related to C3 alone.

Activities highlighted included the deployment of both UK civilian and military personnel to Ukraine and Ukrainian personnel to the UK. One such example from September of this year was the deployment of 41 personnel from the Light Dragoons to Ukraine to take part in EXERCISE RAPID TRIDENT, an annual US/Ukrainian multinational exercise aimed at enhancing interoperability and strengthening NATO partnerships. Elements of such exercise activity play an important role in practising C3 capabilities, but we are not able to give a figure for the number of personnel that have been deployed to Ukraine specifically for C3.

At the NATO Summit in Wales, we announced that the UK would lead a NATO C4 (Command, Control, Communications and Computers) Trust Fund for Ukraine and will contribute over €400,000 to this initiative. Work is now under way on the implementation of the Trust Fund.¹

With the conflict in the east of the country, that help has been stepped up, at the request of the Ukrainian government and now also includes supplying non-lethal equipment.² In a press release on 6 March 2015 the MOD set out the UK's overall policy with respect to military assistance to Ukraine:

UK policy since the start of the crisis has been to provide non-lethal assistance to Ukrainian armed forces, in line with HMG's assessment that there must be a political solution to this crisis. The MOD will continue to focus on support and assistance that will reduce fatalities and casualties amongst members of the Ukrainian armed forces, whilst building their capacity and resilience.³

¹ PQ 209093

² The Council of the European Union had lifted the arms embargo on Ukraine on 16 July 2014 ([Special meeting of the European Council \(16 July 2014\), Conclusions](#), Council of the European Union, 16 July 2014)

³ Ministry of Defence, [Press Release](#), 6 March 2015

2. Provision of Non-Lethal Equipment

The Foreign Office summarised the UK's initial equipment support for the Ukrainian armed forces in a statement in October 2014:

[...] Our non-lethal equipment package is defensive and designed to prevent further UAF fatalities and casualties.

It will be funded by the Government's Conflict Pool fund (FCO, MoD and DFID). It is in response to a direct request from the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (UAF). The Defence Attaché's Office at the British Embassy in Kyiv has designed the package in close cooperation with the UAF. It has also been carried out in close coordination with other donors (US, Canada and France), who are providing similar equipment.

The Departmental Minute laid today therefore sets out our intention to gift a package of £840,300 of equipment to the Ukraine Armed Forces. The proposed gift will consist of the following UK-sourced equipment:

1. 1000 sets of body armour (NIJ level IV) and helmets (NIJ Level IIIA): £408,000
2. 80 Medical kits (for vehicles): £52,800
3. 500 sets of winterisation equipment (winter clothing/ sleeping bags): £314,500
4. 500 Ponchos: £10,000
5. Transport and clearance: £55,000

The proposed gift has been assessed against the consolidated EU and National Arms Export Licensing Criteria. The proposed gift has been scrutinised and approved by a senior, cross-Whitehall Conflict Pool Approval Board, which has confirmed that it fits with the Government's strategic and delivery objectives. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials also assessed the project for human rights risks, using the Overseas Security and Justice Assistance guidelines established by the Foreign Secretary in 2011. They concluded that the risk of human rights violations arising from the project's delivery could be successfully mitigated.⁴

On 6 March 2015 the government announced that a further package of non-lethal equipment would be provided to Ukraine in response to a request from the Ukrainian government. Five high priority items would be gifted immediately in order to increase Ukraine's defensive capacity and tactical awareness on the ground:

- 2,000 Mark 6 helmets
- 150 helmet-mounted monocular night vision goggles (MNVGs)
- 200 global positioning units (GPS)
- 220 hardened laptops
- 1,000 first aid kits

To date, the Government has ruled out providing lethal arms to Ukraine. In an interview on the Andrew Marr Show on 8 March 2015, the Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, stated:

⁴ [HL Deb 20 Oct 2014, c69WS](#)

We don't think there can be a military resolution to this crisis. The disparity between the size of the Ukrainian armed forces and the Russian armed forces doesn't make that a sensible way to go. And we have to insist that the rules-based system, which says very clearly that you can't change international boundaries by force is protected and is imposed [...]

we're providing a lot of support to the Ukrainians. We're providing training, we're providing technical support, we provide them with non-lethal equipment, and we've said that we will keep this under review.⁵

Other European leaders, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Francois Hollande, have openly opposed arming Ukraine. On 2 February Chancellor Merkel said "Germany will not support Ukraine with guns and weapons ... we are putting all our bets on sanctions and doing our best to find a diplomatic solution."⁶

In contrast the US administration has been considering the option of providing Ukraine with lethal weapons if "diplomacy fails to end the crisis in the east".⁷ It already provides significant non-lethal assistance to the Ukrainian armed forces.⁸ At a hearing of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 10 March 2015 the Principal Deputy under Secretary of Defense, Brian McKeon, confirmed:

Other measures remain under active consideration in the Administration, including the provision of additional security assistance. As the President has said, we are looking at all our options, including the possibility of lethal defensive weapons. At the same time, we have made clear that we do not believe there is a military solution to the conflict in Ukraine, and are working actively to support the diplomatic track.⁹

The provision of lethal defensive weapons has the support of Congress,¹⁰ and many Senators have criticised the US administration for its slow response on this issue. Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Bob Corker, commented:

Our country made a commitment in 1994 to defend Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which has been under a near constant assault by Russia for more than a year. More recently, we lured Ukraine West by supporting their desire for closer association with Europe. Now with Ukraine's future in the balance, the refusal of the administration to step up with more robust support for Ukraine and further pressure on Russia is a blight on U.S. policy and 70 years of defending a Europe that is whole, democratic, and free.¹¹

⁵ The Andrew Marr Show, [Interview with Philip Hammond](#), 8 March 2015

⁶ ['Germany rules out arms to Ukraine'](#), *EUobserver*, 2 February 2015

⁷ "US may supply arms to Ukraine", *BBC News Online*, 9 February 2015

⁸ Training and non-lethal equipment, including protective gear, secure communications, medical support and counter-mortar radar capabilities. On 11 March 2015 the US administration announced that a further package of military assistance, worth \$75m, would be sent to Ukraine including Humvees, surveillance drones, night vision devices and military ambulances.

⁹ [Testimony of Principal Deputy under Secretary of Defense](#), Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 10 March 2015

¹⁰ [The Ukraine Freedom Support Act](#) was signed into law in December 2014

¹¹ Statement by the Chairman, Senate Foreign Relations Committee, 10 March 2015

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On 10 February the Foreign Secretary, Philip Hammond, acknowledged the difference of opinion among allies when he stated:

It is a national decision for each country in the NATO alliance to decide whether to supply lethal aid to Ukraine. The UK is not planning to do so, but we reserve the right to keep this position under review. Different members of the alliance take nuanced positions on this question, and are entitled to do so. However, we share a clear understanding that while there is no military solution to this conflict, we could not allow the Ukrainian armed forces to collapse.¹²

¹² HC Deb 10 February 2015, c619

3. Advice and Training

Towards the end of February 2015 the Government announced that additional non-lethal support would also be provided to Ukraine through the provision of advisory and short-term training teams, comprising approximately 75 military personnel. The Secretary of State for Defence, Michael Fallon, stated in the House:

Support to the Ukrainian armed forces is not new; we have been providing it for some time. This includes support on anti-corruption, on defence reform and on strategic communications and procurement. Over the last year, we have also provided personal protective equipment, winter fuel, medical kits and winter clothing for the Ukrainian armed forces.

As part of the wider Government effort to support Ukraine and ensure a robust international response to Russia's aggression, UK personnel will now provide to the Ukrainian armed forces medical, logistics, infantry, and intelligence capacity-building training from mid-March. Most of the advisory and training support will take place in Ukraine, but well away from the areas affected by the conflict in the east of the country. The number of service personnel involved will be around 75.

In respect of medical support, we will provide combat life-support training through a "train the trainer package" to multiply the numbers trained. The logistics team will identify and help improve deficiencies within Ukraine's logistics distribution system. The infantry training package will focus on protective measures to improve survivability, and the intelligence capacity building team will provide tactical-level analysis training.¹³

He also went on to state:

We are considering further requests from the Ukrainian Government for support and assistance, and we will work closely with key allies through the Ukraine-US-UK-Canada joint commission [...]

We have had a series of requests from the Ukrainian Government, including lists of equipment of all kinds. I do not want to give too many details, but we are looking at these shortfalls in their capacity and at what further training we might be able to provide in addition to the infantry training, logistics and medical and intelligence capacity-building training I described [...]

We should respond to requests. Ukraine is our friend, it is in need and we should respond to requests, whether they are for equipment or additional training. I want to assure the House that that is exactly what we will continue to do.¹⁴

It has been suggested that the UK's decision to deploy military trainers is in breach of the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. That Memorandum, signed by the US, Russia and the UK, provided security assurances to Ukraine in return for giving up the stockpile of nuclear weapons it had inherited after the collapse of the Soviet Union and for acceding to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. Specifically States Parties to that Memorandum are required to "respect the independence and

¹³ HC Deb 25 February 2015, c321

¹⁴ HC Deb 25 February 2015, c321 and 325

sovereignty and the existing borders of Ukraine” and reaffirm “their obligation to refrain from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Ukraine and that none of their weapons will ever be used against Ukraine except in self-defense or otherwise in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations”.

Russia’s actions in Crimea and eastern Ukraine since 2014 are widely considered to be in breach of the Budapest Memorandum. However, the UK decision to send military trainers to Ukraine, alongside other aspects of non-lethal military assistance, is at the request of the Ukrainian government. These personnel are not combat troops and the intention is to assist the Ukrainian armed forces in developing the capacity and resilience they require to defend themselves and to help reduce fatalities and casualties. By providing such assistance the UK is seeking to help Ukraine retain their sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity and as such its actions are not considered to be in breach of the Budapest Memorandum.

4. Co-ordination with Allies

The provision of advice, training and non-lethal equipment to Ukraine in response to the current crisis has been done on a national basis. However, all actions, both economic and military have been closely coordinated with allies, through the EU, NATO (specifically the NATO-Ukraine Commission) and through initiatives such as the US/Canada/UK/Ukraine Joint Commission for Cooperation and Defence Reform which was established in July 2014.

For example, following a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission in December 2014, NUC Foreign Ministers made the following statement:

Recalling the NUC Wales Summit Joint Statement, Allies are enhancing their support so that Ukraine can better provide for its own security. We have stepped up our cooperation in the framework of our Distinctive Partnership. We are strengthening our cooperation in the defence and security sector through capability development and sustainable capacity building programmes for Ukraine. Today, we are pleased to announce that the Trust Funds and projects on command, control, communications and computers, logistics and standardisation, cyber defence, military career transition, and medical rehabilitation are operational. We will continue to promote the development of greater interoperability between Ukrainian and NATO forces. NATO's enhanced advisory presence in Kyiv is already in place and will continue to grow. As requested by Ukraine, Allies will continue to provide expertise as Ukraine completes its comprehensive defence and security sector review. The comprehensive reform agenda undertaken by Ukraine in the context of its ANP with NATO, as well as in the context of its Association Agreement with the EU, will further strengthen Ukraine. NATO and Allies will continue to support Ukraine in its reform efforts.

Ukraine welcomes the non-lethal material being provided by many Allies to the Ukrainian Armed Forces, as well as the help being provided to treat wounded Ukrainian personnel, and in humanitarian demining. Ukraine is grateful for the humanitarian assistance being provided to the internally displaced population, and the substantial cooperation through the Science for Peace and Security programme. Ukraine also looks forward to exploring ways to deepen information exchange and strategic dialogue with the Alliance.¹⁵

In the House on 25 February, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon confirmed that the provision of non-lethal assistance and the deployment of UK military trainers is part of those national efforts:

The hon. Gentleman asked about NATO. This is not a NATO deployment; it follows a decision by the United Kingdom Government. Obviously we consult our allies very closely—I hope to do that in Washington very shortly—and NATO has set up a couple of trust funds, to which we have contributed, as part of its partnership with Ukraine. Nevertheless, this is not a NATO operation. A number of our allies are considering providing non-lethal assistance, and the United States is already doing so.

¹⁵ [Joint Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission](#), 2 December 2014

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As for how the deployment fits in with other efforts, it accompanies our continuing diplomatic efforts. I should emphasise that this country has been at the forefront of the efforts to impose sanctions on Russia. I should also emphasise that it is leading the efforts to ensure that those sanctions are renewed, and to make Moscow understand that unless its aggression ceases, it will face further sanctions and additional international isolation.¹⁶

Following a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission on 13 May 2015, NATO Foreign Ministers confirmed that progress was being made on the implementation of the 'Trust Funds' and that additional funds were under consideration.¹⁷

¹⁶ HC Deb 25 February 2015, 322-323

¹⁷ [Joint Statement of the NATO-Ukraine Commission](#), 13 May 2015

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