

Editorial Team: Beata Surmacz (Director of ICE), Tomasz Stępniewski (Deputy Director of ICE), Agnieszka Zajdel (Editorial Assistant), Aleksandra Kuczyńska-Zonik, Jakub Olchowski, Konrad Pawłowski, Agata Tatarenko

No. 859 (107/2023) | 31.05.2023

ISSN 2657-6996
© IES

Hanna Bazhenova

The Ramstein Group: Prerequisites for Creation and Role in Ensuring Ukraine's Military Capabilities (Part 1)

Keywords: Russian Federation, Ukraine Defense Contact Group, military assistance, Ramstein, United States, Ukraine, war

Russia's aggression against Ukraine on 24 February 2022 caused radical changes in the architecture of European and global security. The largest land war in Europe since World War II contributed to the creation of a coalition of 54 states – the so-called Ramstein format – which developed a mechanism for regular military assistance to Ukraine in the form of arms supplies, funding, training of Ukrainian soldiers, modernisation and repair of equipment. De facto, an organisation was created that had no equivalent in post-1945 European military history. The ever-increasing assistance of the allies within the Ramstein Group allowed Ukraine to halt the advance of Russian troops and liberate much of the occupied territory. However, the quantity and types of armaments supplied remain insufficient to fundamentally turn the tide of the ongoing war.

The predecessors of the Ramstein format. The preconditions for the emergence of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group began to take shape in 2014. In response to the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation and its support for the self-proclaimed breakaway republics in the Donbas region, NATO established a number of trust funds aimed at strengthening Ukraine's defence capabilities. Particularly noteworthy were the Command, Control, Communications and Computers (C4) Trust Fund and the Logistics and Standardisation Trust Fund. These two entities provided extensive advisory and consultative assistance at the strategic and tactical levels to elaborate the doctrinal framework for the development of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. They also organised professional and language training for personnel and met the urgent needs of the Ukrainian army. An important aspect of cooperation was the Alliance's assistance in training professional non-commissioned officers of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in accordance with NATO principles and standards.

Mention should also be made of the advisory, instructional, methodological, logistical, and humanitarian assistance provided by individual member states of the North Atlantic Alliance, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Romania. The largest amount of military assistance came from the US, which provided USD 2.5 billion worth of weapons and ammunition. Overall, between 2014 and 2021, the US and other partner governments supplied ships (cutters) and spare parts for them, multipurpose all-terrain vehicles, lethal weapons, night vision devices, optical and communications equipment, small arms ammunition of various calibres, and more for the Ukrainian army as part of international technical assistance.

In addition, four foreign military training missions have been operating on Ukrainian territory since 2015: the Joint Multinational Training Group – Ukraine (JMTG-U, US), the Canadian Armed Forces training mission (Operation UNIFIER), Operation ORBITAL of the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom and the Kingdom of Denmark, and the Lithuanian Armed Forces training mission (LMTG-U). For example, the latter assisted in preparing Special Operations Forces personnel as well as mechanised, air assault units and snipers. The training in the aforementioned missions was cyclical and multi-level. Sub-units that had completed the first training cycle performed combat tasks and returned for the next cycle. From 2015 to early 2022, more than 27,000

Ukrainian soldiers were trained in JMTG-U missions and around 30,000 in ORBITAL and UNIFIER operations. The participation of NATO member states in exercises on the territory of Ukraine was not only a significant practical contribution of the partners to improve the level of training of the Ukrainian army and increase its interoperability with the NATO countries' military units but also a political manifestation of support for Ukraine.

It should be added that on 12 June 2020, the North Atlantic Council recognised Ukraine as having Enhanced Opportunities Partner status, which was also an important milestone in bringing Ukraine closer to the Alliance's standards (see ["IEŚ Commentaries"](#), no. 225). This status meant that the country could benefit from expanded access to various interoperability and training programmes and greater information sharing, including in the intelligence field.

The shock of the first weeks of the war. With the start of the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, the command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine came to the conclusion that artillery ammunition and equipment would at best be sufficient for two months of intensive warfare. Once these stocks were exhausted, the Ukrainian army would lose its ability to conduct organised resistance to Russian regular forces. It is worth noting that the core of Ukraine's arsenal at the time was post-Soviet weapons, albeit partially modernised. In contrast, the amount of modern weaponry was quite limited, including Javelin and NLAW anti-tank systems and Stinger and Starstreak mobile air defence systems (the first batch of Starstreak sets arrived only at the end of March 2022).

At the same time, Ukraine's partners were quite critical of the Ukrainian army's ability to repel a Russian attack and were in no hurry to deliver heavy weapons. This is why almost all of the countries' military assistance packages during the first two months of hostilities mostly consisted of portable anti-aircraft and anti-tank systems, small arms, ammunition of various calibres, bulletproof vests, helmets, and medical kits (see ["IEŚ Commentaries"](#), no. 792). In addition, international programmes within NATO were suspended. In total, in the two months following the Russian invasion, thirty countries raised more than USD 5 billion in military aid for Ukraine, of which USD 3.7 billion was provided by the United States.

In this situation, the leadership of Ukraine's Ministry of Defence focused on buying Soviet military equipment and Soviet-type munitions from former Warsaw Pact countries. Simultaneously, the idea of supplying heavy armaments from the West was lobbied for. Initially, however, this idea met with resistance both among Ukraine's partners and internally: the Ukrainian command feared the transition to Western-type heavy weapons systems during the active phase of the war. The turning point came only after the visit of Ukraine's Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov to London on 21–22 March 2022. A week later, British Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace announced the need to transfer artillery systems and armoured vehicles to Ukraine.

However, the final institutionalisation of international military assistance to Ukraine took place only in late April 2022. By then, the Armed Forces of Ukraine had already liberated the Kyiv, Chernihiv, Sumy, and Zhytomyr regions, and the international community had seen the consequences of the Russian occupation (see ["IEŚ Commentaries"](#), no. 564; ["IEŚ Commentaries"](#), no. 615). It became clear that, despite a huge shortage of weapons, Ukraine defended itself with unexpected heroism and survived the first strike, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's plans to capture Kyiv in three days and the entire country in two to three weeks failed.

Ukraine Defense Contact Group. Currently, the Ukraine Defence Contact Group is an alliance of 54 states, i.e. all 31 NATO members and 23 additional countries, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Israel, Jordan, Qatar, Kenya, Morocco, Austria, and others. This military-political forum is widely associated with the venue of its first meeting. It took place on 26 April 2022 at the US Air Force's Ramstein Air Base, near the German town of Ramstein-Miesenbach, and was attended by representatives from more than 40 states. The meeting was initiated by the United States, notably by US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin and General Mark Milley, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff. The main objective of the forum was to discuss, synchronise, and accelerate the provision of military assistance, weapons, and equipment to Ukraine to counter Russian aggression and win the war. Over time, along with the coordination function, the activities of the Ramstein format also extended to the political level, which involved the creation of a prototype "anti-Russian coalition" or "Atlantic Charter 2.0". In addition, post-war support for Ukraine began to be discussed at the group's meetings.

A total of twelve meetings of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group have been organised to date in various locations, both in person and online. The last of these was held on 25 May 2023. By the end of April 2023, Ukraine had received more than 1,550 armoured vehicles, 230 tanks, as well as a significant amount of other equipment and ammunition through the Ramstein Group. As a result of these contributions, the largest donor of security aid was the United States. In addition, allies, including Poland, are assisting in the repair and modernisation of equipment and armaments, as well as training the Ukrainian military at their bases in accordance with NATO standards. However, it should be noted that there are significant discrepancies between the promised and actual scale of military assistance provided by Ukraine's partners.