

Transferring Defunct Soviet Era Weapons to Ukraine to Confront Russia. \$3.2 Billion U.S. Security Assistance to Ukraine

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Global Research, April 23, 2022

Region: [Europe, USA](#)

Theme: [Intelligence](#), [Military](#) and [WMD](#)

In-depth Report: [UKRAINE REPORT](#)

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The Pentagon [announced](#) Tuesday Ukraine’s military had received additional aircraft as well as parts for repairs to get damaged aircraft flying again. Pentagon spokesman John Kirby did not offer details on which countries provided aircraft, but acknowledged new transfers.

“They have received additional aircraft and aircraft parts to help them get more aircraft in the air,” Kirby told a news briefing. “We certainly have helped with the transshipment of some additional spare parts that have helped with their aircraft needs, but we have not transported whole aircraft,” he added.

Apparently, the Pentagon did not take Ukraine’s military authorities into confidence before making the announcement, because the official Twitter account of Ukraine’s air force [tweeted](#) Wednesday:

“Officially, Ukraine did not receive new aircraft from partners! With the assistance of the US Government, @KpsZSU received spare parts and components for the restoration and repair of the fleet of aircraft in the Armed Forces, which will allow to put into service more equipment.”

Despite the denial, nobody, not even Ukraine’s principal patron, the United States, deem preposterous claims made by Ukrainian sources credible, because Kyiv is known to have given exaggerated casualty counts and inflated figures of damage inflicted by the war in Ukraine in order to mount a disinformation campaign against Russia.

Privately, US officials recognized that Ukraine had an incentive to give only information that would bolster their case for more aid, more arms and more diplomatic assistance, [CNN reported](#) Tuesday.

“It’s a war—everything they do and say publicly is designed to help them win the war. Every public statement is an information operation, every interview, every Zelensky appearance broadcast is an information operation,” said a source familiar with Western intelligence.

Another reason Ukraine’s military authorities want to keep aircraft transfer under the wraps is that previously Russian forces claimed to have [destroyed](#) an S-300 air defense system that Slovakia transferred to Ukraine in a Kalibr cruise missiles strike hitting a hangar on the southern outskirts of the city of Dnepropetrovsk.

Russian Defense Minister Sergey Shoigu [boasted last month](#) that 123 of Ukraine’s 152 fighter jets had been destroyed, as well as 77 of its 149 helicopters and 152 of its 180 long- and medium-range air defense systems, while its naval forces had been totally eliminated.

As demilitarization of Ukraine, alongside denazification and liberation of Donbas, was one of the principal objectives of Russia’s month-long military campaign lasting from late February to late March, therefore Russian forces would never allow vital military assets, especially air defense systems and fixed- and rotary-wing aircraft, to remain in the possession of Ukraine’s air force. Ukraine’s aircraft are safe only as long as they remain grounded and concealed from Russia’s advanced air surveillance systems.

Although the Pentagon spokesman refused to identify the country that delivered the aircraft to Ukraine due to secrecy of the shady transfer deal, the only NATO member state that was in talks with Washington and Kyiv to transfer its Soviet-era fleet of a dozen MiG-29 aircraft was Slovakia.

Reportedly, a batch of Ukraine’s highly skilled pilots traveled to Slovakia last week, took the delivery of the aircraft and then flew them all the way to concealed air force hangars at military airports in Kyiv while maintaining low altitudes in order to avoid detection by Russia’s advanced air surveillance systems. The Pentagon that has [deployed extensive ISR](#), or intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, assets along Ukraine’s borders fully coordinated the entire clandestine operation of transferring the aircraft.

After the scuttled [aircraft-transfer deal](#) that would’ve seen Poland handing over its fleet of 28 Soviet-era MiG-29s to Ukraine in return for the United States “backfilling” the Polish Air Force with American F-16s last month, Slovakia was in talks with NATO about an arrangement that could allow Bratislava to send fighter jets to Ukraine, Prime Minister Eduard Heger [told reporters](#) on April 11.

Eduard Heger said his government wanted to “move away from reliance on the Soviet MiGs” in any case. “This is equipment that we want to finish anyway, because we’re waiting for the F-16s,” he added, referring to US-made jets that Slovakia was scheduled to receive in 2024, though Bratislava could receive American fighter jets earlier as it has now delivered on the pledge of transferring the dozen MiG-29 aircraft Slovakia was reported to have to Ukraine.

In early March, Poland made a similar offer of transferring its fleet of 28 Soviet-era MiG-29s to Ukraine in return for receiving American F-16s, but the Pentagon [rejected the proposal](#) due to apprehensions over direct confrontation with Russian forces in Ukraine.

The prospect of flying combat aircraft from NATO territory into the war zone “raises serious concerns for the entire NATO alliance,” the Pentagon said on March 9. “It is simply not clear

to us that there is a substantive rationale for it,” Pentagon spokesman John Kirby added.

But considering that Slovak aircraft have already been delivered to Ukraine, it seems plausible that the Polish proposal of transferring its aircraft might also be reconsidered by the Biden administration and Ukraine could receive additional Polish MiG-29 aircraft in the coming weeks.

In addition to transferring the aircraft to Ukraine, Slovakia also struck a deal with NATO earlier this month for transferring its Soviet-era S-300 air defense system to Ukraine in return for the transatlantic military alliance delivering four Patriot missile systems to Slovakia.

“I can confirm that Slovakia donated the S-300 air defense system to Ukraine based on its request to help in self-defense due to armed aggression from the Russian Federation,” Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger announced on April 8.

Although [NATO has provided](#) over 25,000 anti-aircraft MANPADS to Ukraine’s security forces and allied neo-Nazi militias, those were portable shoulder-fired surface-to-air missiles, whereas S-300 air defense system, equivalent in capabilities to American Patriots, is a vehicle-mounted advanced system that could practically enforce a “no-fly zone” over Ukraine’s airspace, a longstanding demand of Ukrainian politicians, within the range of the battery. The Slovak army [website said](#) its version of the S-300 battery had a range of 75 km and could strike targets up to 27 km above ground.

Negotiations for the transfer of S-300 air defense system to Ukraine had been going on for weeks before the announcement by the Slovak prime minister that Bratislava had “generously donated” its Soviet-era S-300 air defense system to Ukraine in return for the transatlantic military alliance delivering four Patriot missile systems to Slovakia.

The [Dutch government announced](#) on March 18 it would send a Patriot missile defense system to Sliac, Slovakia, as part of NATO moves to strengthen air defenses in Eastern Europe. “The worsened safety situation in Europe as a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine makes this contribution necessary,” Dutch Defense Minister Kajsa Ollongren said in a statement. In addition, Germany also sent two Patriot missile systems to Slovakia.

Along with the Patriot batteries, the [Dutch also announced](#) sending a contingent of 150-200 troops, who would operate and also train Slovak forces in operating the American air defense system, as the security forces of Slovakia as well as Ukraine are only trained to operate Russian-made military equipment, which many NATO countries that are former Soviet states possess.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin’s trip to Europe in mid-March included not only NATO headquarters in Brussels, but also stops in Bulgaria and Slovakia — countries that own S-300s and SA-8s — before he headed back to Washington.

Previously, Slovakia’s defense minister said on March 17 that the country was willing to give Ukraine its S-300 surface-to-air missile defense systems if it received a “proper replacement.” Speaking at a press conference in Slovakia alongside US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin, Slovak Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad said Slovakia was [discussing the S-300s](#) with the US and Ukraine. “We’re willing to do so immediately when we have a proper replacement. The only strategic air defense system that we have in Slovakia is S-300

system,” he added.

Lloyd Austin declined to say whether the United States might be willing to fill the gap.

“I don’t have any announcements for you this afternoon. These are things that we will continue to work with all of our allies on. And certainly, this is not just a US issue. It’s a NATO issue,” Austin said while diplomatically evading confirming the barter deal for which he had traveled all the way from Washington to Eastern Europe.

NATO member Slovakia had one battery of the S-300 air defense system, inherited from the Soviet era after the break-up of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Following the Slovakia visit, Lloyd Austin also visited Bulgaria on March 18. Bulgaria has S-300 systems, but the country made it clear it had no plans to send any to Ukraine.

Bulgarian President Rumen Radev [prudently said](#) that any arms supplies to Ukraine were equivalent to the country being dragged into war. Ultimately, he said, such an issue should be decided by the parliament. He also said that Bulgaria needed its S-300 for its own air defense, particularly for the Kozlodui nuclear power plant.

Slovak Prime Minister Eduard Heger said Slovakia would receive additional equipment from NATO allies to make up for the transfer. Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad subsequently announced that Slovakia would receive a fourth Patriot missile system from the United States a week after the announcement of the deal.

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the United States would place one Patriot system in Slovakia in the coming days and it would be operated by US troops. “Their deployment length has not yet been fixed, as we continue to consult with the Slovakian government about more permanent air defense solutions,” Austin said in a statement.

“As the Russian military repositions for the next phase of this war, I have directed my administration to continue to spare no effort to identify and provide to the Ukrainian military the advanced weapons capabilities it needs to defend its country,” President Joe Biden said while thanking Slovakia for sending its S-300 system to Ukraine.

Acknowledging President Biden’s gratitude, Russian forces claimed they had [destroyed](#) the S-300 air defense system that Slovakia transferred to Ukraine in a Kalibr cruise missiles strike hitting a hangar on the southern outskirts of the city of Dnepropetrovsk.

In his regular briefing on the military operation in Ukraine on April 11, Russian Defense Ministry Spokesman Major General Igor Konashenkov claimed the barrage of sea-launched Kalibr missiles destroyed four S-300 launchers and as many as 25 Ukrainian troops in the precision strike. The Russian official also reported destroying an S-300 targeting radar in a separate airstrike near Uspenovka.

The [Pentagon revealed](#) last week that the United States had committed more than \$3.2 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the Biden Administration, including approximately \$2.6 billion since the beginning of Russia’s “unprovoked assault” on February 24.

As of April 14, United States security assistance committed to Ukraine includes:

- Over 1,400 Stinger anti-aircraft systems;

- Over 5,500 Javelin anti-armor systems;
- Over 14,000 other anti-armor systems;
- Over 700 Switchblade Tactical Unmanned Aerial Systems;
- 18 155mm Howitzers and 40,000 155mm artillery rounds;
- 16 Mi-17 helicopters;
- Hundreds of Armored High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles;
- 200 M113 Armored Personnel Carriers;
- Over 7,000 small arms;
- Over 50,000,000 rounds of ammunition;
- 75,000 sets of body armor and helmets;
- Laser-guided rocket systems;
- Puma Unmanned Aerial Systems;
- Unmanned Coastal Defense Vessels;
- 14 counter-artillery radars;
- Four counter-mortar radars;
- Two air surveillance radars;
- M18A1 Claymore anti-personnel munitions;
- C-4 explosives and demolition equipment for obstacle clearing;
- Tactical secure communications systems;
- Night vision devices, thermal imagery systems, optics, and laser rangefinders;
- Commercial satellite imagery services;
- Explosive ordnance disposal protective gear;
- Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear protective equipment;
- Medical supplies to include first aid kits.

Despite making Ukraine an “ordnance depot” of NATO powers on Russia’s western flank, [CNN reported](#) Tuesday the US had few ways to track the substantial supply of anti-tank, anti-aircraft and other weaponry it had sent across the border into Ukraine, a blind spot that’s due in large part to the lack of US boots on the ground in the country—and the easy portability of many of the smaller systems pouring across the border.

“We have fidelity for a short time, but when it enters the fog of war, we have almost zero,” said one source briefed on US intelligence. “It drops into a big black hole, and you have almost no sense of it at all after a short period of time.”

Trucks loaded with pallets of arms provided by the Defense Department were picked up by Ukrainian armed forces, primarily in Poland, and then driven into Ukraine, Kirby said, “then it’s up to the Ukrainians to determine where they go and how they’re allocated inside their country.”

In making the decision to send billions of dollars of weapons and equipment into Ukraine, the Biden administration factored in the risk that some of the shipments may ultimately end up in unexpected places, a defense official said. But right now, the official said, the administration views a failure to adequately arm Ukraine as a greater risk.

Although NATO powers did provide caches of anti-aircraft Stingers to Afghan jihadists that helped turning the tide in the Soviet-Afghan war in the eighties, since then, despite providing anti-tank munitions and rest of weapons to militant groups in the proxy wars in Libya and Syria, Western powers have consistently avoided providing MANPADS to proxy forces, because such deadly anti-aircraft munitions could become a long-term threat not

only to military aircraft but also to civilian airlines.

In the sheer desperation to inflict maximum material damage on Russia's security forces, however, NATO appears to have breached its own long-standing convention of curbing the proliferation of anti-aircraft munitions. Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee on April 7, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Gen. Mark Milley revealed that US and NATO countries have [collectively provided](#) over 60,000 anti-tank weapons and 25,000 anti-aircraft weapons during NATO's "weapons for peace" program to Ukraine since Russia's invasion on Feb. 24.

Who would be responsible for the myopic and self-destructive policy of providing anti-aircraft munitions to Ukraine's security forces and allied ultra-nationalist militias once the war ends and those MANPADS are found in black markets, notably in thriving weapons markets of Eastern Europe, posing grave risk to military aircraft as well as civilian airlines across the globe?

In fact, Russia alluded to the mortal risk posed by the proliferation of anti-aircraft munitions in its [diplomatic demarche](#) to the United States last week. The document, titled "On Russia's concerns in the context of massive supplies of weapons and military equipment to the Kiev regime," was forwarded to the State Department by the Russian Embassy in Washington, in which Russia accused NATO powers of violating "rigorous principles" governing the transfer of weapons to conflict zones, and of being oblivious to "the threat of high-precision weapons falling into the hands of radical nationalists, extremists and bandit forces in Ukraine."

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