

UK to Train Ukrainian Pilots, Supply Long-range Weapons to Kiev

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*The United Kingdom will train Ukrainian fighter pilots and provide long-range weapons to Kiev forces, **Prime Minister Rishi Sunak** said in a statement on February 8, as Ukrainian **President Volodymyr Zelensky** arrived in London on a visit.*

"I am proud that today we will expand that training from soldiers to marines and fighter jet pilots," Sunak said.

According to a statement released by the Prime Minister's Office, Ukrainian pilots will develop skills that will allow them to be able to "fly sophisticated NATO-standard fighter jets in the future."

The office didn't clarify on which fighter jets Ukrainian pilots will be trained. The Royal Air Force is currently mainly made of Eurofighter Typhoon jets.

London intends to coordinate efforts in this area with its allies in order to "meet Ukraine's defense needs." Earlier, the Prime Minister's Office noted that the shortest jet pilot training course lasts 36 months.

"[Sunak] will also offer to begin an immediate training programme for marines. That training will be in addition to the recruit training programme already running in the UK, which has seen 10,000 Ukrainian troops brought to battle readiness in the last six months, and which will upskill a further 20,000 Ukrainian soldiers this year," the Prime Minister's Office said, adding that the program will be additionally expanded this year.

"The Prime Minister will also offer to provide Ukraine with longer range capabilities," the statement reads. The main goal of this step is to "disrupt Russia's ability" to target Ukrainian facilities, as well as to "help relieve pressure on Ukraine's frontlines."

The exact type of the long-range weapons in question was not revealed. One of the UK's main long-range systems is the Storm Shadow air-launched cruise missile, which can hit ground targets as far as 560 kilometers away from its launch point.

The UK was one of few countries that began shipping weapons to Kiev forces even before the start of the Russian special military operation last year.

Under the leadership of Sunak, the UK continues to push for more armament for Ukraine. Last month, London pledged to supply 14 Challenger 2 main battle tanks to Kiev forces, which opened the way for other Western countries to provide similar modern tanks. Now, it is apparently trying to promote the rehabilitation of the Ukrainian Air Force.

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Featured image: A Royal Air Force Eurofighter Typhoon FGR4 flies past the audience during the 2019 Royal International Air Tattoo at RAF Fairford, England, July 20, 2019. (U.S. Air Force photo by Airman 1st Class Jennifer Zima)

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