

The US Military Is Struggling to Account for Equipment Sent to Ukraine

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By [Jared Keller](#)

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The U.S. military did not properly maintain accountability for thousands of pieces of equipment transferred to the government of Ukraine as part of the former's security assistance program in the aftermath of Russia's invasion, [according](#) to a new government watchdog report.

The assessment from the Defense Department's inspector general published on Monday [states](#) that military personnel responsible for rapidly transferring material to Ukraine through an aerial port in Jasionka, Poland, "did not fully implement their standard operating procedures to account for defense items and could not confirm the quantities of defense items received against the quantity of items shipped" in three of five shipments examined by defense officials.

The inconsistent implementation of standard gear accountability procedures occurred primarily due to U.S. military personnel failing to fill out the necessary paperwork for defense material transferred to Ukrainian forces, [according](#) to the assessment, a problem compounded by a lack of logistics training for inexperienced personnel on the part of commanders.

In one case, a shipment containing "thousands of small arms, night vision optic devices, and various types of cold weather gear" turned up in Jasionka without a manifest, forcing U.S. military personnel to crack open shipping crates and count items by hand with no real frame of reference for how many items they were supposed to receive in the first place.

As a result of these issues, there was an "increased risk" that the U.S. military is providing

“more or less equipment” than authorized and “may not be able to verify” the specific number of defense materials sent to Ukraine, according to the DOD IG report, which emphasized that “although we identified gaps in accountability that increase risk, we did not find any evidence of loss, theft, or diversion of defense items being provided to Ukraine during the course of our evaluation.”

The DoD IG report provides the first major snapshot of how the Pentagon has managed the approximately \$31.7 billion in “defense items” transferred to the Ukrainian government since the start of Russia’s invasion. An [October 2022 audit](#) of the DoD’s broader accountability of equipment provided to Ukraine remains classified and subject to a Freedom of Information Act request.

Concerns over accountability for U.S. military gear funneled into Ukraine — already pronounced following [the seizure of military assistance](#) provided to the now-defunct U.S.-backed government of Afghanistan by the Taliban — have dogged the U.S. military aid effort since the outset of Russia’s invasion despite repeated assurances from the [State Department and Pentagon](#) that the U.S. government takes oversight seriously.

Indeed, a September 2022 diplomatic cable from the U.S. Embassy in Kyiv [reported](#) by Politico described ongoing challenges facing U.S. military officials tasked with maintaining consistent oversight in an active war zone, [so far that](#) “kinetic activity and active combat between Ukrainian and Russian forces create an environment in which standard verification measures are sometimes impractical or impossible,” per the cable.

The Russian government has seized upon Western anxieties surrounding large defense material transfers to argue that a significant number of Western-supplied weapons “have already entered, or will soon enter, the black market” across Europe, as a spokesperson for Russia’s foreign ministry [claimed](#) in October 2022. Some pro-Russian media [cite](#) a since-retracted CBS News report that [claimed](#) just 30% of weapons sent to Ukraine actually made it to the front lines.

While Ukrainian and European authorities have [dismissed](#) Russia’s claims as propaganda, U.S. lawmakers introduced legislation as recently as this past February to establish a special inspector general explicitly to “ensure that any funding sent to Ukraine for military, economy, and humanitarian aid receives independent and objective oversight and audits,” As House Armed Services Committee vice chairman Rep. Rob Wittman [said](#) in a statement at the time.

“Efforts by the United States and our European allies throughout the last year have clearly demonstrated to Putin his actions will not go without consequences, and I believe we should continue to take strong actions to hold Putin responsible,” Wittman [said](#). “At the same time, we owe Americans peace of mind that their hardworking taxpayer dollars are being used in an efficient manner that prioritizes American interests.”

When asked about the effort, Pentagon spokesman Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder [emphasized](#) that the U.S. takes accountability for U.S. military assistance to Ukraine “very seriously.”

“We have an active and proactive whole-of-government system, as you’ve highlighted, to prevent the illicit diversion of weapons into Eastern Europe,” Ryder [told reporters](#) at the time. “And to this date we have not seen any evidence of any type of widespread diversion of any of the assistance that we’ve provided.”

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Jared Keller is the managing editor of Task & Purpose. His writing has appeared in Aeon, the Los Angeles Review of Books, the New Republic, Pacific Standard, Smithsonian, and The Washington Post, among other publications. Contact the author [here](#).

Featured image: An airman loads weapons cargo bound for Ukraine onto a C-17 Globemaster III during a security assistance mission at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, Sept. 14, 2022. (U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Marco A. Gomez).

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