

Washington Approves Military Assistance to Ukraine After US-Russia Helsinki Summit

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On July 20, the US Defense Department announced in a [statement](#) that it will provide \$200 million to Ukraine in security-cooperation funds earmarked for additional training, equipment, and advisory efforts to build the defensive capacity of its armed forces. The funds [are intended](#) to enhance Ukraine's command-and-control and situational-awareness systems, secure communications, military mobility, night-vision capabilities, and military medical treatment. "This reaffirms the long-standing defense relationship between the United States and Ukraine," the statement noted.

The package includes equipment to support ongoing training programs and operational needs, including counter-artillery and counter-mortar radars, high-mobility multipurpose wheeled vehicles, night-vision devices, electronic warfare detection, secure communications, and medical equipment. The total of US security-sector assistance to Ukraine since 2014 will now top \$1 billion in aid. **Sen. Rob Portman** (R-Ohio), a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the founder the Senate Ukraine Caucus, [hailed](#) the announcement, which he called "a clear message that America stands with the Ukrainian people in their struggle ... against Russian aggression," as he put it.

In March, the State Department cleared a \$47-million sale of FGM-148 Javelin portable anti-tank missiles to Ukraine. The package specified 210 missiles and 37 launchers. Ukrainian personnel have been training with the new weapons since May. Sending US military on an advice and training mission is tantamount to indirect involvement in Ukraine's internal conflict. Hundreds of US and Canadian military instructors [have been training](#) Ukrainian personnel at the Yavorov firing range since 2015. The US Navy [operates a facility](#) in Ochakov.

In June, Ukraine's parliament approved the law "On Amending Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine (on the Direction of Ukraine's Foreign Policy)," which set NATO membership as Ukraine's foreign-policy goal, replacing the country's non-aligned status. With the economy in pitiful shape, Ukraine's defense expenditures already [greatly exceed](#) 2% of its GDP. Very few NATO members spend such a share of their GDP on military needs, despite the pledges they have made at summits.

Ukraine's government says its military will meet NATO standards by or during the year 2020. But allocating a large percentage of GDP to military needs and getting bang for one's buck are two different things. **Natan Chazin**, a former advisor to the chief of the general

staff of Ukraine's armed forces, [believes](#) the military reforms have gone nowhere. According to a sensational [story](#) in the *New York Times*, corruption is widespread in the ranks of Ukraine's military. If so, who can guarantee that the US-supplied weapons would not [fall into the wrong hands](#) and be used against the US military somewhere outside of Europe?

The US 2018 fiscal year (FY) defense budget allocates \$350 million for security assistance to Kiev. In the draft budget for FY 2019, Ukraine is included in the list of countries to be granted security assistance under the State Department's Foreign Military Financing program.

The sum of \$200 million was allocated months ago as part of the defense budget, but was kept on hold pending "a series of defense reforms" Washington was demanding from Kiev. The passage of Ukraine's new national security law, signed by the Ukrainian president on July 5, [met the requirements](#) enshrined in the US legislation, thereby allowing the Pentagon to release the funds. The Law on National Security provides a legislative framework for aligning Ukraine's national security architecture with Euro-Atlantic principles. It is perceived as a major step toward achieving NATO interoperability.

The timing has a symbolic impact. US **President Donald Trump** has come under harsh criticism for the remarks he made during a joint press conference after the summit with Russia's **Vladimir Putin** in Helsinki on July 16. The announcement on military aid to Ukraine came on the same day the White House rejected a proposal from Russia to hold a referendum in eastern Ukraine on the fate of the region. The possibility was raised by Vladimir Putin during the talks. [Addressing Russian diplomats](#) on July 19, President Putin said that any country pushing Ukraine or Georgia into the NATO fold "*should think of the possible consequences of this irresponsible policy*" because Russia would "*respond in kind to any aggressive steps that directly threaten Russia.*" Indeed, why should the US provide lethal weapons and training to a neighbor of Russia, not to mention its military presence in Ochakov? Russia has not sent weapons to any neighbors of the US, nor does it have a military presence near America's borders.

Military cooperation between the US and Ukraine is a multilateral process that is moving forward. A US-Ukraine cyber-security bill [has passed](#) in the House.

So, cooperation in various areas is thriving, despite human-rights violations in Ukraine. This fact has been confirmed by a [report](#) from the State Department. The [corruption in Ukraine](#) is an internationally acknowledged problem. Popular protests are commonplace, despite the fact that the conflict in the Donbass is being used to distract the public from their domestic woes. Many in the West are [frustrated](#) with the way Kiev is implementing reforms and with the [political influence](#) of the oligarchs. A study by the prestigious Brookings Institute has confirmed the fact that the reforms in Ukraine [have foundered](#). The country's politicians are embracing [extremist rhetoric](#).

But a blind eye is being turned to all of this, as Kiev grows obsequious and ready to comply with instructions from Washington. In late June, the Ukrainian government made a decision to buy American coal from Pennsylvania, which is said to be almost twice as expensive as what is locally sourced in the Donbass. It has also decided to rely on cooperation with Westinghouse, in an attempt to maintain its nuclear energy capacity. The deal assumes that the spent fuel will be stored near the surface, turning the country into a nuclear dump.

Kiev has recently been rewarded with [an official status](#) in NATO. The 2018 NATO summit confirmed its support for Ukraine's membership. To display its diligence Kiev has recently joined a new three-nation [anti-Moscow alliance](#).

With the US-Russia two-way dialog on Ukraine [stalled](#), Washington is no longer viewed as a mediator, but rather an accomplice who is fueling the conflict. America's vigorous political support and security assistance is enticing Kiev into seeking a military solution to the crisis in the Donbass. Where could that lead? Russia can supply the self-proclaimed republics in eastern Ukraine with weapons systems, including the [Kornet](#) anti-tank system, which has better [specs](#) than the US Javelin. Moscow could recognize the republics as independent states, once the Minsk II accords wash out. If Russian forces are invited in by the governments of those new republics, Moscow may agree to those requests, which would be an action strictly in compliance with international law. This is the scenario the US and Ukraine may provoke. They will have no one to blame but themselves.

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