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## Ukrainian Military Performance and Outlook

Since Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) have been increasingly challenged to defend against Russian advances, given ongoing disadvantages in personnel and a less developed defense industry. The UAF has demonstrated flexibility over the course of the conflict (including conducting a drone attack against Russian strategic bombers at four airbases across Russia in June 2025) as well as an ability to integrate Western security assistance. Nevertheless, the UAF continues to face obstacles to sustaining momentum against Russian forces, including personnel and equipment losses.

The Biden Administration supported Ukraine's defense of its territorial integrity against Russia's invasion, and since early 2022, Congress has enacted five supplemental appropriations measures to provide assistance to Ukraine. In March 2025, the Trump Administration announced a pause and review of further security assistance and intelligence sharing to Ukraine. After negotiations and consultations with Ukraine, the Trump Administration announced it would resume security assistance. The UAF's evolving condition and performance may be of interest to the 119<sup>th</sup> Congress as Members weigh the impact of U.S. support for the UAF and consider any potential further assistance.

### Personnel

The UAF's overall performance to date has been bolstered, in part, by high levels of recruitment and motivation. High personnel losses and desertion, however, pose continued challenges to the UAF's ability to sustain effective operations.

After Russia's initial invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the UAF gained important combat experience fighting Russian-led forces in Ukraine's eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk (known as the Donbas). In 2022, Ukraine was able to quickly mobilize these veterans and other volunteers into new volunteer Territorial Defense Forces (TDF) and the Reserve forces without the need for lengthy training. This likely contributed to UAF effectiveness since Ukraine did not have a fully developed professional noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps.

Since the beginning of the 2022 war, the UAF has suffered high levels of casualties, lowering force quality. In order to replace these losses, the UAF needs new recruits to regenerate forces. The UAF's need for immediate reinforcements creates pressure to deploy troops with only basic training. However, the UAF also needs to train personnel to conduct complex operations and employ advanced weaponry in order to sustain combat operations. UAF officials say they have the capacity and capability to conduct new recruit training inside Ukraine.

Currently, the UAF also is experiencing recruitment challenges. Reportedly, the average Ukrainian soldier is around 40 years old, and some recruits often have health or substance abuse issues. Some reports indicate that recruitment officials also are resorting to more coercive methods. Ukraine passed legislation in April 2024 to address some recruitment issues (including allowing some prisoners to serve in exchange for a reduced sentence) but continues to reject calls to lower the conscription age from 25 to 18 because of public opposition to lowering the age.

In February 2025, the UAF implemented a new option for volunteers between the ages of 18 and 24 to sign one-year contracts in return for higher wages, a signing bonus, exemption from mobilization for 12 months, and other social benefits. UAF officials have reported a high level of initial sign-ups in response.

Additionally, the UAF reportedly struggles to train officers for staff positions to assist commanders in managing and coordinating operations. The lack of trained staff officers has in some cases led to higher-level command staff coordinating and managing tactical operations, leading to centralized and slower decisionmaking. The UAF has announced organizational changes (such as organizing multiple brigades under the command of a corps) to improve management and coordination of its forces.

In February 2025, the UAF suspended the creation of new brigades made up of new recruits to focus on reinforcing existing brigades. The UAF took this decision in response to criticism from Ukrainian officials about the new brigades' poor performance (including desertions and the opening of criminal investigations).

### Equipment

The UAF operates a mix of Western and Soviet-era or Russian equipment. This variety of systems complicates maintenance and standardization. To date, the UAF has sustained significant equipment losses, apparently leaving some UAF units without mechanized or motorized vehicle support. The UAF has exhibited resilience in the face of such losses, in part due to Western security assistance and concerted UAF maintenance efforts.

Ukraine has nearly exhausted its supplies of Soviet and Russian artillery and rocket ammunition, making the UAF almost entirely reliant on Western assistance for artillery systems and ammunition. To date, the UAF has demonstrated an ability to use the *qualitative* advantages provided by Western security assistance (e.g., long-range precision fires) to mitigate Russian *quantitative* advantages in artillery.

According to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine produces 40% of the equipment and weapons it needs, and the United States supplies 30%. Ukraine's domestic defense industry has increased production but remains unable to meet the country's full wartime demands. International partners are seeking to help Ukraine strengthen its defense industry capacity (including through funding purchase orders and joint production agreements with Western defense companies), thus reducing its reliance on Western security assistance.

### U.S. and Western Security Assistance

Since the start of Russia's 2022 war, the United States has committed almost \$67 billion, the EU over \$54 billion, and the UK over \$17 billion (among other donors) in security assistance to Ukraine. This support is coordinated by NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (assuming the mission and role of Security Assistance Group—Ukraine) and led by a U.S. three-star general. Simultaneously, Western officials have repeatedly voiced concerns over potential escalation of the conflict, defense industrial production capacity challenges, and the continued availability of funding to sustain security assistance.

### Training

The United States and other allies have provided training and advice to the UAF since before Russia's 2022 invasion. Most training efforts focus on employing Western security assistance, basic infantry skills and unit-level development, and combined arms operations. Currently, the UK (Operation Interflex), European Union Military Assistance Mission Ukraine (EUMAM), and United States (the Joint Multinational Training Group—Ukraine) conduct a variety of training programs. Training could grow in importance as the UAF seeks to replace its losses with mobilized personnel.

### Equipment

In the initial phase of the war, U.S. and European provision of anti-tank and short-range man-portable air defense systems were critical for Ukraine's resistance to Russia's invasion. As the war has continued, Ukraine's partners have adjusted security assistance to respond to changing conditions and the UAF's evolving needs.

At the tactical level, the UAF has identified protected mobility (e.g., armored vehicles), tanks, and tactical-level fire support among its needs. Frontline UAF soldiers and commanders also reportedly have expressed concern about the availability of basic supplies. UAF officials express particular concerns about their reliance on Western supplies of artillery ammunition.

Despite improvements in Ukraine's domestic defense industry and growing European production capacity, the UAF remains reliant on the United States for key advanced weapon systems such as air defense, artillery ammunition, and long-range rocket artillery.

### Current Military Outlook

The UAF continues to demonstrate high levels of tactical flexibility and capability in the face of Russian quantitative advantages in equipment, air support, and electronic

warfare. The UAF continues to hamper Russian efforts and has thus far stymied any large-scale Russian breakthrough in Ukraine's Donbas region. Fighting remains attritional, and Russia's summer offensive appears to be gradually encircling UAF defenses around the cities of Pokrovsk and Kostiantynivka in the Donbas region.

The UAF command structure appears more centralized than earlier in the war. While the UAF seeks to adopt NATO-style (mission command) principles of command, it also exhibits traits of Soviet-style (centralized, top-down) command. Some observers and UAF officers have criticized the UAF command for poor communication, micromanagement, and inefficient leadership. The UAF also has been criticized for its strategy of refusing to withdraw from positions, even risking potential encirclement.

The UAF continues to seek Western equipment to replace losses and provide improved capabilities and survivability. Ukrainian officials also note the importance of continued ammunition supplies, especially as fighting remains dominated by artillery. Additionally, the UAF has identified needs in logistics, breaching equipment (e.g., mine clearing), electronic warfare, counter-drone technology, intelligence, and secure communications.

The UAF relies on a core of professional units to conduct operations and respond to Russian advances. However, losses and exhaustion continue to degrade these units' capabilities, as they appear increasingly called to various positions across the front line. Most frontline UAF brigades are understrength and receive ad hoc rotation from the front line. Often, rather than fighting as cohesive formations, sections of units are detached and sent to other units to compensate for losses. Some observers suggest that overreliance on a few units, combined with personnel losses, contributes to Russian advances.

The UAF faces severe infantry shortages and is seeking to recruit more personnel to replace losses and to rotate units from the front line. Training new recruits to replace and expand professional units, as well as officers for staff positions, remains a key objective. The UAF's ability to regenerate and maintain force quality arguably will be critical to its success.

In August 2024, the UAF launched a surprise invasion of Russia's Kursk region, but Russia expelled UAF forces from the region in April 2025. The 2024 Kursk offensive raised questions from some observers about how Ukraine's leadership allocates and prioritizes scarce human and material resources.

These developments may factor into congressional decisions regarding whether and how to support Ukraine's defense. Some observers suggest that sustained Western security assistance is critical for the UAF to avoid a deteriorating situation. Other observers argue that the UAF faces significant hurdles to decisively defeating Russian forces regardless of security assistance.

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