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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 defended and repelled Russian advances, despite ongoing disadvantages in personnel and a smaller defense industry. The UAF has demonstrated flexibility over the course of the conflict as well as an ability to integrate Western security assistance. Nevertheless, the UAF continues to face obstacles, including personnel and equipment losses.

From FY2022 to FY2024, Congress enacted five supplemental appropriations measures to provide assistance to Ukraine. The UAF's evolving condition and performance may be of interest to the 119th Congress as Members weigh the impact of U.S. support for the UAF and potentially consider any further assistance to Ukraine or conduct oversight of U.S. policies toward Ukraine and Russia.

Personnel

Since the beginning of the 2022 war, the UAF has suffered high levels of casualties (data on Ukrainian casualties are sparse, but one estimate places UAF killed as high as 140,000), lowering force quality. In addition, desertion and draft evasion pose continued challenges to the UAF's ability to sustain operations. In January 2026, Ukraine's Defense Minister Mykhailo Fedorov estimated that 200,000 soldiers were absent without official leave (AWOL) and 2 million men were avoiding draft notices.

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 Reserve without the need for lengthy training. This arguably contributed to UAF effectiveness, since Ukraine did not have a fully developed professional noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps.

Many initial volunteers have been killed or wounded since 2022. Reportedly, the average Ukrainian soldier is over 40 years old, and some recruits have health or substance abuse issues. Ukraine passed legislation in April 2024 to address some recruitment issues. However, the government continues to reject some calls to lower the conscription age from 25 to 18, a policy that would likely meet with public opposition.

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. While this option initially drew some interest, the UAF has struggled to recruit and retain younger

recruits, and reports indicate recruitment officials have sometimes turned to more coercive methods.

Training

To replace losses, recruiting and training new personnel remain key tasks. The UAF faces a dilemma in seeking to adequately train new recruits amid demands to provide immediate reinforcements. Ukrainian officials have instituted new training standards, including centralized training centers and an increase in basic training to 1.5 months (up from one month). Despite improvements, most training for new recruits happens in their respective units. This arguably contributes to differing levels of capability across the UAF, as some more elite units prioritize training and provide quality instructors.

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

Equipment

The UAF operates a mix of Western and Soviet-era or Russian equipment and has sustained significant equipment losses during the course of the war. The UAF has exhibited resilience in the face of such losses, in part due to Western security assistance and concerted UAF maintenance efforts. The diversity of systems, continued losses, and varied supply, however, undermine UAF standardization.

Ukrainian officials assert Western security assistance remains critical for supporting UAF operations. Ukraine has nearly exhausted its supplies of Soviet and Russian equipment (especially artillery and ammunition) and relies on security assistance for a variety of key systems, such as air defense and medium-range strike capabilities. Low supplies of artillery systems and ammunition have forced the UAF to adapt to other systems such as drones.

Alongside Western security assistance, Ukraine's domestic defense industry has increased production and continues to innovate. Ukraine currently produces a wide range of systems, including drones (tactical and long-range strike), missiles, artillery systems, radar and electronic warfare, ammunition, and armored vehicles. Ukrainian officials maintain that a robust and capable domestic defense industry is essential to Ukraine's long-term security and for reducing the country's reliance on security assistance. According to one Ukrainian estimate, as much as 76% of the weapons and equipment the UAF needs is now produced domestically.

Ukraine’s defense industry still faces multiple challenges, including accusations of corruption and fraud, labor shortages, and Russian strikes. Additionally, Ukraine’s defense industry has excess capacity but not enough government funding to contract production. In response, Ukraine has sought alternative funding mechanisms—including foreign donors, joint production agreements, foreign investment, and potential exports.

U.S. and Western Security Assistance

Since the start of Russia’s 2022 war, the United States has committed more than \$66 billion, the EU over \$70 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 (NSATU), currently 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 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), the European Union Military Assistance Mission Ukraine (EUMAM), and the United States (the Joint Multinational Training Group—Ukraine) conduct a variety of training programs for the UAF.

Equipment

The UAF continues to request a wide range of equipment from the United States and other Western countries, especially advanced weapons such as air defense systems and ammunition, anti-drone capabilities, and fighter support. At the tactical level, the UAF has identified protected mobility (e.g., armored vehicles), counterbattery radars, artillery, and fire support among its needs. Frontline UAF soldiers and commanders have also reportedly expressed concern about the availability of basic supplies.

The focus of Western security assistance appears to have shifted from donations of existing equipment to financing procurement and investment. In 2024, Ukraine and Denmark reached an agreement (the so-called “Danish Model”) to finance equipment purchases from Ukraine’s domestic defense industry. Additionally, in 2025, NATO and the United States created the Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List (PURL), through which allies contribute funds to purchase “critical defence equipment” from the United States.

Current Military Outlook

The UAF continues to demonstrate high levels of tactical flexibility and capability in the face of Russian quantitative advantages in personnel, equipment, drones, and air support. The UAF continues to hamper Russian efforts and has thus far stymied any new large-scale Russian breakthrough in Ukraine’s Donbas region.

Fighting remains attritional and positional, with the UAF primarily focused on defending the “fortress belt” of Sloviansk and Kramatorsk, which anchor UAF defenses in the Donbas region. According to U.S. officials, Russia captured 1,865 square miles of Ukrainian territory in 2025, but “nowhere on the front did this equate to more than 60 miles of penetration or any territory of operational significance.” The UAF leadership has been criticized for its strategy of refusing to withdraw from positions, even risking potential encirclement, and for continuing to launch offensives.

Ukraine’s strategy appears to be centered on limiting Russian territorial advances and imposing more casualties than Russia is able to replace. In January 2026, Ukrainian defense minister Fedorov said a strategic goal was “to kill 50,000 Russians per month.” While some reports indicate the UAF has at times succeeded in imposing more casualties than Russia can replace, other observers express skepticism about this strategy given the UAF’s own losses. Some observers argue for a greater emphasis on targeting Russian logistics and command centers, but the UAF lacks sufficient medium-range strike capabilities.

Another component of UAF strategy has been to undermine Russia’s ability to economically sustain its war by targeting Russian oil production and export facilities.

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 have criticized the UAF command for poor communication and micromanagement. To improve coordination and maximize resources, the UAF has implemented reforms by establishing corps that control a set number of brigades and are responsible for particular sections of the front line. Some UAF officials report improved coordination, but the process is ongoing; reports indicate some corps are better resourced with personnel and equipment than others.

Recruiting, training, rotating, and retaining troops remain challenges for the UAF. The UAF faces severe infantry shortages and is seeking to recruit more personnel. Most frontline UAF and TDF brigades are understrength and receive ad hoc rotation from the front line. With a porous front line, Russian forces are seeking to identify, bypass, and exploit weak UAF positions.

The UAF relies on a core of professional units to fill gaps in the front line and counter Russian advances. Some observers and UAF officers argue these professional units get priority for personnel and equipment at the expense of other units. Losses and exhaustion also continue to degrade these units’ capabilities, as they appear increasingly called to various positions across the front line. Some observers suggest that overreliance on select units, combined with personnel losses, has contributed to Russian advances.

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