

Military Aid to Ukraine: How Can the EU Live up to Expectations?

Drawing Lessons from a Comparison of French and German Military Aid

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Times are getting increasingly difficult for European security. Russia is becoming more and more aggressive on the Ukrainian front and elsewhere – including cyberspace with disinformation campaigns and cyberattacks. The US is unable to vote for more Ukrainian military aid, although it has been providing most of it in recent years, while European countries are struggling to deliver military aid on time and to agree on how to compensate for the American shortfall. This situation is too dangerous for Europeans to try and keep the status quo. Before discussing a broader European Security and Defense Union framework, which will take a long time to design, a short-term plan for military aid to Ukraine must be developed.

Realistically, how can the EU help to provide for sufficient military aid to Ukraine? After an introduction detailing the need for the EU to live up to expectations against Russia, this study analyses the differences between France and Germany regarding military aid to Ukraine and draws brief lessons for the EU. Thus, to improve the European military aid effort:

- ▶ All allies must work towards implementing a military aid disclosure coordination framework to both allow for strategic ambiguity towards Russia and for the necessary public debate surrounding military aid.
- ▶ National defense industries must accelerate their shift to the “war economy” in order to provide Ukraine with the military material necessary to fight Russia. This need echoes the Commission’s European Defense Industrial Strategy, which foresees a European Defense Industrial Program aimed at providing the industry with predictable orders and thereby incentivizing investment and the ensuing production.
- ▶ Additional military aid to Ukraine should be co-financed, if agreed by Member States, by a new set of EU common borrowings or new EPF funds because the defense of European freedom, which has been put at stake by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, must be considered a European common good.
- ▶ Popular support for military aid must be protected by better fighting Russian disinformation campaigns more intensively, on the ground and online, also via more strict European regulation.

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1 Introduction

1.1 A drying military aid to Ukraine in the US and the EU

Since the beginning of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, a group of 31 countries¹ has been mobilizing to provide the Ukrainian army with military aid. This aid² consisted primarily of weapons (artillery, airplanes, tanks, drones, etc.) and military equipment (ammunition, telecommunication material, light vehicles, etc.).³ In total, military aid had already reached more than EUR 100 bn by 15 January 2024, i.e., about half of the total aid provided to Ukraine since the start of the conflict.⁴ Without this support, the Ukrainian army would never have stood a chance against the Russian aggressor over the last two years.

Nevertheless, this aid is currently being called into question, especially in the US – the country that has sent the most aid since the beginning of the war (EUR 42.2 bn as of 15 January, i.e., all of its commitments⁵) –, where Congress is unable to pass a new aid bill for Ukraine.⁶ If the US fails to renew its military aid, the EU – second largest provider of military aid including the European Peace Facility (EPF)⁷ and national aid (between EUR 28 and 33 bn up to 15 January 15)⁸ – must compensate for this loss. Considering its total commitment up to the end of 2024, (between EUR 49.1 and 49.6 bn)⁹ and the currently allocated aid, the EU is not on course to do that (only EUR 16.6 to 21.1 bn left¹⁰), partly because the EU has been slow to fulfil its commitments¹¹, and has sometimes even failed to fulfil them, as in the case of ammunition.¹² As a result, the Ukrainian army is already losing ground on the battlefield.¹³

¹ Statista, [Quels pays envoient le plus d'aide militaire à l'Ukraine ?](#), 28.02.2024. From NATO, Romania, Turkey, North Macedonia, Albania and Hungary are not sending any military aid. Outside NATO, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand are participating to the coalition.

² This paper does not take other types of aid into consideration: financial aid, humanitarian aid, etc. Military training and financial support to the Ukrainian army are not considered either, because they are not included in the IFW data used for this analysis.

³ Statista, [Quels pays envoient le plus d'aide militaire à l'Ukraine ?](#), 28.02.2024.

⁴ BFM Business, [En deux ans de guerre en Ukraine, les aides à Kiev avoisinent les 200 milliards d'euros](#), 25.02.2024.

⁵ IFW, [Ukraine Support Tracker – Methodological Update & New Results on Aid “Allocation” \(Feb. 2024\)](#), p. 6.

⁶ France 24, [US Senate passes aid bill for Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan but prospects uncertain in House](#), 13.02.2024.

⁷ European Council, [European Peace Facility](#). The EPF provided for EUR 6.1 bn of military aid to Ukraine since 2022.

⁸ IFW, [Methodological Update & New Results on Aid “Allocation” \(Feb 2024\)](#), p. 8, & European Commission, [Two years in, EU continues to stand firmly with Ukraine](#), 23.02.2024.

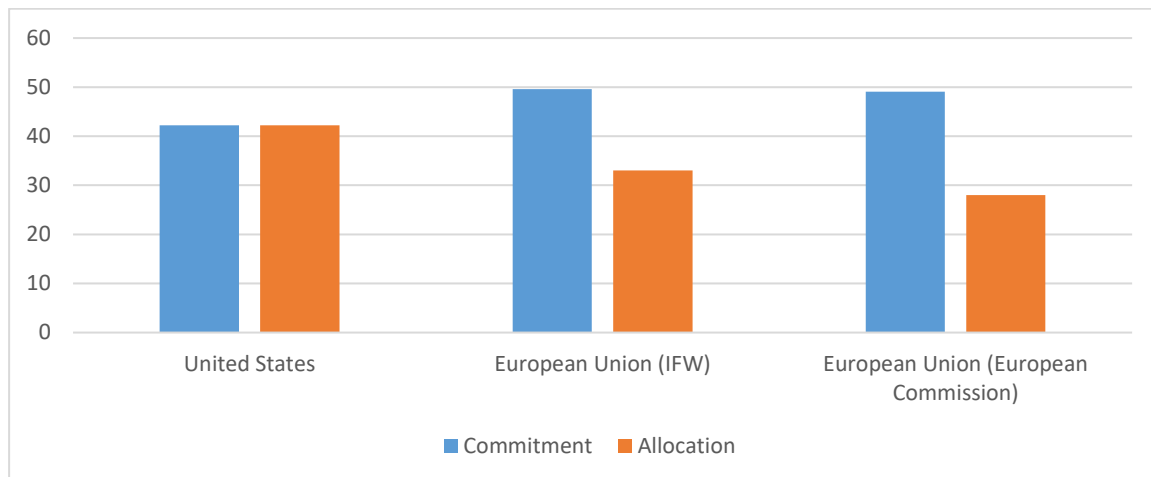
⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ There have been announcements from many countries (Sweden, Denmark, etc.) since the last update of IFW data. They are not included in this analysis. They do not significantly change the core of the analysis results or the following recommendations.

¹¹ IFW, [Europe has a long way to go to replace US aid – large gap between commitments and allocations](#), 16.02.2024.

¹² Euractiv, [France’s Macron open to non-EU ammo purchases for Ukraine as Western leaders gather in Paris](#), 27.02.2024.

¹³ Financial Times, [Ukraine’s top general orders retreat from Avdiivka](#), 17.02.2024.

Figure 1: Military aid commitments and passed allocation in the US and EU (in bn EUR)

Source: Institut für Weltwirtschaft (IFW), European Commission. Commitments up to the end of 2024.

1.2 Growing need for military aid in Ukraine

Yet, the Ukrainian conflict has been the theatre of high-intensity combat: Ukrainians have endured between 31 000 and 70 000 deaths, and between 90 000 and 120 000 wounded.¹⁴ Russian casualties have reached between 75 000 to 180 000 deaths and 210 000 to 230 000 wounded.¹⁵ Despite the transition of the conflict into a stalemate over the past year,¹⁶ these numbers are still growing and are at hugely significant levels, compared for example to other conflicts that Russia has been involved in over recent decades (for instance, 15 000 losses in Afghanistan from 1979 to 1989¹⁷).

And this situation is unlikely to change: neither army currently seems to have the power to gain large portions of Ukrainian territory, be it East or West. But belligerents have incentives for pursuing the war:

- Russia's victory in Ukraine – i.e. Kyiv's fall – is existential, both for Putin – if he loses he could get overthrown and killed by a conspiracy led for example by its most far-right faction¹⁸ and the oligarchs –, and for the Russian economy, which has been revived by the long war¹⁹. This is especially thanks to its transformation into a war economy and to the improvement of social mobility in certain rural areas, giving incentives to Russians to join the increasingly depleted Russian army²⁰. A success in Ukraine would then open the door to new Russian conquests, which would be used by Putin's regime to maintain its legitimacy and to keep on feeding its economy with the war effort. Also, even if a ceasefire in Ukraine is adopted, it is reasonable to assume that

¹⁴ These figures are provided by the [Office of the President of Ukraine](#), an [article from the New York Times](#) providing US estimates, and [an article from Euromaidan Press](#). Numbers from February 2024.

¹⁵ These figures are provided by [Mediazona](#), the [Kyiv Independent](#), and the [British Ministry of Defence](#). Numbers from February 2024.

¹⁶ ECFR, [Beyond the counter-offensive: attrition, stalemate, and the future of the war in Ukraine](#), 18.01.2024.

¹⁷ American Archive, [Soviet-Afghan War \(1979-1989\)](#).

¹⁸ JDD, [Russie : Vladimir Poutine est-il débordé par l'extrême droite ?](#), 28.09.2022.

¹⁹ Russia's GDP growth reached 3,6% in 2023, erasing the recession of 2022. La Tribune, [La Russie renoue avec la croissance économique malgré les sanctions occidentales](#), 08.02.2024.

²⁰ Elements gathered during a discussion with Dr [Céline Marangé](#) organized by Le Grand Continent on 20.02.2024.

Russia would use it to rebuild its military capacities, helped by North Korea, Iran, and indirectly by China²¹, to ultimately restart the war.

- For the Ukrainians, winning the war is of course existential – this time for the country itself. 85% of Ukrainians are confident Ukraine can win the war – i.e., take back the East and Crimea –, but 79% also consider Western military aid to be crucial for victory.²²
- For the coalition of 31 countries helping Ukraine defeat Russia, winning the war is also a fundamental goal as a Ukrainian defeat would send a terrible signal to the international order and weaken liberal democracies all around the world, while increasing the threat to NATO countries of a war-hungry Russia. Also, considering the “hybrid war” Russia is leading against the West, via constant disinformation campaigns in electoral cycles or cyberattacks, a Russian war in Ukraine could also indeed amount to an existential threat to the West as this hybrid war would intensify.

Therefore, everything points to an intensification of the conflict in the coming months, maybe years: it will get worse before it gets better. Thus, the Ukrainian army will have a sustained need for Western military aid, probably more than ever before.

1.3 Potential military aid strategies for the West and the EU

What should the West’s strategy be in this context? So far, the West has provided sufficient military aid to help Ukraine resist Russia, but never to defeat it.²³ Yet, if it wants Ukraine to win - take back the East and Crimea -, it should change its course and give more military power to the Ukrainian army. In this context, the EU should consider increasing military aid to Ukraine. Finally, if the West does not decide to make Ukraine win, it still needs to provide military aid to Ukraine sustainably. Hence, in both cases, **the EU needs to live up to expectations.**

To better fathom what needs to be done at the EU level in this context, this *cepAdhoc network* analyses the composition and size of past military aid in France and Germany before drawing brief lessons (section 2), followed by a brief conclusion (section 3).

2 French and German military aid to Ukraine

To understand what the EU can improve in its military aid policy, it is first useful to focus on French and German military aid in 2022 and 2023, due to their quite distinctive characteristics in terms of disclosure strategy, composition, and size related to GDP.

2.1 French military aid to Ukraine

Regarding its disclosure strategy, it must be emphasized that France has allegedly been deliberately hiding the true size and composition of its military aid to Ukraine, since the beginning of the war, to maintain “strategic ambiguity” vis à vis the Russian opponent: the French government is in fact choosing to hide strategic information related to military aid to prevent Russia from using it against Ukraine.

²¹ Even if China is not providing direct lethal military aid to Russia, it is sending technological material – semi-conductors among other things – via connector countries like Uzbekistan to help the Russian army rebuild its capacities. Explanation gathered by Estelle Prin, director of the semiconductor observatory, 27.02.2024.

²² Al Jazeera, [Bitter but resilient: Ukraine fights on, two years into Russia’s war](#), 24.02.2024.

²³ Atlantic Council, [2024 preview: The West must decide if it wants Ukraine to win](#), 17.12.2023.

Emmanuel Macron underlined the validity of this principle during the Paris conference on military aid to Ukraine held on 26 February.²⁴ Nevertheless, on 3 March, the French government finally released a list of equipment sent since the beginning of the war, without detailing future deliveries.²⁵ The number of units of strategic air-to-ground defense missiles remained confidential.

Therefore, **regarding the composition of the aid**, the main components are the following:

- (1) Armored vehicles (AMX10 RC tanks, transport vehicles, medical vehicles),
- (2) Air-to-ground defense systems (MILAN CROTALE, MISTRAL, and ASTER missiles, long-range SCALP Torch Shadow missiles, etc.),
- (3) Artillery (ammunition, rocket launchers, CAESAR canons, etc.)
- (4) Military engineering capabilities (clearing tanks, mines, etc.)
- (5) Protective and special equipment (helmets, bullet-proof vests, etc.)
- (6) Logistics material (trucks, etc.)
- (7) Material for combat readiness and survivability (individual weapons, FAMAs rifles, etc.)

Regarding the size of the aid, the Office of the President of Ukraine reported that the French government had provided EUR 1.7 bn of military aid in 2022, EUR 2.1 bn in 2023, and is expected to deliver EUR 3 bn in 2024, which makes a total of EUR 6.8 bn, i.e., 0.26% of GDP.²⁶ The above-mentioned list of delivered equipment corroborates these figures by mentioning a value of EUR 3.815 bn for 2022 and 2023, including the funds for the European Peace Facility (EPF).²⁷ It must also be emphasized that these figures mainly represent the cost replacing the French military material required for the French army, which means that the military equipment sent to Ukraine has a lower face value.²⁸ Hence, due to this official methodology, the Kiel Institute for the World Economy (*Institut für Weltwirtschaft – IFW*), which only focuses on the value of the material transferred to Ukraine, comes up with radically different figures. According to the Institute, commitment and allocation for France are equal – because the French government does not disclose future deliveries – and only reach EUR 0.635 bn, i.e., 0,02% of its GDP²⁹.

2.2 German military aid to Ukraine

Regarding its disclosure strategy, Germany has been revealing all of its military aid to Ukraine publicly via a very precise website.³⁰

Regarding the composition of the aid since 2022, German military aid to Ukraine has mainly consisted of:

- (1) Armored fighting vehicles (Personnel carriers, MARDER infantry fighting vehicles, LEOPARD tanks).
- (2) Air defense systems (missiles, SKYNEX systems, etc.)

²⁴ Élysée, [Conférence de soutien à l'Ukraine](#), 27.02.2024.

²⁵ Ministère des Armées, [Liste des équipements livrés à l'Ukraine](#), 03.03.2024.

²⁶ President of Ukraine, [Agreement on security cooperation between Ukraine and France](#), 16.02.2024.

²⁷ Ministère des Armées, [Liste des équipements livrés à l'Ukraine](#), 03.03.2024.

²⁸ When investigating on its own, the French Senate measures that military aid reached EUR 3.2 bn in 2022 and 2023 using this methodology, which is close to the official number of EUR 3.8 bn. When considering the value of the material sent to Ukraine, the report finds EUR 1.7 bn EUR. Capital, [Guerre en Ukraine : pourquoi le montant des aides françaises devrait exploser en 2024](#), 24.01.2024.

²⁹ IFW, [Ukraine Support Tracker](#).

³⁰ Bundesregierung, [The arms and military equipment Germany is sending to Ukraine](#), 26.02.2024.

- (3) Artillery (ammunition, rocket launchers, COBRA radar system, etc.)
- (4) Military engineering capabilities (clearing tanks, mines, etc.)
- (5) Protective and special equipment (drones, helmets, drone detection systems, etc.)
- (6) Logistic material (trucks, minibuses, etc.)
- (7) Material for combat readiness and survivability (assault rifles, machine guns, medical material, etc.)

Regarding the size of the aid, the federal government announced that it amounted to about EUR 1.6 bn in 2022, EUR 5 bn in 2023, and should amount to EUR 7.1 bn in 2024, which makes a total of EUR 13.7 bn expected by the end of the year, i.e. 0.35% of GDP.³¹ The official figures are different from those of the Kiel institute (IFW) which argues that the total commitment of Germany is actually EUR 17.7 bn (0.46% of GDP).³² Indeed, the figure calculated by the IFW includes deliveries beyond 2024, and the German government has also announced deliveries for the coming years.

2.3 Comparison between French and German military aid

All in all, depending on the methodological approach taken, France and Germany have very different figures for military aid.

Table 1: Methodological differences between the IFW and official military aid levels to Ukraine in France

Methodological features	IFW	French government	German government
Disclosure	Disclosed past and future commitments	Disclosed past commitments (except strategic ones) and undisclosed future commitments	Disclosed past and future commitments
Time scope	Unbounded	2022-2024	Unbounded
Value considered	Value of the equipment transferred to the Ukrainian Army	Value of the equipment replacing that sent to the Ukrainian Army	Uncertain
EPF fund included	No	Yes	Yes

Source: IFW, Bundesregierung, Office of the President of Ukraine.

If official sources are considered – which supposedly define aid as the value of material replacement for its own army³³ and not the value of transferred material to Ukraine, which includes EPF funds - and if aid is counted from 2022-to-2024 -, the levels in terms of % of GDP are close (0.26% for France vs. 0.35% for Germany). If the total past and future disclosed aid and the value of the transferred material to Ukraine are considered, the levels are dramatically different (0.02% vs. 0.46%).

³¹ Bundesregierung, [Vereinbarung über Sicherheitszusammenarbeit und langfristige Unterstützung zwischen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der Ukraine](#), 16.02.2024, p. 2.

³² IFW, [Ukraine Support Tracker](#).

³³ For Germany, it is not clear whether military aid value is defined as replacement value for the Bundeswehr or value transferred to the Ukrainian Army.

2.4 Understanding the French-German differences in military aid levels

Thus, despite methodological discrepancies, the gap between French and German military aid levels as a percentage of GDP is real, with France lagging behind. **What is the possible explanation for the differences between France and Germany in terms of military aid?** Several ad-hoc factors should be considered:

- (1) **Germany immediately had the opportunity to transfer its unused Cold War stocks to Ukraine**, which France could not do because its stocks were liquidated a long time ago.³⁴
- (2) Furthermore, the French army is usually described as a “Bonsai” army, which can do everything but only on a small scale. Hence, **given its current involvement in many different theaters of operation all around the world, French military material was not readily available**³⁵ for the Ukrainian army.³⁶
- (3) **Germany could also count on a more rapid and larger scale ramp-up of its defense industry to produce brand new military aid to Ukraine**, which France only started a few months ago and with fewer results.³⁷

In addition, on the speculative side of the explanation spectrum, three further elements could be added:

- (1) **The French government may fear giving Ukraine too much military aid without control because it lacks trust in Ukrainian institutions.** It is indeed likely that, once the war is over, the Ukrainian Army could become one of the strongest armies in Europe.³⁸ If the government turns out not to be pro-European anymore – especially if Russia wins –, all the military aid sent today could be used against the EU. **This may also explain why the French government may be willing to “send troops” to Ukraine**³⁹ as it would be able to directly monitor the use of military aid.
- (2) **The French government may also fear sending too huge an amount of military aid to Ukraine because of the popular backlash it could provoke.** According to the Eurobarometer from November 2023, only 53% of French citizens support the delivery of military aid by the EU to Ukraine vs. 61% of Germans.⁴⁰ France has already been enduring Russian influence on social media for many years – such as during the Yellow Vests crisis⁴¹ – and a large proportion of French public opinion is now against sending a lot more help to Ukraine. In this context, the French government may have been hesitating in its military aid strategy, especially at the beginning of the war.
- (3) **The French government could also be choosing to comply as much as possible with the new Stability and Growth Pact rules.**⁴² With this aim, for instance, the Economy Minister Bruno Le

³⁴ Explanation from François Heisbourg, special consultant for Europe, International Institute for Strategic Studies, heard during the Grand Continent event « [Deux ans après l’invasion de l’Ukraine, sociétés et armées face à la guerre étendue](#) », 20.02.2024.

³⁵ 20minutes, [War in Ukraine: Why is France so discreet about its arms deliveries](#), 01/06/2023.

³⁶ Explanation from François Heisbourg, special consultant for Europe, International Institute for Strategic Studies, heard during the Grand Continent event « [Deux ans après l’invasion de l’Ukraine, sociétés et armées face à la guerre étendue](#) », 20.02.2024.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ One anonymous French diplomat mentioned a few months ago the fact that the French government was also supporting enlargement of the EU to Ukraine because it did not want Ukraine to ultimately turn against the EU if the country were to change its political direction.

³⁹ Élysée, [Conférence de soutien à l’Ukraine](#), 27.02.2024.

⁴⁰ European Commission, [Europeans continue to strongly support Ukraine, Eurobarometer shows](#), 13.12.2023.

⁴¹ Portail de l’IE, [La France est-elle armée face aux guerres informationnelles ? Les exemples des influences russe et chinoise](#), 09.03.2022.

⁴² European Council, [Economic governance review: Council and Parliament strike deal on reform of fiscal rules](#), 10.02.2024.

Maire already announced EUR 10 bn in spending cuts for 2024.⁴³ In this context, replacing the military material sent to Ukraine or purchasing brand new material to send to Ukraine correspond to further spending cuts in the French 2024 budget, to prevent the high French debt-to-GDP ratio from growing again. This choice could have dramatic repercussions for French public opinion with European elections looming.

2.5 Brief lessons for European military aid effort

What can be inferred from this comparison in order to improve EU military aid effort? The differences between French and German military aid levels promote the following ideas:

- (1) All allies, including Ukraine, must work towards **implementing a military aid disclosure coordination framework** to allow for both strategic ambiguity towards Russia and the necessary public debate surrounding military aid.
- (2) **National defense industries must accelerate their shift to a “war economy”** in order to provide Ukraine with the brand-new military material necessary to fight Russia. This need echoes the Commission’s European Defense Industrial Strategy⁴⁴, which envisages for example the **European Defense Industrial Program**⁴⁵, aimed at providing the industry with predictable orders and thereby incentivize investment and the ensuing production.
- (3) **Despite the political risk, it implies that additional military aid to Ukraine from highly indebted countries like France should be financed by sovereign spending** and, if agreed by Member States, co-financed in the longer run by a new set of EU common borrowings or new EPF funds.
- (4) Popular support for military aid must be protected by **fighting Russian disinformation campaigns more effectively and intensively**, on the ground and online, also via stricter European regulation.

3 Conclusion

In order to resist and/or defeat Russia in Ukraine, the EU must therefore play its part as provider of crucial support to Ukraine with more military aid deliveries this year, and in those to come if the war continues. This involves greater coordination on disclosure between the military aid allies and Ukraine. This involves the development of defense industries in the EU, supported by demand for military aid guaranteed by the European Defense Industrial Program. This involves more financial commitment from highly indebted countries to finance military aid and, if agreed, a new set of common borrowings. This involves fighting Russian online disinformation more effectively. Finally, this could also involve breaking the remaining economic bonds with Russia by imposing new sanctions. 2024 is a decisive year for the EU. It seems to be compelled to change its course and finally start developing a greater defense capability instead of simply relying on a seemingly increasingly unreliable American partner. Will the peace dividend return? No one knows. Until then, the old saying prevails: *si vis pacem, para bellum*.

⁴³ France info, [Coupes budgétaires : quels sont les postes de dépenses affectés par le plan d’économies de 10 milliards d’euros ?](#), 22.02.2024.

⁴⁴ European Commission, [Commission launches comprehensive consultation process with stakeholders aiming to deliver a European Defense Industrial Strategy](#), 27.10.2023.

⁴⁵ Euractiv, [EU « ready to take risks” to boost defense production, Breton says](#), 11.01.2024.

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