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US Is Eager to Start Sending IED Materials to a Ukrainian Insurgency — Already Laying Down Plans

Field Empty

7-8 minutes

National Security

U.S. and allies quietly prepare for a Ukrainian government-in-exile and a long insurgency

The Ukrainian military has mounted an unexpectedly fierce defense against

invading Russian forces, which have been dogged by [logistical problems](#) and flagging morale. But the war is barely two weeks old, and in Washington and European capitals, **officials anticipate that the Russian military will reverse its early losses, setting the stage for a long, bloody insurgency.**

The ways that Western countries would support a Ukrainian resistance are beginning to take shape. Officials have been reluctant to discuss detailed plans, since they're premised on a Russian military victory that, however likely, hasn't happened yet. But as a first step, Ukraine's allies

are planning for how to help establish and support a government-in-exile, which could **direct guerrilla operations** against Russian occupiers, according to several U.S. and European officials.

The **weapons** the United States has provided to Ukraine's military, and [that continue to flow into the country](#), **would be crucial** to the success of an insurgent movement, officials said. The Biden administration has asked Congress, infused with a rare bipartisan spirit in defense of Ukraine, to take up **a \$10 billion humanitarian aid and military package that includes funding to replenish the**

stocks of weapons that have already been sent.

Should the United States and its allies choose to back an insurgency, Ukrainian President Volodymyr **Zelensky would be the pivotal force, officials said, maintaining morale and rallying Ukrainians** living under Russian occupation to resist their powerful and well-equipped foe.

The possible Russian takeover of Kyiv **has prompted a flurry of planning at the State Department, Pentagon and other U.S. agencies** in the event that the Zelensky government has to flee the capital or the country itself.

“We’re doing contingency planning now

for every possibility,” including a **scenario in which Zelensky establishes a government-in-exile in Poland**, said a U.S. administration official, who, like others, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive security matter.

Zelensky, who has called himself Russia’s “[target No. 1](#),” remains in Kyiv and has assured his citizens he’s not leaving. He has had discussions with U.S. officials about whether he should move west to a safer position in the city of Lviv, closer to the Polish border. Zelensky’s security detail has plans ready to swiftly relocate him and members of his cabinet, a senior

Ukrainian official said. “So far, he has refused to go.”

Nevertheless, **European diplomats, like their American counterparts, are starting to prepare for how to support the Ukrainian government if Kyiv falls or the country is entirely occupied by Russia.** A United Nations resolution this past week condemning the [invasion](#), which drew 141 votes, is one element of “laying the groundwork” to recognize Zelensky’s administration as Ukraine’s legitimate government and to keep it afloat even if it no longer controls territory, said a senior European diplomat.

During an official visit, a Ukrainian

special operations commander told Rep. Michael Waltz (R-Fla.), Rep. Seth Moulton (D-Mass.) and other lawmakers that they were shifting training and planning to focus on maintaining an armed opposition, relying on insurgent-like tactics.

As the Russian military struggles with logistical challenges — including fuel and food shortages — Waltz anticipates that the Ukrainians will repeatedly strike Russian supply lines. **To do that, they need a steady supply of weapons and the ability to set improvised explosive devices, he said.**

“Those supply lines are going to be

very, very vulnerable, and that's where you really literally starve the Russian army.”

Moulton, who served in Iraq as a Marine Corps infantry officer, said that he is in favor of sending Harpoons and Stingers — the administration has decided to send the latter weapons, according to a U.S. official and [a document obtained by The Washington Post](#) — but that using them also will require training.

“You can't ship them to Ukraine at the last minute and expect some national guardsman to pick up a Stinger and shoot down an aircraft,” he said.

Continuing a resistance campaign

will require continued clandestine shipments of small arms, ammunition, explosives and even cold-weather gear.

“Think about the kinds of things that would be used by saboteurs as opposed to an army repelling a frontal invasion,” Moulton said.

Officials remain cautious about overt support for a Ukrainian insurgency lest it draw NATO member countries into direct conflict with Russia. **In Moscow’s eyes, support for a Zelensky government operating in Poland could constitute an attack by the alliance, some officials warned.**

But Ukraine’s leaders and its citizens

aren't likely to be deterred by NATO's concerns.

"I doubt very much that the Ukrainians will not continue an underground resistance campaign even after the Russians establish control," said a **senior Western intelligence official.**

Moscow has "grossly underestimated Ukraine's ability to resist," the official said. "I'm reminded, especially by my eastern colleagues, about Ukrainians themselves. Ukrainians were some of the fiercest fighters ... for the Soviets during World War II." He **predicted that a resistance would continue for months and possibly years.**

The United States has backed and

fought against successful insurgencies. Veterans of such conflicts say that the Ukrainians so far have demonstrated the key ingredient.

“The number one thing you have to have is people on the ground who want to fight,” said Jack Devine, a retired senior CIA officer who ran the agency’s successful covert campaign to arm Afghan fighters who drove out the Soviet military in the 1980s.

If Russian and Ukrainian negotiators who have been meeting near the border in Belarus reach some settlement, that will likely diminish the momentum for an insurgency and support for it, Devine predicted.

Marta Kepe, a senior defense analyst at the Rand Corp. who studies resistance movements, said that they often change during the course of a war.

“As occupation progresses and extends for a longer time, what can start out as a more centralized resistance often changes into smaller resistance groups or units. It is not a negative thing,” she said. “In fact, smaller groups allow more resilience.”

NATO policymakers admire the spirit of the Ukrainian forces, but they also say that their ability to hold out against Russia is not unlimited, especially as stocks of ammunition dwindle and the

Russian military extends its encirclement of major cities.

“Russia has more troops than Ukraine,” said a second senior European diplomat. “Ukrainian troops are very brave, but they are already fighting more than a week.”

Source: [The Washington Post](#)