

Hayrünnisa Çelik

Do NATO states continue to have enough willpower and strategies to help Ukraine to stop Russia and what are the prospects of Ukraine's NATO membership?

As Russian troops settled in and annexed Crimea in 2014 to slowly start planting the seeds of the so-called “special military operation” of Ukraine which would begin on 24th February 2022, Zelensky signed decrees approving the strategies to liberation of Crimea and NATO partnership in 2021. At the same time, Putin started to publicly vocalize his thesis that there was a climate of hatred which had been increasing to a genocide towards the Russian population in Donbas region which undoubtedly initiated a series of disinformation and a hybrid warfare, in which he continuously used mass media, fake news and other various irregular methods. (Arsalan, 2024)

Although the war takes place between Ukraine and Russia, its effects on those supporting the parties and the international community are quite high. Due to the fact that Ukraine and Russia are important suppliers of grain and fertilizer in the world, and Russia is the leading natural gas supplier to the EU, the war has had a negative impact on energy and food security issues across Europe. Apart from these impacts the Russia-Ukraine war had in Europe, however, the shock of Russia’s continuous attacks and aggression against Ukraine became a reminder of NATO’s role in ensuring European security and transatlantic relations.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, with its center of gravity being unity and the aim of creating a long-lasting security and peace in North America and Europe, is committed to providing collective defense with its member nations. The NATO alliance’s support for Ukraine is extremely pivotal to stop the Russian aggression on the Ukrainian territories which is why many NATO members have provided substantial military aid to Ukraine, including advanced weaponry and training for the Ukrainian army. Therefore, the alliance’s support has been crucial in improving Ukraine's defenses and countering Russian aggression.

NATO member states provided Ukraine with a wide scope of **military aid** which expands from anti-tank weapons and artillery systems to air defense missiles and drones. The United States, the United Kingdom, and some Eastern European NATO countries (notably, Lithuania) have been very active in providing guns and military equipment. This support has been important in strengthening Ukraine's defenses, allowing it to resist Russian forces and regain the occupied regions.

Perhaps one example to the member states that did drastic changes in their policies is Germany. Even though since World War II Germany has tried to impose limitations on its military and took steps to keep it under control, on 27th February 2022, days after the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it announced a plan to prioritize military spending and created a special fund for the German military. Moreover, the German government also decided to send military aid to Kyiv and provided Ukraine with 1,000 anti-tank weapons and 500 air missiles. It also allowed Estonia and the Netherlands to send German-made arms to Ukraine, which Germany has refused to do so for years for different countries. (Deutsche Welle, 2022)

Germany's huge shift in its policy is a clear sign that by destroying Ukraine's security, Russia is aiming at destroying the European security as well, which NATO and its allies are actively trying to combat.

The change and improvements in national defense, however, is not only visible in Germany. Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty states that *"In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack."* requiring member states to be prepared against any possible attack. When analyzing the budget proposals of other member states like France and Poland, who decided to implement this requirement in a strict manner, we can see an increase and a commitment to meet the minimum 2% of GDP annual defense spending requirement set by NATO and especially encouraged by the USA.

In terms of **practical support**, NATO has significantly increased the military training and assistance to Ukraine. One of these programs is the "Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP)" under which NATO helped Ukraine to improve its defense sector and provided military support and capacity building initiatives. Additionally, the Allies, among supplying arms and military equipment, have decided to establish the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) to coordinate the provision of military equipment and training for Ukraine by Allies and partners and it will be based in Wiesbaden, Germany. Although under international law, the NSATU will not make NATO a party to the conflict, it will support the improvement of Ukraine's defense and oversee the training of Ukraine's armed forces. Among Ukraine's biggest supporters, USA will also purchase military equipment for Ukraine, and establish various military trainings and provide investments for Ukraine's defense infrastructure and industry.

In regard to the **economic and humanitarian aid**, member states have provided Ukraine with financial assistance and loans with a minimum baseline funding of €40 billion annually to provide to Ukraine within the next year. Moreover, member states have provided medical supplies and food to the Ukrainians affected by the war. (NATO, 2024b)

Since Russia's full-scale military invasion in Ukraine, Lithuania has been one of the member states that acted steadfastly in support to Ukraine by initiating a long-term support strategy. Lithuania's pledge for 2024-2026 includes at least 200 million EUR in military assistance to Ukraine and in addition to this, regular supplies of military hardware and equipment. Lithuania actively trains Ukrainian soldiers, accepts injured service members for medical care, provides expert consultations, and contributes financially to international funds that support Ukraine. Military aid accounts for half of Lithuania's 1 billion EUR support to Ukraine thus far. (Lithuania.lt, 2024) These numbers do not include the funds raised by various NGOs for the Ukrainian refugees residing in Lithuania, which is a notable number compared to the country's population.

Besides all the military support for Ukraine, allies have imposed **sanctions** on Russia to diminish its effects on Ukraine and its ability to re-built its finances. The United States began its 2022 sanctions campaign by freezing \$5 billion of the Russian Central Bank's US assets, an unprecedented action to prevent Moscow from utilizing its foreign reserves to prop up the

Russian ruble. It also prevented the largest Russian bank and several others from using the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) which is a Belgium-based interbank messaging service essential for processing foreign payments. (Hussein, 2024)

Meanwhile, the US Treasury Department restricted US investors from trading Russian securities, including debt as well; the sanctions collectively limit transactions with 80 percent of Russian banking sector assets. (Psaedakis and Jones, 2022)

As the US implemented such sanctions, other NATO member states has placed their own on Russian banks and individuals including Putin. Europe was Russia's biggest energy export market. Moscow supplied approximately 40% of the EU's natural gas and roughly one-third of its crude oil. The EU placed an embargo on most Russian crude oil imports and joined the G7 price ceiling; in early 2023, it added a ban on Russian refined oil products such as diesel and gasoline. The EU and other states have also put restrictions aimed at Russia's financial lines and military technology. In December 2022, the union agreed to prohibit sale of some military gear to Russia and its allies, including Iran. (S&P Global, 2024) The sanctions are not only intended to cripple Russia's economy or end the war, but to send a message that breaking international standards and invading a neighbor will result in a strong coalition response.

In terms of diplomatic efforts of NATO, the Alliance has made numerous statements to condemn the Russian aggression and illegal invasion of Ukrainian territories. (Tefft and Courtney, 2024) The statements have highlighted both the alliance's and international community's stance against the violations of international law. However, clearly these efforts and measures did not serve their purpose.

Although NATO has increased its presence in Eastern Europe, Ukraine's NATO membership still remains as a challenge. As a peacekeeping organization, NATO is skeptical about admitting a country that is currently engaged in a war, based on statements made by various heads of member states. (AP News, 2024) Moreover, admission of Ukraine to NATO would mean that Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, providing that *"If a NATO Ally is the victim of an armed attack, each and every other member of the Alliance will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members and will take the actions it deems necessary to assist the Ally attacked."* would oblige the member states to fully intervene into and escalate the war.

Even though currently Ukraine's membership is on a debate, the trajectory towards NATO membership depends on the aftermath and resolution of its conflict with Russia. The alliance's support for Ukraine is vast, as it can be seen from the military aid provided, but full membership is likely to depend on on significant progress in rebuilding the military and achieving internal reforms in line with NATO requirements. Though, still, despite these challenges, NATO states demonstrate a strong willpower and have strategic measures in place to support Ukraine.

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