

THE POLISH EXPERIMENT IN MILITARY ADVISING: IMPROVING THE EUROPEAN UNION TRAINING MISSION TO UKRAINE

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Editor's Note: Since 2021, the authors have worked as a research team that has visited numerous locations across Europe, including Ukraine, to observe Ukrainian troops being

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trained. This article is based on a recent visit to Combined Arms Training Command in Poland, which falls under the authority of the European Union Military Assistance Mission Ukraine.

In a long war, attrition of highly trained personnel is to be expected. So as Ukraine's defensive war grinds on through its third year, training Ukrainians is increasingly important simply to keep its fighting positions manned and its operational options maximized. As a 2024 RUSI report notes, "Ukrainians may have lost over 70% of their combat experienced personnel since 2022." Though the new mobilization law has allowed Kyiv to conscript more soldiers to address the manpower shortage, the Armed Forces of Ukraine have struggled to provide sufficient high-quality training to the newly mobilized troops due to a lack of trainers and suitable facilities. According to Ukrainian commanders at the front, their infantry forces are "grappling with exhaustion and flagging morale, leading some to abandon their positions and allow Russia to capture more land." Moreover, neither exhaustion or morale issues can be solved when, without sufficient training, "50 to 70 per cent of new infantry troops were killed or wounded within days of starting their first rotation."

Reports from frontline Ukrainian commanders are in line with observations from British military trainers we interviewed in early 2023, who told us that among Ukrainian troops who graduated from their three-week basic training course, attrition rates were about 70 to 90 percent within two to four weeks of arriving at the front lines. Such heavy losses led the British military to increase the training program to five weeks, with an "emphasis on tactics that would help Ukrainians survive the first two weeks in the trenches, which is also the most critical learning period for becoming experienced."

As training takes on a heightened level of importance for Ukraine's ability to continue fighting in war, on par with other critical elements of international support like military equipment and economic assistance, many Western militaries are emphasizing programs of instruction. Based on our recent visits to training bases,

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UPCOMING EVENTS

There are no upcoming events.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Announcing the Modern War Institute...

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we highlight how training of Ukrainian forces is adapting alongside the realities of this “cyberpunk war” and shifting tactical innovations by Ukrainian and Russian forces.

Filling a Crucial Gap through International Training

Ukraine’s international partners provide basic training for new recruits, as well as additional training to help experienced units fight together better as a cohesive whole. Despite popular perceptions that the United States provides the majority of the support to Ukraine, European partners are actually the primary providers of training. As of the end of summer 2024, the European Union (EU) has trained over sixty thousand Ukrainian troops, with thirteen thousand trained in Poland, and is working toward training another fifteen thousand by the end of the year. Known as the EU Military Assistance Mission (EUMAM) in support of Ukraine, there are twenty-four EU member states providing military personnel and programs of instruction to the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Within that EUMAM framework, there are two training commands: Special Training Command (ST-C) in Strausberg, Germany, and an operational Combined Arms Training Command (CAT-C) in Zagan, Poland. Per our interviews with Western military personnel, only one of these commands is necessary, but having two provides advantages, such as enabling more flexibility for the training providers. Based on our fieldwork and visits to German and Polish training bases, each military provides a distinctive approach to Ukrainian training.

Outside of the EU framework, the UK leads a multinational training mission, known as Operation Interflex, which has trained over sixty thousand Ukrainians since 2014. The United States has trained almost twenty thousand Ukrainians, primarily through the Joint Multinational Training Group-Ukraine (JMTG-U)—run by assigned US National Guard units—and to a lesser extent, training provided by regionally aligned forces in Europe.

Collectively, since 2022, Ukraine’s international supporters have been responsible for training over 120,000 Ukrainians (more than one and a half times the size of the British Army) at eighty locations around the world. For context, the number of Ukrainians trained represents around 20 percent of the six hundred thousand soldiers Ukraine had fighting in the Ukrainian Ground Forces in