

How Britain Fueled Ukraine's War Machine and Invited Direct Conflict with Russia

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Britain has played a key role in NATO forward troop deployments and training exercises on Russia's borders. With war underway, the UK sends billions in arms, special forces, and volunteers to ensure escalation.

In an effort to evade his domestic woes, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson—who may soon be replaced—has spent much time [toing and froing](#) to Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has [described](#) the buffoonish British PM as one of Ukraine's closest allies. If and when Johnson leaves office, he is tipped for a role as Ukraine Envoy.

The Johnson-Zelenskyy relationship contrasts sharply with Zelenskyy's experiences with French President Emmanuel Macron, who has [warned](#) the European Union (EU) and the US not to “humiliate” Russian President Putin and instead to [seek diplomatic](#) over military solutions to the conflict.

But Johnson's pastiche of Churchillian resolve has deeper roots in the Anglo-American alliance when it comes to Ukraine, and is heavily informed by Britain's membership of the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). His impulses are also dictated by Britain's post-World War Two-era role in the global order: to serve the interests of the US state. From 2015 to this year, the UK has [trained](#) over 22,000 Ukrainian military personnel as part of the Maritime Training Initiative and Operation Orbital.

The UK pushes Ukraine as a gateway to NATO

In my book *Britain's Secret Wars*, I documented how the UK spent years training the Ukrainian military, long before the 2014 coup, and even when the Ukrainian military was under the command of Russian-oriented governments.

“We believe that Ukraine, as a European country, should have the right, under existing

treaties, to join the EU once it has fulfilled the criteria for accession.” These are the words [spoken](#) in 2011 by Leigh Turner, Ambassador to Austria and the UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations. Turner went on to say: “I’ve actually spent several chunks of my career in and around Central and Eastern Europe, starting off with a year in 1980 as a civil servant at the headquarters of the British Northern Army Group in Rheindahlen in Germany.”

Turner [continued](#): “We always used to joke nervously that this would be the target of the first Soviet tactical nuclear missile to launch hostilities in Europe.” Nothing quite puts you in the mood for political work like a few wisecracks about the apocalypse. Turner said that the UK should continue to focus on Ukraine as a weapon against Russia: “Ukraine could have a big demonstration effect in the region. Indeed, there is an argument that a successful Ukraine could be a swing-state for the whole of the FSU [former Soviet Union].”

“Conversely, if Ukraine fails, it would be easy for unelected or undemocratic leaders in the region to claim that ‘western’ style governance has no place around here.” Turner and his colleagues hoped that they could nudge Yanukovich in the pro-Western direction. “Before the election of President Yanukovich, he was often depicted as being ‘pro-Russian’. This is too simple,” Turner [explained](#) before laying out the economic “reforms” being undertaken.

To quicken the process, Turner saw the UK’s role as Ukraine’s gateway to NATO: to establish Ukraine as a NATO proxy but without giving it the benefits and collective protection guarantees of NATO members. As he said, “There’s a lot the UK can continue to do to work closely with Ukraine to help its armed forces to reform and to make them more capable of integrating into, and working with, NATO forces.”

British proposals included appointing a special Defense Adviser, providing language training, and naval integration. Turner’s follow-up statement, also in 2011, [noted](#) that 17 staff and students from the UK Royal College of Defence Studies visited Ukraine, while 20 personnel from the Ukrainian National Defense University came to Britain. As part of so-called Partnership for Peace programmes, British paratroopers trained their Ukrainian counterparts.

But [according](#) to John Kampfner, this was not enough. “When Russia invaded Donbas and annexed Ukraine in 2014, the UK was happy to fall in behind efforts by France and Germany to negotiate a settlement with Moscow and Kyiv under the Normandy Format, which ultimately failed,” writes the journalist and author, who neglects to mention why the negotiations failed. Kampfner is now Executive Director of the [UK in the World Programme](#): a project of the Royal Institute for International Affairs think tank that seeks to formulate Britain’s neocolonial doctrines.

A House of Commons research briefing [states](#) that, at the time, the EU’s major powers, France and Germany, opposed sending military equipment to Ukraine. This was in contrast to the US position under US President Barack Obama. Britain bolstered the US position while compromising with its European neighbors by sending so-called non-lethal equipment.

“Win-wins for NATO”

In 2015, Britain established Operation Orbital to train Ukrainian forces. From 2017 to 2020, various branches of the government, including the Foreign Office and Department for International Development (which later merged), spent over £30 million of taxpayers’

money on the so-called [Conflict, Stability and Security Fund](#) (CSSF). In addition to Orbital, the funds contributed to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine.

The House of Commons research briefing [says](#) that a year later, Ukraine and Britain signed a Memorandum of Understanding to continue military training and arms exports. "In 2018 training teams consisting of Royal Navy and Royal Marines personnel were deployed to deliver training to the Ukrainian Navy." In late-2020, it was [reported](#) that 100 soldiers from the 3rd Rifles and 4th Battalion Royal Regiment of Scotland (4 Scots) "are in Ukraine providing training to Ukrainian Force."

In 2021, the UK pledged [£1.7bn in financing](#) to support the Ukrainian Naval Capabilities Enhancement Programme. In June of that year, the military contractor Babcock signed a [tripartite memorandum](#) of understanding with the UK and Ukrainian governments to regenerate Ukraine's naval ports. "Babcock will be supported by several other companies with a strong UK presence, including MBDA, Thales, and Royal Haskoning DHV."

In August 2021, *Soldier* magazine [reported](#) that British forces had "been training with their Ukrainian counterparts as part of a multinational package that also involved Canadian, US and Swedish personnel." The 400 person battle group mainly consisted of personnel from 4 Scots who were deployed to Ukraine "with the aim of developing mutual relations, joint planning and battalion and tactical operations." The report notes how personnel practiced live-fire drills with Ukraine's 54th Mechanized Brigade, "which has completed multiple tours in the volatile Donbas region."

Commenting on Exercise Cossack Mace, Lt. Col. Alasdair Hempenstall of 4 Scots [said](#) of his men: "They have learnt how the Ukrainians operate from a military perspective, as well as experiencing a taste of their culture and heritage."

A *British Army Review* publication from summer 2021 [states](#): "Ukraine and Estonia have evolved more from support to (UK) Operations ORBITAL and CABRIT", the UK deployment to Estonia as part of NATO's Forward Presence. "These are also win-wins for NATO, which is coming neatly into alignment."

[Lt. Col. Glen Grant \(ret.\)](#) is a Riga (Latvia)-based British military advisor in Ukraine and graduate of various institutions, including the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. A Northern Ireland war veteran (i.e., counterinsurgency specialist) and military-intelligence operative in 1990s' Bosnia and Iraq, Grant has advised most of the militaries of Eastern Europe/the Baltic and Balkans regions.

Consider the background: In the 2010s, the US Agency for International Development – the State Department's privatization and astroturf wing – [helped](#) Ukraine's so-called Democratic Alliance; one of many groups pushing for pro-Western "reforms" and an entity prominent in the Euromaidan protests that escalated into the 2013-14 coup. One prominent Democratic Alliance leader was politician and advisor Victor Andrusiv, who went on to lead an entity called the Ukrainian Institute for the Future (UIF), founded by figures like [ex-military officer](#) and businessman, Anatoliy Amelin, [founder](#) of one of Ukraine's largest investment companies, Altani Capital.

Another UIF founder, Taras Berezovets, is a [graduate](#) of Britain's Royal College of Defence

Studies who became [head](#) of the UIF's National Security and Defense section. The late Oleksiy Skrypnyk was Deputy Chairman of the Permanent Delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, who during the Trump years successfully "[lobbied](#) the United States to supply Ukraine with sophisticated Javelin anti-tank missiles."

Lt. Col. Grant [works as a security and defense expert](#) at the UIF, "where he is supporting the Parliamentary Defence Committee" and leads military volunteers and army officers. Grant is also a senior fellow at the Institute for Statecraft (IfS): the notorious military-intelligence front organization set up in 2005 and registered to a derelict-looking mill in Scotland. As has been well-documented elsewhere, the IfS spun out a British Foreign Office-funded organization called [the Integrity Initiative](#), which created covert "clusters" of journalists, academics, and other anti-Russian influencers.

Earlier in 2022, the UK-led [Allied Rapid Reaction Corps](#) (ARRC) completed its year-long tenure as NATO's combat corps headquarters. Training teams later deployed to Estonia and Ukraine. The ARRC also partners with the Romanian-led Multinational Corps South-East.

This March, the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) [said](#) that Britain deployed to Poland the Sky Sabre medium-range, anti-aircraft system, which consists of radar and trucks carrying missiles, including 100 personnel. Troops from the 16th Regiment Royal Artillery operate the weapon. Others from the Regiment have been at a base on Baker Barracks, Thorney Island (on the English Channel), ready to deploy to Poland. Starstreak, meanwhile, is [described](#) as a high velocity anti-craft missile, which was sent to Ukraine.

"Diplomacy is the only path," UK Defense Secretary declares while promising escalation in Ukraine

In September 2021, MoD personnel met with the National Guard of Ukraine (NGU), a wing of the Ukrainian military providing the umbrella for notorious battalions of [neo-Nazi activists](#) and criminal elements. Operation Orbital's Lt. Col. Andy Cox Deputy commander [said](#): "We will start this work with the inclusion of NGU representatives in the training activities that are already being conducted by British instructors in some units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine." Classified in the UK, the information was posted on the NGU website, prompting denials from the MoD.

In February 2022, the Royal Welsh Battlegroup left its base in Germany to travel to Estonia as part of Operation Iron Surge, which included a convoy of Warrior infantry fighting vehicles and Challenger 2 main battle tanks. Other entities involved included the 1st Aviation Brigade Combat Team of the Army Air Corps. Britain's [daffy](#) Defence Secretary Ben Wallace, who later [fell for](#) a state secret-spilling prank, [said](#): "Alongside our NATO Allies, we are deploying troops and assets on land, sea and air to bolster European defences in response to the build-up of Russian military forces on the border of Ukraine." He added: "De-escalation and diplomacy remain the only path out of this situation," as he continued to escalate the situation and quash efforts to negotiate a settlement.

Video-prank with British Defense Minister Ben Wallace

On March 17, 2022, Vovan and Lexus held a video conference with British Defense Minister Ben Wallace on behalf of Prime Minister of Denis Shmyhal. Wait for the full version of the conversation in a few days on our channel. pic.twitter.com/siq9FYKvFE

Also in February, it was [reported](#) that a team of Special Air Service (SAS) veterans who had fought in Afghanistan and Iraq were receiving money funneled through an unnamed private company via an unnamed European country. Veterans include warrant officers, sergeants, corporals, and snipers who will reportedly kill Russian spotters. The veterans are expert Javelin and Stinger missile operators, suggesting that they training the Ukrainians how to use such weapons. In addition, the US Joint Special Operations Group and SAS reportedly have an evacuation plan for high-ranking politicians, including Zelenskyy.

A month later, four British soldiers [went AWOL](#) to fight Russians. This prompted an official ban on personnel traveling to Ukraine. In April, the UK hosted the Ukrainian delegation to the Salisbury Plain Training Area. Ukraine's Deputy Defense Minister, Volodymyr Havrylo, [witnessed](#) the British Army's 3rd Division and Royal Marines demonstrating "a range of equipment and options for further military support, including defensive missile systems and protected mobility vehicles."

James Heappey, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defense, [confirmed](#) that 120 armored vehicles were being manufactured/sent to Ukraine and that Ukrainian forces would be trained to use them in the UK. Special Forces [arrived](#) in Obolon, Kyiv, to train the Ukrainian 112th Battalion in how to use NLAW anti-tank missiles. Later that month, it was [alleged](#) that around 20 sabotage experts from the SAS had arrived in Lviv, western Ukraine. *The Mirror* [reported](#) that a squadron of serving SAS troops in Poland trained Ukrainians in sabotage.

By May, Britain had sent Ukraine 4,000 NLAWs, an [undisclosed number](#) of Javelin missiles, 3,000 sets of body armor, 2,000 helmets, and 4,000 (presumably pairs of) boots. Thousands of grenades, claymore anti-personnel devices, heavy machine guns, high-velocity sniper rifles, and 66mm anti-tank weapons had been [sent](#) via NATO countries.

And by the end of that month, the UK taxpayer had forked out a stunning [£2.8 billion](#) to Ukraine in so-called aid programs and military equipment, including 6,500 anti-tank missiles.

In June, reservists from the UK's 4th Battalion, Mercian Regiment, [trained](#) with the Lithuanian Army's Iron Wolf Brigade. The 3,500-troop exercises included forces from 14 different countries, including Ukraine. The 1st Regiment Army Air Corps provided four Wildcat helicopters. Heappey, the Under-Secretary of State for Defense, [said](#): "The UK plans to deploy 1,050 UK Service personnel to facilitate the training of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. It is estimated that 900 of these will be responsible for the training aspect of the programme."

UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss encourages British citizens to fight in Ukraine

In October 2015, *Foreign Policy* [reported](#): "When separatists started a war in eastern Ukraine, hundreds of Russians, Belarusians, and other foreigners came to Kiev's defense. Now they've been abandoned." Flash forward to the present, and the British government and elements of the media are openly encouraging volunteers to kill and die in Ukraine,

even though young men are returning and warning others that they are being used for [“suicide mission\[s\].”](#)

In April, when asked by the BBC about British people volunteering in Ukraine, Britain’s Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss, who is likely to replace Johnson as PM, [said](#): “I do support that, and of course, that is something that people can make their own decisions about.” It was [reported](#) that Truss’s comments provoked Russia to put its nuclear weapons on high-alert.

Just did a quick screen-cap of the Liz Truss interview supporting Brits going to fight in Ukraine. [#UkraineRussiaWar](#) [#RussiaUkraineWar](#) [#russianinvasion](#) Perhaps some de-badged special forces? Just sayin'. pic.twitter.com/hW5sbfBN4u

— Todd J Harrison [🇺🇸](#) [#Socialist](#) [#GTTO](#) [#ProEU](#) [#Ally](#) (@ToddJHarrison1) [February 27, 2022](#)

The Chief of Defence Staff, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, immediately [contradicted](#) Truss: “We’ve been very clear that it’s unlawful as well as unhelpful for UK military and for the UK population to start going towards Ukraine in that sense.” Johnson’s spokesperson [said](#): “We currently advise against travelling to Ukraine.”

By June, a [reported](#) 20,000 volunteers were fighting in Ukraine, of whom 3,000 were British. Up to 80 percent pass through the Georgian Legion, which operates under Ukrainian command where the volunteers are supposedly vetted. “You’re more of a hindrance than a help,” [says](#) veteran Martin Dunwoody, who went to give humanitarian aid but ended up advising the inexperienced combat volunteers he encountered.

Former soldier Matthew Robinson travelled to Ukraine’s Yavoriv over the nearby Polish border in transport arranged by the International Legion. On March 9, the base was hit and 35 people killed, including three former British Special Forces operatives. Robinson trained and vetted volunteers. Ex-Royal Marine Scott Sibley died and volunteer Andrew Hill was captured and paraded on Russian TV. Aiden Aslin and ex-Royal Anglian soldier, Shaun Pinner, were captured and sentenced to death. Having fought ISIS on the side of Kurds, an [alleged](#) Conservative Councillor and city trader “Macer Gifford” (*nom de guerre*) [went to fight in Ukraine](#).

Exclusive Interview by Graham Philips of Aiden Aslin, a British Mercenary fighting in Ukraine against Russia, Captured in Donbass, Mariupol

1/4 on the brutal war crimes committed by Ukrainian soldiers and AZOV Battalion against Russian prisoners of war pic.twitter.com/O2kXnhWM6k

— StarBoy [🇺🇸](#) (@StarboyHK) [April 19, 2022](#)

Former Royal Navy engineer, “Curtis,” joined other foreign fighters via the base in Yavoriv, [explaining](#): “There was absolutely no structure to it at all, nothing at all.” He fought in Irpin, near Kyiv City. “Most of the ex-serving, whether it’s Navy, Army, Marines, even the Air Force, some guys were there – they were within a decent age, 30 and above, but there were a lot of young guys who had never been in any serving military, had no military training at

all, kind of *Call of Duty*-type people.” Curtis reckoned that over 20 Britons had already died in Ukraine: “We were using essentially supermarket radios, which are not at all decent for fighting with, Russians can listen to everything we were saying and it was highlighted many times.”

Anton Vybornyi, a British citizen and [businessman](#), was [pictured](#) in Korczowa, Poland, on the border with Ukraine with his van full of military equipment. “It includes body armour” and his team, Alexei Kalmikov and Andrius Dargis. Vybornyi [raised](#) £25,000 to assist the volunteers.

Conclusion: Truth in the Records

As usual, government and military records reveal the opposite of statements by politicians and their media echo-chambers about the events that precipitated the outbreak of war between Russia and Ukraine.

A British House of Commons research briefing contains a timeline which [notes](#) that in February 2019, Ukraine’s constitution was amended to set its NATO membership application into motion. In June 2020, Ukraine was granted NATO Enhanced Opportunity Partner status. In September, President Zelenskyy adopted a National Security Strategy, which included provision for joining NATO.

In April 2021, Russia announced a troop build-up and exercises on the border. Notice the chronology. Later that month, Russia “re-deployed its forces back to their home bases.” In October of that year, the Ukrainian military used a drone in eastern Ukraine, “angering Russia.” After amassing troops on the border, Russia in December 2021 demanded security guarantees that Ukraine will not join NATO. Putin then [presented draft proposals](#) to the United Nations Security Council. The House of Commons briefing makes no reference to Britain or America’s responses – or lack thereof – to the proposals. In January this year, US President Biden seemed to invite Russia’s invasion by [referring](#) to the impending events as a potential “incursion” not invasion, which Putin took to be a signal that the US would not react harshly.

Another House of Commons Library research briefing [states](#): “Russia is seeking longer term security guarantees from the Alliance that Ukraine will not be admitted as a Member State and that NATO military infrastructure will not be deployed in the country.” The briefing paper also notes that NATO had escalated around Ukraine: “NATO allies have moved to shore up the defence of eastern Europe with the deployment of additional ships and fighter aircraft to the region.” The 2014-15 Minsk Agreements remain “largely unimplemented by both sides.”

The combination of hubris, intransigence and militarism reflected in these official UK documents helps explain how the stage was set for a mad confrontation between nuclear powers.

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