



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on March 5, 2024

France Proposed Sending Troops to Ukraine, but NATO Refused

France suggested deploying NATO troops to Ukraine in order to aid Kyiv's forces with key tasks, the former U.S. envoy to the bloc, Ivo Daalder, penned in an article for Politico published March 4.

Per Daalder, the proposal came several weeks ago from the chief of staff of the French Army, General Thierry Burkhard, who wrote to half of his NATO colleagues to ask them to "explore the possibility" of mobilizing "a coalition of the willing" to Ukraine's front lines. The troops, Burkhard reportedly said, could man defensive systems on the ground, train troops, launch cyber operations, and provide help in de-mining.

Burkhard's proposal was swiftly dismissed by "every ally," Daalder wrote, in line with NATO's longstanding policy of "no troops on the ground in Ukraine."

The letter was reportedly sent well before French President Emmanuel Macron ignited controversy last week when he told journalists that the idea of deploying NATO troops to Ukraine should not be excluded.

His remarks sparked swift reactions from other NATO nations, including the United States, the U.K., Spain, Italy, and Germany, who hurried to state that they had no such plans. French Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne tried to clarify Macron's words, telling state broadcaster Radio France Internationale on March 1 that Paris would not risk either its people or a direct conflict between Russia and NATO.

In his article, Daalder labeled Macron's words on troop deployment "another headline-grabbing statement" and an attempt to score political points, but said the fact that his remarks followed Burkhard's proposal "may have revealed more serious thinking" about efforts to help Ukraine within the alliance.

Kyiv has been requesting its Western backers for additional funding for months, quoting dire shortages in ammunition and weaponry on the front lines. On March 3, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky slammed NATO for the delays in allocating funds to help Kyiv's war effort, alluding to the \$60 billion U.S. aid package that has been stalled in Congress for nearly a month.

Moscow has slammed the West for providing military aid to Kyiv, cautioning that it will only prolong the conflict and lead to more deaths. Commenting on Macron's statement regarding the idea of deploying troops, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov warned that this type of move on the part of NATO would



AP Images
Emmanuel Macron



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make a direct conflict between Russia and the bloc inevitable.

Newspaper *Le Monde* reported on March 1, citing its sources, that the French government is mulling sending a small military force directly into Ukraine to serve as instructors for Kyiv's Armed Forces and as a "deterrent" to Moscow.

The paper did not reveal the number of French military "instructors" that could potentially be authorized to enter Ukrainian territory but reported that their ranks could include some "conventional units."

According to *Le Monde*, French Special Forces were also involved in training Ukrainian soldiers in neighboring Poland and in escorting the nation's arms deliveries to Kyiv. They have, however, always "stopped at the Ukrainian border," the outlet stressed.

The training France would like to supply to Ukrainians "on the ground" includes handling air-defense systems, the same *Le Monde* report said. Kyiv's surface-to-air weapons installations are frequently targeted by Russian forces, it explained, adding that the "presence of French soldiers or [those] of other nations would potentially protect certain areas of the Ukrainian territory."

The French government allegedly regards such a troop deployment as a way of posing a "strategic dilemma" for Moscow, the paper said, adding that it could "constrain" Russia's targeting and strike capabilities. It may especially prove to be "essential" before the arrival of U.S.-made F-16 fighter jets, poised to take place later this year, the French daily added.

Meanwhile, the commissioner for the EU's internal market, Thierry Breton, told the broadcaster France Info on March 4 that Ukraine should not expect the EU to supply it with one million artillery rounds "for free," blasting Zelensky for "falsely" accusing the bloc of failing to deliver on its promises.

Last week, Zelensky bemoaned that the EU would miss the target of 520,000 artillery shells that it was expected to supply to Kyiv by March. "Of the million shells that the European Union promised us, not 50 percent came, but 30 percent, unfortunately," he said.

Questioned about the statement on March 4, Breton brushed Zelensky's statement off as "false." The figures cited by Zelensky do not correspond to reality, he said, adding that Kyiv expected all the promised shells to be "donated," but that had never been the case.

"I said: 'provide' and not 'give away for free,'" Breton told France Info about the pledge made by Brussels last year. He said the bloc expected Ukraine to pay for at least part of the supplies.

The EU plan envisaged three major avenues for Kyiv to obtain artillery rounds, the commissioner explained. The first did involve donations, and the EU has already provided Ukraine with 300,000 rounds free of charge, he said, adding that by March that figure was to rise to 550,000 rounds.

The second channel involved the Ukrainian government buying ammunition directly from EU defense firms. Kyiv has already purchased some 350,000 shells from manufacturers since the pledge was made, Breton said.

Together with the EU donations, these purchases would bring the total number of shells the bloc will have supplied to Ukraine by the end of March to some 900,000, the commissioner posited.

If it still wants more, Kyiv can continue to buy "directly from our industries," Breton said, adding that the EU has been providing the Ukrainian government with €1.5 billion (\$1.63 billion) per month in financial aid.



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The third part of the plan included bilateral donations by individual EU member states, which have not been made public, the official said. Due to all of these avenues, the bloc is already well above the target, he added.

However, observers have noted that Breton's comments seem to contradict earlier statements made by EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, who said in January that Brussels would fail to deliver on its promise to provide Ukraine with one million 155mm artillery shells by March, explaining that just over half the amount would be provided.

Kyiv has repeatedly lamented that its Western backers have not supplied it with ample military supplies. In late February, Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov said that half of all the weapons and ammunition promised by the West have arrived late.



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