

Ukraine Sees ‘Hypocrisy’ in Western Allies’ Defense of Israel

The U.S., British and French militaries helped intercept Iranian missiles and drones, but Ukrainians say they haven’t provided the same help against Russian air attacks.



By Marc Santora and Matthew Mpoke Bigg

Reporting from Kharkiv, Ukraine, and London

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For people in eastern Ukraine, where nightly barrages of drones from Russia outpace the military’s overwhelmed air defenses, the response by Western allies to Iran’s aerial assault against Israel this weekend produced uncomfortable comparisons.

The militaries of the United States, Britain, France and others stepped in to help Israel defend against the fusillade of more than 300 Iranian drones and missiles, nearly all of which were intercepted. A similar number of aerial weapons are fired at Ukraine on a weekly basis, its officials say, with many of the drones in those attacks designed by Iran and now produced by Russia.

Since the start of this year, Russia has fired 1,000 missiles, 2,800 drones and 7,000 guided aerial bombs at Ukraine, according to Ukraine’s permanent representative to the United Nations, Sergiy Kyslytsya. While Washington and other allies have provided Kyiv with some powerful air defense weapons, they have not directly confronted Russian forces, and Ukrainian officials have long argued that the supplied weapons are insufficient to counter the threat from Moscow.

In the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv, where 1.3 million people live with nightly air raid alarms, many people expressed anger and disappointment over the weekend that Ukraine’s allies, wary of provoking Russia, don’t give it the same protection as they did Israel.

“When rockets fly in Israel, the whole world writes about it,” said Amil Nasirov, a 29-year-old singer. “Here, rockets are flying, and we don’t have American bombers that are saving the sky like over Israel.”

“It’s very stupid; it’s hypocrisy,” he added. “And it’s like some devaluation of Ukrainian lives.”

Ukraine has begged since the outset of Russia’s full-scale invasion in February 2022 for more tools to close its sky to Russian missiles. But the first Patriot missile systems from the United States and Germany — the only proven defense against ballistic missiles — did not arrive until the spring of 2023.

Ukraine also pleaded for F-16 fighter jets, which the Biden administration, which must approve any transfers of the American-made planes, long resisted providing them out of concern that Moscow would see it as an escalation.

It eventually relented, but Ukrainian pilots are still training on the systems and they are not expected to fly in the skies above Ukraine until this summer.

Ukrainian officials noted the role that fighter jets played in defending Israel as a sign of their importance in air defense.

President Volodymyr Zelensky said the response to the Iranian attack was clear evidence that “the world has everything necessary to stop any missiles, Shahed drones, and other forms of terror,” referring to the Iranian-made attack drones that have been a large part of Russia’s arsenal.

“The whole world sees what real defense is. It sees that it is feasible. And the whole world saw that Israel was not alone in this defense — the threat in the sky was also being eliminated by its allies,” Mr. Zelensky said in his latest nightly address.

Britain’s foreign secretary, David Cameron, said on Monday that while his country has been one of the staunchest military supporters of Ukraine — training thousands of troops and providing tanks and other advanced weapons — Britain could not shoot down Russian drones over Ukraine because it could inflame a wider war in Europe.

“If you want to avoid an escalation in terms of a wider European war, I think the one thing you do need to avoid is NATO troops directly engaging Russian troops,” Mr. Cameron told Britain’s LBC radio station. “That would be a danger of escalation.”

The United States remains the chief supplier of the munitions for Ukraine’s best air defense systems. But the last time Congress approved military aid for Ukraine was in October. In the intervening months, Ukraine’s air defenses have been critically depleted, while Russia has greater success in using air power to advance on the front line, attack Ukraine’s energy grid and inflict more casualties against civilians.

At least 126 people were killed and 478 more were injured in Russian strikes in March, a 20 percent increase compared with the previous month, according to the United Nations.

Liubov Sholudko contributed reporting from Kharkiv, Ukraine.

Marc Santora has been reporting from Ukraine since the beginning of the war with Russia. He was previously based in London as an international news editor focused on breaking news events and earlier the bureau chief for East and Central Europe, based in Warsaw. He has also reported extensively from Iraq and Africa. More about Marc Santora

Matthew Mpoke Bigg is a correspondent covering international news. He previously worked as a reporter, editor and bureau chief for Reuters and did postings in Nairobi, Abidjan, Atlanta, Jakarta and Accra. More about Matthew Mpoke Bigg

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