



## The U.K. Is Giving Ukraine Hundreds Of Armored Vehicles. Russia Has A Plan For Wrecking Them.

### Description

The United Kingdom isn't just sending Ukraine a small batch of surplus Challenger 2 tanks. It's planning to donate *hundreds* of armored vehicles and self-propelled howitzers. Enough equipment for a whole brigade.

It's offensive weaponry. And the U.K. government intends for it to support a possible Ukrainian counteroffensive in 2023.

But the Russian government knows this—and it's planning to spoil the Ukrainian offensive with an offensive of its own.

The United Kingdom was one of the first of Ukraine's allies to offer up Western-style tanks. While NATO countries last year helped Kyiv to source hundreds of surplus Soviet-style tanks including T-72s and hybrid M-55Ss, the Western alliance was reluctant to send its own best M-1s, Challenger 2s and Leopard 2s.

Poland was the first to break rank. During a visit to Lviv in western Ukraine on Jan. 11, Polish president Andrzej Duda announced Poland would donate a company of Leopard 2 tanks. A company might include a dozen or 14 vehicles.

The United Kingdom three days later announced its own donation. "Sending Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine is the start of a gear change in the U.K.'s support," the U.K. government [stated](#). "A squadron of 14 tanks will go into the country in the coming weeks."

But the Challenger 2s are just part of a much bigger aid package. The United Kingdom also plans to send to Ukraine an initial eight AS90 self-propelled howitzers, eventually followed by an additional 22 AS90s.

“Hundreds more armored and protected vehicles will also be sent,” U.K. defense minister Ben Wallace [stated](#). They include an unspecified number of Bulldog armored personnel carriers and, presumably, Scimitar reconnaissance vehicles.

A brigade with Challengers, Bulldogs, Scimitars and AS90s should, with adequate training and support, be capable of intensive offensive operations.

That's the whole point, Wallace wrote. “Today's package is an important increase in Ukraine's capabilities. It means they can go from *resisting* to *expelling* Russian forces from Ukrainian soil.”

Ukraine already has conducted three major counteroffensives. First ejecting Russian invaders from north-central Ukraine starting in late March last year. Then, six months later, routing the Russians in northeast and south-central Ukraine.

But the onset of the wet-cold early winter, as well as the arrival of tens of thousands of newly-drafted Russian troops, halted the Ukrainians' advance. Large-scale attacks could resume once the ground freezes in coming weeks—and intensify when winter turns to spring.

The Ukrainian army by then should have integrated many hundreds of Western tanks and fighting vehicles. Not just Leopard 2s and Challenger 2s, but also [ex-American M-2 fighting vehicles](#), ex-German Marder fighting vehicles and AMX-10RC reconnaissance vehicles from France. Altogether, a powerful offensive force.

But the Russian army aims to interfere with any Ukrainian attack. “The Kremlin is likely preparing to conduct a decisive strategic action in the next six months intended to regain the initiative and end Ukraine's current string of operational successes,” the Washington, D.C.-based Institute for the Study of War [noted](#).

Russian commanders are reconstituting depleted brigades and divisions with conscripts, draftees and repaired weaponry. The Russian government is pumping money into arms-factories, hoping to make good some of the thousands of vehicles and hundreds of aircraft the Russians have lost in Ukraine—and keep them supplied with ammunition.

The plan might be for a refitted Russian army to wait until the Ukrainian army attacks—and then counterattack with superior force. “Russian forces may seek to successfully defeat a Ukrainian counteroffensive and deprive Ukraine of the initiative by destroying a significant proportion of mechanized Ukrainian forces,” ISW explained.

“Such a successful Russian decisive action could then enable Russian forces to develop a counteroffensive to exploit disorganized and exhausted Ukrainian forces.”

This collision of mechanized armies—the Ukrainians with their new NATO hardware, the Russians with fresh copies of their same old tanks and fighting vehicles—could reshape Russia's wider war on Ukraine as it grinds into its second year.

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