

SPEECH

Opening Remarks by Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III at the 25th Ukraine Defense Contact Group (As Delivered)

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Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III
Ramstein Air Base, Germany

Good morning, everyone. And welcome back to Ramstein.

It's good to see everyone. And I'm honored that you could join us for the 25th gathering of the Ukraine Defense Contact Group.

I know that you've seen the American flags flying at half-mast today. That's a tribute to the late President Jimmy Carter, who will be honored today in our nation's capital. And I hope that we will all carry forward his deep devotion to the cause of human rights and human decency.

Now, all Americans are also watching the terrifying wildfires that are ripping through parts of Southern California. The Department will continue to stand ready to surge support as needed. That includes federal air assets that California can request to help fight the fire from the sky. And many U.S. military installations in the area have personnel and equipment that can also be surged to fight this awful blaze. We stand with the people of California in this terrible time.

And now, let me turn to our agenda here.

Let me welcome our Ukrainian colleagues, who have again made the trip from Kyiv to

Ramstein. As you know, we are honored to be joined today by a leader who has made history: President Zelenskyy.

[Applause]

Mr. President, it's an honor to have you back in Ramstein. The whole world has been moved by the courage of Ukraine's forces and the strength of Ukraine's people. And you know firsthand how much this Contact Group has meant for Ukraine's fight for freedom.

President Zelenskyy, the floor is yours.

[President Zelenskyy gives remarks.]

Well thank you, President Zelenskyy. I know that I speak on behalf of everyone here. The spirit of Ukraine has inspired us all. And it has reminded us all to never take our freedom for granted.

That's been true ever since the Contact Group convened for the first time here on April 26, 2022. That first meeting and today's meeting would not have been possible without our hosts. So let me invite Minister Pistorius to say a few words. Boris, over to you.

[Minister Pistorius gives remarks.]

Minister Pistorius, thanks again. A special thanks for those very generous words. And thanks for all that your government has done for Ukraine.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a big day. And this is a great cause. I continue to be moved by the dedication of the countries that are here today. And I continue to be inspired by this Contact Group. You are all helping to ensure that Ukraine can defend itself—and fight for its freedom.

Nearly three years ago, we gathered at Ramstein for the first time. It was a moment of great uncertainty—and urgency. The Kremlin was just two months into its full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Ukraine's survival was in danger. And so much was unsettled at our first meeting at Ramstein. But two things were already clear. The Ukrainian people had chosen to fight. And they needed help from countries around the world.

So we gathered here. And we began to coordinate security assistance to Ukraine—swiftly and decisively. Back in April 2022, few people could have imagined the level of support

that our countries have delivered to Ukraine.

Putin clearly never imagined it. In the first months of the war, we provided everything from Javelin missiles and Stinger missiles to artillery systems. And that helped Ukraine withstand the first thrust of Putin's invasion.

Month after month, members of this Contact Group have helped provide, produce, and sustain the systems and the munitions that Ukraine needs. That includes advanced air-defense systems and long-range strike capabilities. Ukraine has suffered terribly from Russia's imperial aggression. But sustained, principled commitments by the countries gathered here have made all the difference.

This Contact Group has evolved. And so have the capabilities that its members have provided. We have stood up eight Capability Coalitions. They are led by 14 countries, as well as Ukraine. In close partnership with our National Armaments Directors, these new coalitions ensure that our support is coordinated, efficient, and sustainable. And their work has helped Ukraine to more swiftly absorb the security assistance that we provide. Thanks to the leadership of the Air Force coalition, Ukraine is now flying fourth-generation fighters. And thanks to the Maritime coalition, Ukraine is building up the capabilities that it needs to defeat and deter Russian aggression in the Black Sea.

Earlier today, the Coalition Leadership Group met again, including representatives from our 15 countries. And they endorsed Capability Coalition roadmaps leading to the year 2027. And through the Capability Coalitions, partner countries can continue to support Ukraine's urgent battlefield needs. And they can continue to help Ukraine build a force that will deter more Russian aggression over the long haul as Ukraine implements its own critical reforms on mobilization and other areas.

The Kremlin's assaults today remind us of the scope of the danger. Putin isn't letting up. His forces continue their grinding offensive in the east of Ukraine. In Kursk, Russian troops are fighting alongside North Korean forces to drive back Ukraine's troops. Meanwhile, the Kremlin continues to bombard Ukraine's civilians and critical infrastructure without pity or pause. Yet again, Ukraine faces a winter of war. And yet again, Putin is targeting Ukraine's energy grid. And he's using increasingly ruthless missile and drone strikes.

In February, we will mark three years of Putin's war. And the stakes are still enormous—for all of our security. If Putin swallows Ukraine, his appetite will only grow. If autocrats conclude that democracies will lose their nerve, surrender their interests, and forget

their principles, we will only see more land grabs. If tyrants learn that aggression pays, we will only invite even more aggression, chaos, and war.

But we are still determined to not let that happen. And so are the free people of Ukraine. And so are the nations of goodwill around the world—and around this table.

Retreat will only provide incentives for more imperial aggression. And if we flinch, you can count on Putin to push further—and punch harder. Ukraine's survival is on the line. But so is the security of Europe, the United States, and the world. And that's why the some 50 members of this Contact Group continue to stand united with Ukraine.

And now, as you all know, today marks my last Contact Group. And I am incredibly proud of what we've achieved together. Over the past few years, we have moved heaven and earth to get Ukraine the security assistance that it needs. And together, we've committed more than 122 billion dollars' worth of security assistance and expanded factories around the world. That has rushed capabilities to Ukraine ranging from artillery systems to ammunition to main battle tanks. It includes air-defense platforms, interceptors, and drones.

In just the past few weeks, we've seen Contact Group members step up with important new donations. Germany announced that it will deliver 680 million dollars' worth of military equipment to Ukraine by the end of the year. Others have already budgeted generous sums of 2025 aid. And Norway has committed more than 2 billion dollars for military support. And the U.K. is allocating 3 billion pounds annually. As a percentage of GDP, Denmark, Estonia, and Latvia are now the top three providers of assistance to Ukraine.

So we must not let up. That's why I am announcing today another Presidential Drawdown Authority package, valued at approximately \$500 million. It includes additional missiles for Ukrainian air defense, more ammunition, more air-to-ground munitions, and other equipment to support Ukraine's F-16s.

Here again in Ramstein, I am determined to do all I can to help Ukraine live in freedom and security—and to forge a more just and decent world. And together, our work must continue.

Here is the fundamental truth: Ukraine's fight matters to all of us. As I said here in Ramstein back at our first meeting in April 2022, Putin's war “is a challenge to free people everywhere.” And we all have a stake in ensuring that autocrats cannot place their

imperial ambitions ahead of the bedrock rights of free and sovereign peoples. Ukraine is waging a just war of self-defense. And it is one of the great causes of our time.

Chairing this Contact Group has been one of the great honors of my life. But this is a day for business, and not talk. And I'm looking forward to yet another highly productive meeting.

So we'll pause as our friends in the media depart. And then we'll get to work. Thank you very much.

[Applause]

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