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Multinational Force Ukraine Series

Germany: heavy on funding, light on force

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Political will

Germany remains a key financial and military supporter of Ukraine but is more cautious than others. Berlin politically supports the Multinational Force for Ukraine (MFU), that is, the main product of the Coalition of the Willing (CoW) led by France and the UK, but, as of November 2025, it is unlikely to deploy substantial military capabilities to Ukraine.

After initial hesitation, Germany emerged as the second largest individual donor for Ukraine in absolute terms (in relation to GDP it ranks much lower though). In November 2025, the government increased the military support for Ukraine in 2026 from €8.5bn to €11.5bn, enabled through the 2025 constitutional reform that exempts defense spending from the debt break.

Domestically, support for Ukraine remains consistent, with mainstream parties agreeing, despite occasional disputes over specific weapon systems like the Taurus cruise missile. The far-right AFD and the Left party continue to oppose military aid. Legally, the government only needs a simple parliamentary majority to approve a deployment to Ukraine. Yet it may seek support from the Greens, now in opposition, to have a broader consensus.

Assessing the public support for a Bundeswehr deployment to Ukraine remains difficult. Two surveys, conducted in February and March 2025, produced conflicting results: the February survey showed 59% in favor and 35% opposed, while the March survey showed only 43% supporting and 46% opposing. This discrepancy indicates that survey results can vary widely based on question framing and deployment scenarios.

So far, the German government is hesitant to contribute troops to the MFU. In August 2025, during the meeting between President Trump, President Zelensky and European leaders, Chancelor Friedrich Merz said that Germany should help to secure a ceasefire or armistice, but he has not given further details. His coalition partner, the Social Democrats, are also unwilling to discuss publicly any deployment. The prevailing narrative is to focus on a ceasefire first.

Meanwhile, the chairman of the federal parliament's defense committee and other politicians stated that Germany could not shy away from participating in the MFU if it wants to reshape itself as a leading middle power, as laid out by Chancellor Merz in a keynote speech in January 2025.

For Germany, the CoW format itself has already been a success in that it showed, especially to the US, a European willingness to shoulder more responsibility after a controversial 2025 Munich Security Conference. It is also a blueprint for smaller, agile leadership formats when the traditional institutional pillars like the EU or NATO prove too cumbersome.

Military capabilities

The government has signalled that a German troop deployment to Ukraine would first require a ceasefire

or armistice. While the chancellor previously mentioned Russian agreement as a precondition, this has not been reiterated, though Berlin understands such an agreement as implied in a ceasefire. Additionally, Berlin sees key US capabilities (often referred to as a "backstop") as indispensable to set up a credible mission and, in the case of renewed hostilities, defend themselves effectively.

During initial discussions, Berlin made substantial suggestions for German contributions that were however subsequently withdrawn. Germany also considered adding a line of operation to the existing ones (air, sea, regeneration, demonstration force) to demonstrate its commitment. Yet, this did not materialise either. Germany currently refers to its substantial contributions to NATO's Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU) and the EU's Military Assistant Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM) to justify its reluctance for major contributions to the existing lines of operations.

This reluctance to contribute troops to the MFU appears motivated by three additional concerns: a focus on NATO's family of plans, fears of provoking Russian escalation, and doubts about the credibility of a Western force that could invite Russian probing the firmness of the MFU deployment. There is indeed consensus in Berlin that NATO obligations take priority over any potential mission to Ukraine, and the German armed forces are almost entirely assigned to NATO plans.

Nevertheless, Germany could contribute to specific areas without affecting its NATO contributions, such as helping with mine clearance in the Black Sea. But there is currently no willingness to do so.

As it stands now, the German government is not considering playing a substantial role in the sea line of operations, where it refers to the responsibility of Black Sea littoral states, neither in the air line of operations or the demonstration force. Germany is however present with personnel in the HQ in France.

Yet, even if NATO commitments would not matter, Germany would struggle to provide a sizeable number of troops for the MFU. Berlin is already hard pressed to man and equip the brigade it is standing up in Lithuania. Additionally, Germany has supplied Ukraine with equipment from active stocks, providing for example main battle tanks, infantry fighting vehicles and artillery systems. These stocks have not yet been replenished.

There is also a personnel issue: Since 2017, the German armed forces have had an envisioned strength of 203,000 soldiers, yet the actual number has stagnated between 180,000 and 184,000 over the last five years, despite the dramatically changing security environment and increased NATO commitments that require an active force of 260,000 soldiers.

Given political and military restrictions, the government favors a porcupine strategy, where better trained, equipped and enabled Ukrainian armed forces would have sufficient capability and credibility to deter Russia without requiring Western deployments. Germany would continue to provide training and equipment and increase its cooperation with Ukraine's defense industry but would not make substantial military contributions.

Yet, if a ceasefire were to be agreed and the MFU were to be implemented, Germany would likely face pressure to participate, both domestically and from partners. Berlin is also aware that Germany's participation in the MFU could unlock other countries' participation – while German reluctance might allow others to hide behind Germany.

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In the *Multinational Force Ukraine series* of policy briefs leading experts from allied countries assess key factors for participation in the Multinational Force Ukraine. This includes the political willingness of allies to deploy troops—on the ground, in the air, or at sea—to establish a military presence in or around Ukraine. They also examine the conditions for such deployments to occur (before, during, or after peace negotiations), the roles these forces would be expected to perform (defensive or offensive), the red lines imposed by national governments, and the specific capabilities each country could realistically contribute.

Photo credit: NTB