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## Abrams: A Game Changer for Russia-Ukraine Conflict?

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The US has recently approved a battalion of 31 M1-Abrams tanks to be sent to Ukraine to help increase its offensive capabilities in the conflict with Russia.<sup>1</sup> The tanks play a unique and important role in the overall conflict, as they possess certain specifications that make them different from the other combat vehicles. For instance, the installation of new laser rangefinder technology, colour cameras, and advanced meteorological sensors.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, if the tanks are used after extensive training, they might help reshape the Russia-Ukraine conflict. However, these specialised tanks require high maintenance and experienced personnel to perform efficiently.

The US is sceptical about whether Ukraine will engage in training campaigns for operating those tanks.<sup>3</sup> However, it has been noticed earlier that Ukraine's military has shown its capability to acquire western weapons, especially through rapid training and efficient usage of the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS).<sup>4</sup> Therefore, it will be a boon for Ukraine if it properly carries out its responsibilities with the aid provided.

In addition, there are other M-88 recovery vehicles that are included in the aid package from the US to Ukraine. It has been observed that the announcement that came from the US was followed by months of requests from Ukraine officials. The requests were made in order to give a boost to their defences amid the war with Russia. President Joe Biden diplomatically explained the US's action with Ukraine in time of need by claiming that it is "helping Ukraine defend to protect Ukrainian land."<sup>5</sup> However, it is in the best interest of the US not to start a war with Russia and to play strategically against it.

On the other hand, it is clearly noticeable that around 105 western tanks are sanctioned to be sent to Ukraine. The United Kingdom, for example, pledged 14 Challenger-2 tanks; Poland is prepared to send 14 Leopard-2 tanks; and France may provide an unspecified number of tanks to Ukraine. However, Germany seems to be lagging behind in showing the level of cooperation compared to the other countries. Germany should strategically and naturally show its aid-providing nature towards Ukraine on humanitarian grounds and not under any pressure.<sup>6</sup> But it is also understandable, as after being a belligerent party to two of the deadliest wars in history, Germany has not really experienced a full-blown war and hence is not used to such tactics.

As far as the tanks are concerned, it seems that Ukraine has a strategy planned already to secure enough ground for their own territory using the Abrams. The technicalities of Abrams will ensure that they contribute to the ambitions and aims of Ukraine. It contains not only thick armour, a 120mm M256 Smoothbore cannon, and an advanced targeting system with a lot of technical developments, but also automatic stabilisers that allow the gun to stay locked on targets, even when

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the tank is going through rough terrain.<sup>7</sup> The smoke grenades on the sides of the tanks are an additional benefit for the weapon system to hide during combat. The viewports are designed in such a way that it makes it easier for the commander of the tank to have a 360° view. Named after General Creighton Abrams, a World War II hero, it first entered combat in 1991 in the Gulf War. The tanks are not only used by the US but are also sold to countries such as Australia (M1A1), Egypt (M1A1), Kuwait (M1A2), and Saudi Arabia (M1A2).<sup>8</sup>

These tanks will be crucial decision-makers in Ukraine's current war, as they will provide a modern element on the battlefield. However, looking at it from the western perspective, it seems that the delivery of the tanks is a move to expand the conflict, and it is sort of risking the confrontation between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Russia.<sup>9</sup> Shedding light on this topic, it seems that western tanks are outperforming the Russian tanks, at least technically. The number of tanks being sent from different countries is less than what was expected from Ukraine, and this might not be a stage that actually leads to radically changing the direction of the war as such. Moreover, the Russians' deployment of anti-tank missile systems gives them the capability to destroy tanks and other armoured vehicles with laser-guided missiles. Therefore, it also predicts Russia's preparedness for the war, perhaps not only with Ukraine but also with the West.

Considering the increasing number of weapon systems, there is a high possibility that the conflict might reshape in the future. Time is another factor that will play quite an essential role in shaping the conflict since the Abrams will take months to reach Ukrainian grounds; however, until that time, European tanks might contribute to the overall conflict. It remains to be seen whether the entire scenario will devolve into a world war.

**NOTES:**

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<sup>1</sup> Nandita Bose and Steve Holland, et. al, "In change of course, U.S. agrees to send 31 Abrams tanks to Ukraine", *Reuters*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/reversal-us-agrees-send-31-abrams-tanks-ukraine-2023-01-25/> , accessed on January 27, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Kris Osborn, "U.S. Army M1 Abrams Vs. Russia's T-14 Armata", *Warrior Maven*, January 24, 2023, <https://wariormaven.com/russia-ukraine/abrams-t-14-armata-tanks> , accessed on February 03, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Olivia Baker, "What You Need to Know About the M1 Abrams Tank Headed to Ukraine", *Observer*, January 26, 2023, <https://observer.com/2023/01/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-m1-abrams-tank-headed-to-ukraine/> , accessed on January 27, 2023.

<sup>4</sup> Sanya Mansoor, "Why U.S. HIMARS Rockets Are Becoming Increasingly Decisive for Ukraine", *Time*, January 05, 2023, <https://time.com/6244479/himars-rockets-ukraine-russia/> , accessed on January 27, 2023.

<sup>5</sup> Joe Biden, "Remarks by President Biden on Continued Support for Ukraine", *White House*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/01/25/remarks-by-president-biden-on-continued-support-for-ukraine/> , accessed on January 27, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> Lauren Kent and Mick Krever, et. al, "Germany set to send Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine, Der Spiegel reports", *CNN*, January 25, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/24/europe/germany-leopard-2-tanks-ukraine-announcement-intl/index.html> , accessed on January 27, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> Tara Copp and Lolita Baldor, "What you need to know about the Abrams tanks bound for Ukraine", *PBS*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/what-you-need-to-know-about-the-abrams-tanks-bound-for-ukraine> , accessed on January 28, 2023.

<sup>8</sup> Gabriel B. Collins, "The M1 Abrams Is the Right Tank for the Job in Ukraine", *Foreign Policy*, January 24, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/01/24/m1-abrams-tank-ukraine-germany-russia-invasion-leopard/> , accessed on January 28, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> Brad Lendon, "Ukraine's new tanks won't be the instant game-changer some expect", *CNN*, January 27, 2023, <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/01/27/europe/ukraine-war-nato-tanks-analysis-intl-hnk-ml/index.html> , accessed on January 28, 2023.