

Perspectives of Ukraine’s Security Umbrella: The Country’s Latest Pacts and Alliances

States are the only subjects of international law, that possess international legal capacity, i.e.: to maintain diplomatic and consular relations, participate in international organizations, enter into agreements, bear international responsibility, have their citizenship, etc. As a participant in international relations, Ukraine must understand its goals, needs, options for action, and the means at its disposal to function in the world rationally and in accordance with its own interests. In recent years, against the backdrop of emerging threats, Ukraine has begun to realize that it is necessary to stabilize its security and strengthen its international position through participation in collective security and defense mechanisms.

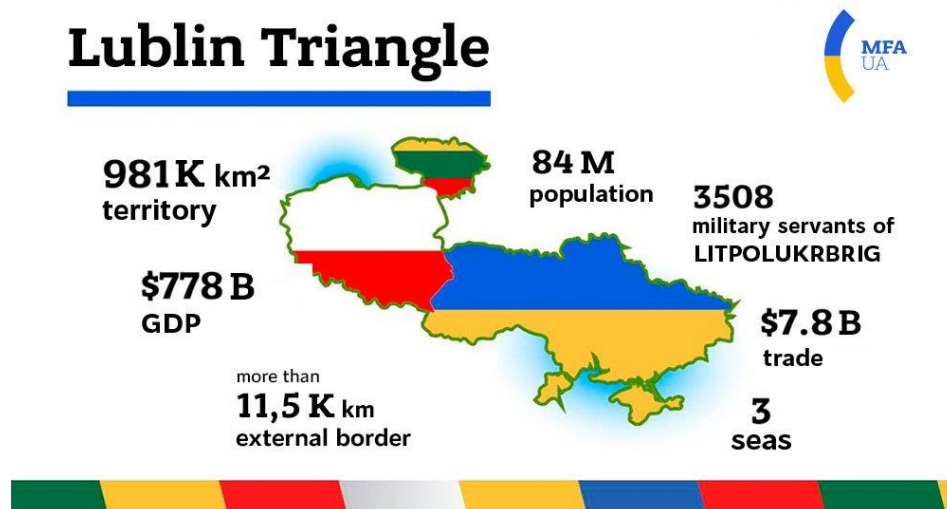
Being outside of NATO’s guarantees and the European Union’s “security umbrella,” Ukrainian diplomacy has focused its efforts on creating a regional network of cooperation in the form of small alliances. This is how the Associated Trio (Ukraine-Moldova-Georgia), the Lublin Triangle (Ukraine-Poland-Lithuania), and the British–Polish–Ukrainian trilateral pact emerged. Similar tactics were used by all the newcomers to the EU and NATO, which, through regional associations, demonstrated the possibility of cooperation in various fields, strengthened relations with neighbors and became more visible in the international arena, and demonstrated that they could join larger alliances with other states.

On January 14-16, 2023, the Sociological Group Rating conducted a public opinion poll to assess public opinion on Ukraine’s potential membership in security alliances such as NATO or the formation of a military-political coalition consisting of Ukraine, Poland, and the United Kingdom, or a military-political coalition consisting of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania. According to the survey results, 85% of respondents support the idea of forming a military-political alliance comprised of Ukraine, Poland, and the United Kingdom; 80% support the idea of forming a military-political alliance comprised of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania, and 86% support joining NATO, the highest percentage of support in survey history.

Let us analyze the basis for cooperation within the framework of the coalitions above, the prospects for creating security alliances from their agreements, and the prospects for Ukraine’s accession to NATO.

The Lublin Triangle

The Lublin Triangle (L3) initiative was established on the basis of an adopted declaration at a meeting of the foreign ministers of Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine in Lublin on July 28, 2020. The format refers to the Republic of the Three Nations’ historical, political, and cultural heritage - Poland, Lithuania, and Rus-Ukraine. The Lublin Triangle is a concept that promotes cooperation on multiple levels. “The establishment of the Lublin Triangle will have practical significance for political cooperation, military cooperation, and any other cooperation,” Lithuania’s foreign minister optimistically stated at the inaugural meeting in Lublin.



Within the framework of the Lublin Triangle, the following areas of cooperation have been established:

- Regional policies and security. Countering Russia's aggressive policies in the region and leveraging NATO capabilities to ensure the region's security.
- Trade, investment, and structural projects to ensure regional cohesion, development, and broadly understood security.
- Civil society and social communication. Creating horizontal ties between states through civil society.

The initiative's institutional dimension of cooperation includes Summit meetings of state leaders, meetings of parliamentary presidents, foreign ministers, and liaison officers.

The security dimension is very important in the Lublin Triangle agenda. Because of their proximity to Russia and historical experience, Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine, all share a similar perception of 'traditional' military and political threats, as well as a new type of threat in the form of disinformation. Russia is regarded as the primary source of such threats among these countries. In this context, the initiative should serve as a vital forum for regional cooperation in order to maintain regional stability in the face of Russia's aggressive policy. This is in everyone's best interests, especially since Ukraine, by clearly articulating its aspirations for NATO membership, relies on the support of its neighbors (Alliance members) in this regard.



President Volodymyr Zelenskyi of Ukraine, President Andrzej Duda of Poland and President Gitanas Nausėda of Lithuania have signed the Lublin Triangle Declaration in support of Ukraine's accession to the European Union and NATO. Source: Holos Ukrainy

In particular, in a declaration on January 11, 2023, the presidents of Ukraine, Poland, and Lithuania, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, Andrzej Duda, and Gitanas Nausėda stated, at the Lublin Triangle Summit in Lviv, that Lithuania and Poland support Ukraine's membership in NATO and are seeking consensus among the Alliance's allies on this issue.

The Lublin Triangle not only ensures the political support of its members but also strengthens its own position within the framework of the Central and Eastern European regional framework and NATO security architecture. It will be easier to push through certain solutions and decisions if there is a 'Lublin Triangle common position' or 'Lublin Triangle interests' rather than playing 'one-on-one,' based on individual states' interests and potential.

In terms of military cooperation, the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade Combat Team (nota bene based in Lublin) refers to the three countries' centuries-long tradition of military cooperation. Military cooperation may evolve into a more comprehensive defense arrangement, involving, for example, assistance in the event of a conflict with a third country (the scope of such cooperation may vary from technical assistance to the provision of limited military assistance).

There are some early results of such collaboration. On January 11, President Volodymyr Zelenskyi met with the leaders of Poland and Lithuania, Andrzej Duda and Gitanas Nausda, and important decisions were made for Ukraine and its response to Russian aggression. Andrzej Duda stated that “as part of the formation of an international coalition, a company of Leopard tanks will be transferred to Ukraine. Poland has already made a decision in this regard.” President Zelenskyi expressed gratitude to Poland for making the decision to transfer the tanks. In addition, he stated that Lithuania would provide Ukraine with air defense and anti-aircraft systems. The Lithuanian leader confirmed this but did not specify which weapons were used.

The ongoing war on Ukrainian territory necessitates intensive work by the Ukrainian defense sector. Cooperation in this area could also benefit Ukraine and Poland, both of which are interested in modernizing their armed forces. The Lublin Triangle could be transformed into a military-political alliance, as the alliance members are now more united than ever before by a common threat in the form of Russia. However, for the time being, the Triangle's formula is to be a **consultative platform**, so institutionalizing the new initiative is out of the question.

Closer cooperation within the framework of the Lublin Triangle may be hampered in the future by strained relations conditioned by differences in interests, mutual perceptions, and historical policies. This has been most visible in Polish-Ukrainian and Polish-Lithuanian relations - in this context, the initiative may become a factor for improving bilateral relations, by reducing competing interests, but it may also be a weakness of the initiative, e.g., if circles in either country that are historically antagonistic towards their neighbors take power.

British–Polish–Ukrainian trilateral pact

The British–Polish–Ukrainian trilateral pact is a trilateral military and political cooperation format between the United Kingdom, Poland, and Ukraine to counter the Russian threat and work for European security. The formation of a new London-Warsaw-Kyiv axis coincides with a significant deterioration in Ukraine's border security and the United Kingdom's active supply of weapons to Ukraine. Representatives of the three newly allied countries said in a statement that the countries have “deep historical ties” and “a common history of confronting aggressors who threaten freedom in Europe.” The alliance's stated goal is to “work together to ensure stability and strengthen Ukraine's resilience by reinforcing democracy along the border in Eastern Europe”.



Source: Council on Geostrategy

Ukraine initiated this trilateral cooperation in October 2021. On February 1, 2022, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba announced a small alliance between Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and Poland. The alliance's launch was announced on February 17, 2022, but it still has no official name and is undocumented, yet it has already begun to function in practice.

Cooperation initially focused on coordinating support for the Crimean Platform, cyber and energy security cooperation, and strengthening strategic communications. Military cooperation and interaction could be areas of cooperation within the alliance, but it is too early to say whether these will be the primary areas of cooperation. This is because the United Kingdom provides assistance to Ukraine directly, rather than in the context of an alliance.



British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss (L) and Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba attend a joint press conference following their talks in Kyiv, on Feb. 17, 2022. (Photo by Efrem Lukatsky/Pool/AFP via Getty Images)

Ukrainian military expert Oleh Zhdanov predicts that if the three countries can reach an agreement as allies, there will likely be coordination of military staff and command as well as military aid, rather than just technical support when it comes to defense matters.

Ukraine's interest in this type of cooperation can be explained by the fact that it will be easier to rely on practical and concrete assistance from countries that are already willing to assist, i.e., no time is required to reach a consensus among countries in larger alliances such as the European Union or NATO. However, Poland and the United Kingdom have influence in these alliances, and as in the case of the Lublin Triangle, they will be able to better convey Ukraine's position and requests, whether in the EU or NATO.

Oleksii Danilov, Secretary of Ukraine's National Security and Defense Council, believes that Ukraine must form a defense alliance with a nuclear-armed country. In an interview on March 15, the politician indicated that such a country is the United Kingdom.

"Many international organizations formed after World War II have no influence and only express concern. Ukraine must join a new defense alliance that includes a nuclear weapons state. Currently, it is the United Kingdom." Danilov's words were quoted by the National Security and Defense Council's press service.

By taking part in the trilateral cooperation initiative, the United Kingdom is pursuing a "global Britain" policy and attempting to play an active role in the world outside of the European Union. The concept of "global Britain" first appeared in the policy document "Global Britain in a Competitive Age", a year after the UK's withdrawal from the European Union. The same document identifies Russia as the primary threat to NATO and the United Kingdom while emphasizing support for Ukraine's territorial integrity and willingness to assist in the development of Ukrainian armed forces. Due to the fact that not all NATO

countries are prepared to decisively counter the Russian threat, Britain continues to use small alliance tactics to work more effectively in Eastern Europe.



Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmygal attend a news briefing following their talks in Kyiv, Ukraine February 1, 2022.
REUTERS/Valentyn Ogirenko

Russia is also a threat to Poland, so Ukraine's developed defense capability will have an impact on Poland's security. Poland is also strengthening its position in the EU and NATO as a result of its active participation in small alliances. According to Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki, the main benefit of the new cooperation format is to strengthen regional security. The hybrid attack by the Lukashenko regime on the Polish-Belarusian border is an additional argument for Poland. Another security issue for Poland is the likely permanent concentration of Russian troops in Belarus. As a result, it is necessary to focus on reinforcing Poland's eastern flank and borders, which are also the external borders of the European Union and NATO.

At present, during the ongoing Russian aggression, the United Kingdom provides one of the largest amounts of military and security assistance to Ukraine, and Poland, having a natural interest in Ukraine strengthening its defense capabilities, cooperates with Ukraine on a wider level that goes beyond the security framework. *"This puts them on a par with the British, strengthens them within the European Union, and demonstrates that Poland is engaging Britain in security tasks in which the entire EU is interested,"* says Serhii Herasymchuk, Deputy Director of the Foreign Policy Council "Ukrainian Prism."

"Deeper cooperation in this triangle appears to be natural. After all, we're talking about two countries that take Russia's threat seriously and have dealt with it to varying degrees. Because not all NATO countries are prepared to resolutely counter the Russian threat, Britain continues to use small alliance tactics to work more effectively in Eastern Europe. As a result, a three-way alliance can function as a Small Entente, similar to how Central and Eastern Europe formed a small bloc and shared the goals of the Great Entente in the early twentieth century." - says expert Oleksandr Kraiev.

NATO

NATO is a military-political alliance with a history dating back more than 70 years, whose primary function is to provide member states with mutual defense through civilian and military means. And it also serves as a forum for cooperation and consultation in a variety of other security-related areas. The Alliance is based on the North Atlantic Treaty, which was drafted in Washington on April 4, 1949, and is currently in effect indefinitely. After WWII, the Soviet Union and its satellite states posed a growing political and military threat to Western countries, prompting the treaty's conclusion. The key provisions of the North Atlantic Treaty, a founding act of NATO, concern the principles of member states' defense self-sufficiency (Article 3), allied consultations on security matters (Article 4), mutual assistance in a situation of armed aggression - the so-called "collective defense" (Article 5), its application to the sum of the allied states' territories (Article 6), and the conditions for the organization's enlargement (Article 10.).

After Ukraine became independent in 1991, it initially pursued a non-aligned foreign policy, which meant it did not join any military alliances. Ukraine began cooperating with NATO in 1994, but it wasn't until 2002 that it officially declared its desire to join the alliance.



Ukraine's President Viktor Yushchenko talks with US President George W. Bush, at the NATO Summit conference in Bucharest, where one of the most controversial decisions of the Alliance was made. Thursday, April 3, 2008. Source: White House by Eric Draper.

In 2008, Ukraine along with Georgia was promised a NATO Membership Action Plan, that would lead to Ukraine's membership in NATO. However, political opposition within Ukraine and opposition from Russia, which saw NATO expansion as a threat, stalled Ukraine's membership prospects, and the plan was never officially proposed. Corruption, political issues, a lack of sufficient reforms, and on top of that, the Russian aggression against Ukraine which resulted in the annexation of Ukraine's territories, hampered the country's movement towards NATO.

Nonetheless, in June 2017, the Ukrainian parliament recognized NATO membership as a foreign policy goal for the country, and in February 2019, the goal of joining NATO and the EU was written into the Constitution.

With the beginning of Russian aggression in 2014, the annexation of Crimea, and the creation of Russian proxies in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, NATO responded by reinforcing the alliance's defenses in Eastern Europe and halting all civilian and military cooperation with Russia. But for Russia, the lack of a strong consolidated response, which would entail steps to actively support Ukrainian resistance, proved to be a signal of the appropriateness of further campaigning against Ukraine's sovereignty and independence.

In the time frame that preceded the full-scale Russian invasion, the Ukrainian-NATO partnership encompassed various initiatives, such as enhancing Ukraine's abilities and compatibility with NATO forces, facilitating reforms in the country's defense and security sectors, and supporting non-military endeavors like joint scientific research and public diplomacy.

However, Ukraine's accession to the organization stayed off the negotiation table. A list of "obstacles" included the reluctance of the country's population to join the Alliance, which from the support of 19% of Ukrainians in October 2012 grew to 47% in January 2016 and to 86% in 2023 (according to Rating polls in 2012, 2016, and 2023); the impossibility of joining due to the ongoing conflict; and the fear of provoking Russia that traditionally held NATO back from deeper engagement with Ukraine.

Following the outbreak of a large-scale Russian war of aggression in 2022, NATO member countries were unable to reach an agreement on Ukraine's membership in the alliance, fearing that it would exacerbate the relations with Russia and lead to NATO's direct involvement in the war. But it supported Ukraine's efforts to defend its independence and territorial integrity. NATO member states have provided Ukraine with substantial military aid worth billions of dollars since the beginning of the

full-scale invasion and have pledged to continue “as long as it takes”. Due to this reason, Ukraine has already received a large number of standard NATO weapons systems, which in the long-term will bring Ukraine’s military significantly closer to NATO’s standards, as Soviet-era weapons are quickly running out on the battlefield.

Indeed, Ukraine’s successful defense against the Russian offensive made it a more promising ally for NATO. Now Ukraine has one of the most numerous armies in Europe that is hardened in battle and is trained to use modern Western weaponry in real combat. Moreover, the operations of Ukraine’s units, which have been executed against a much more numerous enemy are now being studied for a more effective and quick response of the organization to potential security threats. Thus, Ukraine’s potential accession will significantly strengthen the military potential of the Alliance.



President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced a surprise bid for fast-track membership in the NATO military alliance on Sep. 30, 2022. Photo: Ukrainian Presidential Office.

Remarkably, Russia’s unprecedented war against Ukraine prompted the accession of two other countries to NATO: Sweden and Finland. They applied under the simplified procedure (without MAP), which Ukraine also did on September 30, 2022. And although there is still no explicit agreement on Ukraine’s accession, there are now hopes that the words of NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg that “NATO’s doors are open” will have a practical implementation.

The current situation has debunked many of the previous arguments against Ukraine’s membership in NATO, and therefore the prospects of joining the alliance after the war seem more real than ever. Ukraine’s membership in the Alliance should solve the eternal problem of Ukraine playing the role of the buffer zone between NATO and Russia, as well as ensure peace and prosperity in Eastern Europe, which is impossible without effective mechanisms to curb the aggressive attitudes of hostile countries.

In conclusion, Ukraine’s policy of initiating security-related cooperation is a sensible decision that enhances its standing in the international arena. By demonstrating its willingness to be a dependable ally and fulfill its responsibilities, Ukraine increases its chances of being heard and acknowledged as a valuable partner. The Lublin Triangle and the British-Polish-Ukrainian trilateral pact are already contributing to Ukraine’s efforts to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and these partnerships have the potential to evolve into a security alliance with strong guarantees.

However, Ukraine’s desire to join NATO has yet to be realized, and the path ahead remains uncertain. Although Ukraine’s ambition of becoming a NATO member could be realized in the future, it is contingent upon various factors, including a complete defeat of Russia. Despite these obstacles, Ukraine’s efforts to promote security cooperation are commendable and have the potential to benefit all participants.

Yelyzaveta Vyshnevskya, Visiting Researcher; Alina Horbenko, Junior Analyst