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U.S. to Provide 31 Abrams Tanks to Ukraine Amid Russian Warnings

By AFP

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An Abrams tank taking part in military exercises in Poland. **Nikolay DOYCHINOV / AFP**

The United States announced Wednesday that it would provide 31 Abrams tanks to help Ukraine repel Russia's forces, mirroring a similar move announced earlier in the day by Germany and in spite of dire warnings against escalating the conflict from Moscow.

The twin announcements will come as a major relief for Kyiv which has pleaded for months for heavy Western tanks to aid its forces repel the Russian invasion.

The U.S. pledge came hours after Germany — which reportedly sought a U.S. commitment of tanks before agreeing to send its own — approved the long-sought delivery of its powerful Leopard 2s to Ukraine.

Unlike the German tanks, however, the M1 Abrams will be procured with Ukraine assistance funding rather than directly drawn from existing U.S. stocks, meaning they will not arrive on

the battlefield for months.

U.S. President Joe Biden, who spoke with key European allies about supporting Kyiv's fight Wednesday, delivered an address from the White House on the US tank deliveries in which he stressed American tanks were not an "offensive threat to Russia."

The move is a significant reversal for the U.S. after defense officials repeatedly described the Abrams as ill-suited for the task at hand.

"Tanks are complex systems that require a significant amount of training and maintenance," the official said, and the United States "will begin now to work to establish a comprehensive training program."

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The U.S. Defense Department was also "working through the mechanisms to deliver the fuel and equipment Ukraine will need to operate and to maintain the Abrams," the official added.

Defense officials have raised various doubts in recent days about the suitability of the Abrams, which was first fielded by the U.S. Army in 1980, for use in Ukraine.

Pentagon Press Secretary Brigadier General Pat Ryder said on Tuesday that the tank was "a very capable battlefield platform. It's also a very complex capability."

"Like anything that we're providing to Ukraine, we want to ensure that they have the ability to maintain it, sustain it, to train on it," he said.

Asked Wednesday if Germany requested that Washington provide Abrams as a precondition for it to give Leopards, a senior official said Berlin would have to speak on the timing of its announcement, but that the United States has "closely coordinated our security assistance with allies and partners throughout the conflict."

The provision of tanks announced by the United States and Germany follows recent pledges of dozens of other armored vehicles that will aid offensive operations by Kyiv.

Washington has pledged 90 Stryker armored personnel carriers and 109 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles, while Germany promised about 40 of its Marder vehicles, Britain said it would provide 14 Challenger 2 heavy tanks, and France will give AMX-10 RC light tanks.

"You're going to see hundreds of armored vehicles — exceptionally capable vehicles — and tanks arriving in Ukraine. And importantly, they will be arriving with trained crews," a senior US official said.

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