

'Stab in the back': Ukrainians in shock after US aid halt

AFP- Ukrainians in Kyiv and soldiers on the front lines were in shock on Tuesday and grappling with a sense of betrayal after US President Donald Trump's decision to suspend military aid.

The move by Trump follows weeks of deteriorating ties between Washington and Kyiv, and Ukrainians said the decision played directly into the hands of the Kremlin.

"It's like a stab in the back. Because we were counting on them. And we are still counting on them. It's wrong in my opinion," Sofia, a Kyiv resident, who declined to give her surname, told AFP.

"Of course it was shocking. These are our main partners," the 33-year-old financial assistant added.

The United States, which is Ukraine's most important political ally, has also contributed billions of dollars of vital military assistance to Kyiv since Russia invaded in February 2022.

Trump vowed before his inauguration in January to speedily end the war but had offered no roadmap, spurring fears that Ukraine could be forced into conceding territory to Russia as part of an agreement.

– 'Europe will be next' –

Oleksiy, a 26-year-old serviceman, told AFP in the frontline town of Kramatorsk that Ukraine would need to find other ways to make up the shortfalls in aid.

“At the very least, Europe is interested in this. If (Russian forces) capture Ukraine, Europe will be next,” he added.

Denys Kazansky, a Ukrainian media commentator said that while Washington had paused support for Kyiv “North Korea and Iran did not stop military aid to Russia”.

Both Moscow-allied countries have provided critical help to the Russian military since the Kremlin launched its fully-fledged invasion.

“We live in a reality where the United States has become an ally of North Korea, Russia and Iran and it is helping them carry out aggression against a European country,” Kazansky added on social media.

Political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko told AFP that the halt of US military aid did not necessarily mean that Ukraine would imminently lose the war.

“Worsening of the situation – yes. Weakening of Ukraine’s defence capabilities – yes. More vulnerability in case of ballistic missile attacks on Ukraine – yes,” he said.

“But this does not mean the inevitable loss of the war,” he said.

Sergiy Takhmazov, a member of the Ukrainian military, questioned how long Ukrainians would be able to hold out without US support for air defence systems and intelligence sharing.

Prime Minister Denys Shmygal told reporters that Ukraine would find a way to “hold out” and said Kyiv was still open to talks with Washington.

But he said that Ukraine needed security guarantees from its Western allies to deter any future Russian attacks.

“This is existentially important not only for Ukraine, but

also for the European Union, for the European continent," Shmygal said.

– Ukraine could 'cease to exist' –

Pavlo Kazarin, a journalist and commentator who joined the military, warned what would happen without those guarantees.

"All those who demand peace from us ignore that the price of our peace will be higher than the price of our war," he said.

Some of the servicemen AFP spoke with in eastern Ukraine voiced confidence in their country's own developing arms industry.

"It's just that so much has already happened, and now to back off or something like that, I don't see any sense in it," said a 37-year-old sergeant who identified himself to AFP as Viking.

In the capital, Igor Peresada said the dynamics of fighting would become much more difficult without US military support, but said that it would also be impossible for Ukraine to stop fighting.

"Because if we stop shooting, Ukraine will cease to exist as an independent state. And if Putin wants a ceasefire, he can withdraw his troops, and that's it, the war will end," the 57-year-old civil servant said.

AFP