

British troops on ground in Ukraine in operations with “high level of political and military risk”

Steve James
18 December 2022

A leading British army general has admitted that British Royal Marine troops have been deployed on “discreet operations” inside Ukraine. Lieutenant General Robert Magowan is one of three deputy defence chiefs of staff of the British armed forces and commanded the Royal Marines until 2020. Magowan's comments were made in the marines' official journal, the *Globe and Laurel*.

Magowan, a former head of the marines, made his comments as part of a birthday message to Royal Marines Commandos, declaring, “We have already seen glimpses of the new Commando Force concept playing out for real in the horrific conflict in Ukraine.”

Magowan revealed in January 2022, 350 marines from 45 Commando Group were “deployed at short notice — from the depths of a dark, north Norwegian winter, to evacuate the British embassy in Kyiv to Poland.” Magowan continued “Then in April, they returned into the country to re-establish the diplomatic mission, providing protection to critical personnel. During both phases, the commandos supported other discreet operations in a hugely sensitive environment and with a high level of political and military risk.”

Magowan is quoted in the Express stating “Alongside wider defence, we have been heavily involved in training hundreds of Ukrainian military personnel throughout this summer. We are also planning to train Ukraine marines.” This is one of the main functions of 45 Commando, whose website states, “When acting as a Standing Task unit, 45 Commando acts as protection force for Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels around the globe. They also contribute to the UK's domestic resilience and supply training teams to help develop foreign armed forces.”

Reporting on Magowan's comments, forces.net noted that Magowan said the 'ability to move and operate across' the future battlespace is 'highly constrained... We are seeing this play out today in fact, in the Donbas and the Black Sea region.

“It is an all-seeing environment, with few places to hide, where there is a constant battle for supremacy of the electromagnetic environment, an environment where you need freedom to fly, communicate, see and strike.”

He added “It calls for the ability to break in, to move decisively and discreetly, to prosecute effect at range and withdraw — the so-called pulsed operation, as nobody can dominate the battlespace for long periods of time anymore.

“This is the new Commando Force and it is firmly established on its journey to be forward deployed, in and around harm's way, on a much more regular basis... There is no turning back.”

The Royal Marines Commandos are the UK's special operations capable commando force, amphibious light infantry and also one of the five fighting arms of the Royal Navy. Magowan's statements provide a glimpse of the how the marines whose website describes them as “an elite fighting force, optimised for worldwide rapid response” —are massively involved in the Ukrainian war effort.

The British military were up to their necks in preparing and executing NATO's imperialist proxy war against Russia. No information was provided on the “discreet operations” carried out by the marines. Days after the Russian invasion, however, the *Daily Mirror* reported teams of UK special forces veterans of the Special Air Service signing up via private companies to fight in Ukraine. In April, the *Times* reported serving UK forces as training Ukrainian recruits on the use of Next Generation Light Anti-tank Weapons (NLAWs) anti-armour missiles.

Two House of Commons Library research briefings published this year outlined Britain's growing military involvement in Ukraine since 2014. “Military assistance to Ukraine 2014-2021” was published in March 2022. It notes that as early as October 2014, the UK announced its intention to supply “non-lethal” military equipment.

Following the 2014 far-right coup in Kiev—which overthrew the pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, in early 2015—the British military started Operation Orbital designed to train Ukrainian armed forces in “medical, logistics, general infantry skills and intelligence capacity building.” In March 2015, then Defence Minister Sir Michael Fallon offered the Ukrainian government whatever it wanted. He said, “Ukraine is our friend, it is in need and we should respond to requests, whether they are for equipment or additional training”.

Through 2015, Operation Orbital expanded, involving 100

British military personnel, in training Ukrainian forces in urban warfare. The programme also grew to cover all branches of the Ukrainian military. In 2016, the UK and Ukraine signed a 15 year Memorandum of Understanding covering defence cooperation, sharing intelligence, training and arms. By 2018, both the Royal Marines and the Royal Navy were training the Ukrainian Navy, while an initial £2.2 million worth of equipment had already been supplied.

In October 2020, the two governments signed a Memorandum of Intent and in 2021 a Memorandum of Implementation to build up the Ukrainian Navy, clearly against the Russian Black Sea fleet. Work was started to transfer two refurbished UK minehunters to Ukraine, to sell and integrate missiles onto Ukrainian Navy platforms, along with training and support. New naval bases were to be built in the Black Sea and the Azov Sea to host eight fast missile warships and a “modern frigate capability.” £1.7 billion was released to begin to pay for this. The Royal Navy sent warships to participate in repeated exercises in the Black Sea, the last of which, in June 2021 resulted in a warning shots being fired by a Russian Russian border patrol boat against the British destroyer, HMS Defender.

Parliament’s second report, “Military assistance to Ukraine since the Russian invasion” was published this week, and summarised the full spectrum of modern weaponry, training and military support being poured into Ukraine since February 24. It outlines the scale of the logistics and planning operation set in motion targeting Russia, of which the UK, along with the US and Poland, is in the forefront.

In April, an International Donor Coordination Centre was set up in Stuttgart at the US European Command HQ, staffed with troops from 30 countries to coordinate Ukraine's endless requests for more weaponry. A US led Ukraine Contact Group, which meets monthly and involves as many as 50 countries, was also set up.

US Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley enthused on the operation. “The speed that we have delivered security assistance is without comparison. From the time the requests are validated and authorized it is only a matter of days until the requirement is sourced, shipped, in the hands of Ukrainians. In some cases, it may take a week, but most of the time it's measured in days.”

While military aid from the US—which as of this month had poured \$19.3 billion into Ukraine since February alone, dwarfs that of any other country—Britain’s commitment compared to the size of its economy is vast.

Parliament’s report outlined the scale of British sourced finance, weaponry and training now reaching Ukraine. Some £2.3 billion in purely military spending is going to Ukraine, part of £3.8 billion spent on aiding Kiev since February this year. Another £2.3 billion, at least, will be spent on arms next year.

The UK has supplied Ukraine with NLAW and Javelin anti-

tank missiles, Starstreak air defence missiles, Stormer armoured fighting vehicles, anti-structure munitions, M-109 self-propelled artillery, M270 rocket launchers, Harpoon anti-ship missiles and intends to supply AMRAAM anti-aircraft missiles, howitzers and drones. 200,000 items of body armour, helmets, night vision equipment, winter clothing and three retired helicopters have also been handed over. The training operation has been massively ramped up. Operation Interflex intends to train 10,000 new and existing Ukrainian soldiers every 120 days.

But one of the most striking aspects of the report was the number of countries desperate to get in on the war against Russia. For example, Canada has had its own training programme since 2015 and has committed to \$1 billion worth military equipment including machine guns, sniper rifles, howitzers, armoured vehicles, artillery rounds, drones and winter clothing.

Germany has already supplied anti-tank weapons, MANPAD missiles, self-propelled howitzers, bunker buster missiles, armoured vehicles, rocket launchers, radar, anti-aircraft tanks. Germany has also agreed to provide autonomous surface vessels, reconnaissance drone and more air defence systems.

The report notes, “At the beginning of August, the Minister for Europe, Catherine Colonna, said that French assistance to Ukraine amounted to €2 billion thus far, including humanitarian as well as military assistance.”

Italy has sent Stinger surface to air missiles, anti-tank weapons and machine guns while the Netherlands has sent Stingers, anti-tank weapons, rockets and howitzers. It is also refurbishing 90 T-72 tanks from the Czech republic. Norway threw out its longstanding opposition to supplying weapons to conflict areas and has, to date, donated Ukraine 4,000 anti-tank weapons, and air defence system, 22 M-109 howitzers. Norway is working with the UK to provide long range rockets and microdrones and intends to supply 160 Hellfire missiles.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact