



Biden pushes Ukraine military support against backdrop of inflation at home

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President Joe Biden's military support of Ukraine abroad has a price tag that coincides with the highest consumer price spikes in decades and war fatigue after 20 years in Afghanistan here at home.

But while Biden has not received a polling bump for his response to Russia's invasion, the country's national security and his own political footing may be put in an even more precarious position before November's midterm elections if he does not keep standing by Ukraine.

On Monday, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin announced roughly \$322 million in additional military funding for Ukraine shortly after crossing the border into Poland following their meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv. The top diplomat and Pentagon chief's announcement means the total U.S. security assistance is now in excess of \$3.7 billion since the start of the conflict in February and \$4.3 billion from the outset of Biden's presidency last year as Russia escalates its attacks in eastern Ukraine.

Center for Strategic and International Studies senior adviser Mark Cancian described the U.S. rate of supply to Ukraine as "unprecedented." The international studies program expert compared the clip to that of World War II, though the type of partnership is more similar to that with the Afghan mujahedeen during the 1980s, he said.

"The first seven weeks or so, we were supplying aid at the rate of about \$50 million a day," Cancian told the *Washington Examiner*. "If the aid packages continue as they have for the last two weeks, that would go up to about \$100 million a day."

Biden previewed that he would ask Congress for supplemental funding for Ukraine this week after lawmakers approved \$13.6 billion last month, only part of which was earmarked for military equipment. The president foreshadowed that the request would likely be split again between economic support and security assistance, such as weapons and ammunition.

"My hope is and my expectation is Congress would move and act quickly," he said at the time.

A Senate Democratic staffer told the *Washington Examiner* that "funding for Ukraine defense is a strategic imperative, and the political risks are far higher for opposing the funding than for supporting it" for a bipartisan majority of lawmakers.

And Cancian, who has written extensively about defense spending, agreed, but he predicted some Republicans may seek "offsets" from other Biden proposals, including another COVID-19 measure.

"The other place I think you're going to start seeing pushback is from the U.S. military because some of the things that we are supplying, the inventories are getting low, and the production lines aren't always available," he said.

Cancian named the portable Javelin anti-tank missile system and the Stinger air-defense counterpart as examples. The United States shipped about a third of its Javelin inventory to Ukraine, and it could take a year-plus to replenish despite an open production line.

"The U.S. military I know is going to the civilian leadership and saying we are taking risks in our war plans now because of the drawdown in stockpiles," he said. "Those discussions will shape the level and kind of equipment that we will provide as this goes into the future."

For the Cato Institute's defense policy studies director, Eric Gomez, the U.S. commitment to Ukraine is "not a massive sum" when compared to Biden's Pentagon fiscal year 2023 request of \$773 billion, a \$30.7 billion, or 4%, increase from the previous budget. The rate may also fluctuate based on ally pledges, the length of Russia's offensive, and even where the fighting occurs.

"I think public support will likely remain with Ukraine," he said. "Things that could make the public more weary could be certain escalations of the conflict, like if the Russians were to use a weapon of mass destruction. That's a big, big question mark."

Biden's coming Ukraine supplemental funding request dovetails with a more forceful tone from Austin and Blinken. Austin spoke in Poland on Monday of seeing "Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine." Blinken, in turn, anticipated that "a sovereign independent Ukraine" would be around "a lot longer than Vladimir Putin is on the scene."

White House press secretary Jen Psaki declined to confirm Monday if there was a cap for U.S. Ukraine spending or whether it would be tied to the administration's push for COVID-19 money.

Biden was needled on his Ukraine spending last week, and he insisted then that the U.S. has "the capacity to do this for a long time."

"The question is: Are we going to continue to maintain the support of the international community and keep the pressure on Putin to prevent him from overrunning the country? Number one," he said. "And number two: Make sure we continue to maintain the economic sanctions — which, over time, and we're beginning to see it — are devastating their economy and their ability to move forward."