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## The US is pouring weapons into Ukraine, but Biden is right not to give Kyiv everything it wants

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Listening to the commentariat, one would think America had abandoned Ukraine. Earlier this month, more than two dozen Ukraine experts invoked the Holocaust in calling for a US-led No Fly Zone in Ukraine, a move that almost certainly would lead to a NATO-Russia war.

Barack Obama's ambassador to Russia, Michael McFaul, declared in the Washington Post that "More fighter jets, more surface-to-air missiles systems and more counter-fire weapons against long-range artillery are needed immediately."

In an interview with The Economist, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba blamed Western caution for Ukraine's casualties: If the West says "we can give this [weapon], but we cannot give that [weapon] — they only extend the suffering of Ukrainians, they contribute to the toll of dead civilians, and they only facilitate the further destruction of Ukrainian cities and villages."

The risks of escalation need to be taken more seriously, as do the extent of US exertions in defense of Ukraine. Before and during the current war, the United States has poured immense resources into Ukraine, with evident success. While Ukrainian courage and Russian incompetence have been key contributors to Ukrainian resistance that has surprised the world, US support has been a serious, even essential factor.

How much materiel has the United States provided?

According a recent analysis published in Politico, Washington has given Ukraine 1,400 Stinger anti-aircraft missile systems, 4,600 Javelin anti-tank missiles, five Mi-17 helicopters, three patrol boats, four counter-artillery and counter-drone tracking radars, nearly 40 million rounds of small-arms ammunition, 6,000 light anti-armor systems, and now 100 Switchblade loitering munitions.

These weapons have made an enormous difference on the battlefield. In particular, anti-armor weapons such as the US-made Javelin and the European N LAW have wreaked havoc on Russian armor. Since the war began, Russia has lost hundreds of tanks, along with an even larger number of other armored vehicles.

Not for nothing do "Saint Javelin" memes abound on this war's information front: The missile system and others like it have been a legitimate game-changer.

Washington has not just surged arms into the war. Before the current conflict began, US advisors had conducted an eight-year effort to modernize and enlarge Ukraine's military and security forces. The United States spent \$3 billion on this effort and trained at least 27,000 Ukrainian soldiers. Many went on to train their countrymen, a force multiplier called "train the trainer."

As with US weapons, this training appears to have borne fruit, as both Russian casualties (conservatively, thousands of dead in just four weeks of fighting) and copious evidence of Ukrainian tactical victories can attest.

When Russia annexed Crimea and began its proxy war in the Donbass in 2014, Ukraine could field just 6,000 combat-ready troops. At the outbreak of war last month, Ukrainian forces totaled 196,000 active duty servicemen and 900,000 reservists.

Some of the most valuable American support to Ukraine has not been directly visible on the battlefield. Despite longstanding fears of Russian penetration of Ukrainian intelligence, the US–Ukraine intelligence partnership has become "about as robust ... as just about anybody else in Europe," according to a former senior CIA officer.

The United States is deploying some of its most advanced reconnaissance aircraft and drones just across the border in NATO airspace to provide Ukrainian forces imagery and signals intelligence. Other, even more secret, intelligence and cyber assets are doubtless being deployed to aid Ukraine.

US support to Ukraine is ground-breaking in another key way: much of it is extremely overt. Previous large-scale proxy wars against a nuclear-armed foe, such as the effort to arm the Afghan mujahideen during the 1980s, at least maintained a veneer, however thin, of plausible deniability. No such cover has been maintained in Ukraine.

The Biden administration, perhaps trying to ward off domestic political pressure, announced the weapons in its \$800 million aid package on March 16 in detail. Even the dreaded "S" word was uttered: anti-aircraft Stinger missiles (a weapon that gained its fearsome reputation during the Afghan jihad).

The Biden administration has wisely not acceded to every Ukrainian request, nor has it caved to the incessant emotional appeals of the media.

On the key issues where the administration has demurred — the attempted imposition of a no-fly zone over part or all of Ukraine and the supply of Polish MiG-29 aircraft — policymakers wisely decided that the escalatory risks were too high. Ukraine is not worth the terrifying specter of nuclear war.

It remains unclear whether Ukraine is capable of defeating Russia outright. But the debate about whether additional military assistance is warranted or wise should not be driven by a false narrative of an abandoned Ukraine.

The United States and its European allies and partners have provided extraordinary support to Ukraine that has enabled its battlefield successes thus far. Any decisions about further aid should be made with that basic fact in mind.

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