



Lend-Lease Bill Could Help Ukraine Negotiate Peace With Russia

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President Joe Biden is expected to sign a bill that will speed up how quickly his administration can send weapons to Ukraine – a bureaucratic shift that could help Kyiv negotiate an end to the war, according to some experts.

The bill will have an impact on cutting the bureaucracy around getting weapons to Kyiv, sending a message to both the Ukrainians and Russian leader Vladimir Putin that America will provide long-term assistance. But some experts speculated that Congress' quick bipartisan action to pass the bill also had a political motive, so lawmakers could prove that they too are still focused on Ukraine as the White House announces billions of dollars in military and humanitarian aid.

The Ukraine Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act of 2022 passed the House on Thursday by an overwhelming 417-10 vote. All 10 votes against the bill were by Republican lawmakers. The bill passed the Senate unanimously by voice vote on April 6.

“This war is far from over, and to ensure Ukraine remains a sovereign democracy, the United States cannot let up on providing the arms, intelligence, and aid Ukraine requires to defend its homeland,” Rep. Ruben Gallego, D-Ariz., said in a statement. “That is why I voted to pass the Democracy Defense Lend-Lease Act to cut through the red tape and quickly get Ukraine what it needs to keep up the pressure against Russia.”

The White House did not return a request for comment on when Biden would sign the bill.

The United States has sent aid worth billions of dollars to Ukraine to help it fight Russian forces that invaded the country in February, killing thousands of civilians while shelling Ukrainian cities. Ukrainian and Russian negotiations to end the conflict have so far failed. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Congress this week that he “has seen no sign” that Putin is serious about ending his war through diplomacy, though the Russian leader told UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres this week that he still has hope for a peaceful resolution.

The new law will enable the administration to keep aid flowing indefinitely, unlike using supplemental funding that can be exhausted and require new action by Congress. The law is

intended to reassure Kyiv and strengthen its position in peace negotiations with Moscow, said Thomas Warrick, a nonresident senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Forward Defense program.

"It sends a message both to Ukrainians and Putin that there will be more weapons and munitions coming in the pipeline," Warrick said. "Peace negotiations are based not just on the conditions of the moment, but on both sides expectations of how the war would continue if there was no peace.... This strengthens the hands of NATO, Ukraine, and the U.S."

The White House has not struggled to get weapons and munitions to Ukraine quickly without this bill on the books. Biden has announced three \$800 million military aid packages since March 16, and asked Congress on Wednesday for an additional \$33 billion to keep weapons flowing.

Because of this, some wonder if the bill is more about Congress being able to say it has also had a hand in quickly arming Ukraine.

"It's a great way to say Congress *and* the president are doing something," said Jordan Cohen, a policy analyst at the Cato Institute. "I'm a little cynical about it. It's not like the current process has been slow."

The intent of the bill is to expedite arms shipments to Ukraine by reviving a World War II-era program to lease military equipment to allies. Without the bill, if Ukraine wanted to lease military equipment, there are conditions, such as returning the equipment within five years and reimbursing the United States for anything that gets broken, Cohen said. The bill will remove those restrictions. It also gets rid of the requirement for Biden to justify to Congress what he wants to lease to Ukraine in an emergency authorization, making it very easy for the administration to send any platform other than things like chemical and nuclear weapons, though there are still political and logistical realities that might limit what makes it into aid packages.

"Biden will more or less be able to lease any weapons systems he wants to Ukraine without the broad requirements that Ukraine would need to pay us back," Cohen said. "It gets rid of the entire bureaucratic process to sell a weapon. Now, you can just lease it."

The United States used the Lend-Lease program during World War II to increase its involvement in the war and quickly lend arms to allies in the fight against the Nazis while remaining neutral in the conflict. The Roosevelt administration sent \$50 billion to more than 30 allies under the program.

Cohen said the new Lend-Lease program could become especially helpful if the war with Russia gets worse.

"Having this bill passed makes it a lot easier for the U.S. to escalate very quickly," he said. "The effect it will have if everything stays status quo is probably not much. If the U.S. wants to increase its involvement with far more advanced weapons, this bill makes that a lot easier."