

# [***Schism over Russia drives Republicans apart***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BCJ-PF31-JBSS-S2RR-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Analysis by Zachary B. Wolf, CNN

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; There are emerging signs of a deep schism in the Republican Party over how or even whether the US should stand up to authoritarianism in Russia.

How to approach Russia and help Ukraine is a topic that separates true believers of Donald Trump from the Republicans who may have simply fallen in line behind the former president.

It's also the issue former US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley is talking about as she [*vows to carry on with her presidential campaign*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/20/politics/nikki-haley-2024-campaign/index.html) even if, as seems increasingly likely, she loses the Republican primary Saturday in her home state of South Carolina, where she once served as governor. Saturday also happens to be the two-year anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

In recent days, Haley has made passionate arguments about the need for the US to stand up to autocrats and bristled at Trump's attempt to compare himself to Alexey Navalny, the Russian opposition leader who died in jail.

She delivered what was billed as a "major" speech in South Carolina Tuesday to make clear that, no, she would not be dropping out of the race anytime soon. With a not-so-subtle nod to [*Trump's failure to criticize Russia for Navalny's death*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/19/politics/trump-navalny-death-response/index.html), she compared elections in democracies to those in autocracies.

Primaries, Haley argued, should be about presenting choices to voters. Most Republicans, she pointed out, have not had a chance to cast primary ballots.

"People have a right to have their voices heard and they deserve a real choice, not a Soviet-style election where there's only one candidate and he gets 99% of the vote," Haley said.

Haley's intransigence comes in the face of Trump's power within the Republican Party. Compare it with House Speaker Mike Johnson, who, at Trump's behest, is refusing to bow to pressure to allow a vote on US aid to Ukraine.

Trump called US military aid to Ukraine "stupid" if it does not come with "strings." Johnson traveled to Mar-a-Lago to celebrate Presidents Day with Trump and posted a photo of the two giving a thumbs up on X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter.

Warning about a 'Putin wing' of the GOP

Appearing on CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday, former GOP Rep. Liz Cheney, who was all but run out of the party for opposing Trump, said Johnson currently wields a rare power in US ***politics*** since he could singlehandedly secure funding for Ukraine by simply allowing a vote on legislation passed through the Senate, although it could cost him his position as speaker.

The Wyoming Republican argued that opposing aid to Ukraine is [*essentially supporting Russian President Vladimir Putin*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/18/politics/liz-cheney-navalny-putin-gop-cnntv/index.html).

"I believe the issue this election cycle is making sure that the Putin wing of the Republican Party does not take over the West Wing of the White House," Cheney told JakeTapper.

Haley, in her Tuesdayspeech, offered a defense of the US protecting its role as a leader in world affairs that would sound natural coming out of President JoeBiden's mouth or any of the bipartisan group of 70 US senators [*who voted in favor of additional Ukraine funding last week*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/12/politics/senate-foreign-aid-bill-ukraine/index.html).

"Russia isn't the only country that smells blood in the water," she said. "When the dictators in Iran, North Korea and Communist China see America step back, they rush into the breach. They think America's time has passed and their time has come."

What does Johnson actually support on Ukraine?

If it is clear where Haley and Trump stand on opposing Russia and helping Ukraine, what's in Johnson's mind is a secret. Here are lines that leap out from a report by CNN's Melanie Zanona, Annie Grayer and Haley Talbot:

It is unclear where Johnson - who is caught in the middle of the competing wings of his party - stands, even amid fresh warnings over the weekend about the direness of the situation.

"I think many of us understand the plans that are out there," one GOP lawmaker, granted the condition of anonymity to speak freely, told CNN. "If there is a Mike Johnson plan, there aren't any House Republicans that are aware of its existence." [*Read their full report*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/19/politics/johnson-ukraine-aid-critical-decision/index.html).

A new compromise proposal gets little attention

A bipartisan group of moderate members of Congress crafted their own, [*pared-down version of an aid package*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/16/politics/house-foreign-aid-border-bill/index.html), which also includes measures to address the border crisis. But Johnson has remained noncommittal and dismissed lawmakers for a planned two- week, out-of-Washington recess.

One of the authors of that bipartisan proposal, Republican Rep. Mike Lawler of New York, was asked on Tuesday by CNN's Boris Sanchez about Trump's attempt to compare his own prosecutions in US courts to what was endured by Navalny, who was poisoned, jailed in Siberia and ultimately died under mysterious circumstances. Without criticizing Trump, Lawler made his feelings on Putin very clear.

"Vladimir Putin is a vile thug and dictatorand he needs to be held accountable for his conduct, for his actions," Lawler said after arguing the legal process should play out against Trump. "He is not our friend. He is not our ally, and his conduct in Ukraine and in his own country is indefensible."

Not dropping out of the GOP race, but ...

Appearing later Tuesday on Fox News, Haley was asked if she would consider running outside of the normal party system. No Labels is a nonprofit group trying to secure 50-state ballot access in case a consensus candidate emerges to challenge Trump or Biden. Her answer was less than a definitive no.

"My focus right now is running in a Republican primary," she said. "It always has been. I've never talked to the No Labels people. That's not anything that I've beenfocused on."

But she rounded out the interview talking about how division and hate in US ***politics*** should not be normal.

"We can strongly disagree on issues, but we can't do it with two candidates who literally just hate on the other side," she said. That's some interesting language and something to keep an eye on.

Analysis by Zachary B. Wolf, CNN

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