

# [***Many Republicans will snub Zelensky's desperate plea for aid. Here's why***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BDR-N601-DY7V-G028-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Analysis by Stephen Collinson, CNN

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; There is a simple reason why many Republicans will snub Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's [*desperate plea*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/25/europe/ukraine-troop-casualties-intl/index.html) for billions of dollars in arms and ammunition.

Sending more taxpayer funds to a war on the edge of Europe is incompatible with the "America First" creed of a party dominated by [*ex-President Donald Trump*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/president-donald-trump-45).

The previous and possibly future commander in chief's position is countered by [*President Joe Biden*](https://www.cnn.com/politics/joe-biden), who warns that allowing Russia to win would embolden an adversary that could threaten US security. Their likely rematch means the 2024 election is about far more than who will run the United States for the next four years. It's likely to decide the fate of Ukraine, the shape of the Western world and the nature of US global power.

In an interview with CNN, Zelensky appealed to the Republican-led House to unblock the [*latest US aid package*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/12/politics/senate-foreign-aid-bill-ukraine/index.html) after Ukraine marked the [*second anniversary*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/24/europe/ukraine-war-second-anniversary-key-moments-intl/index.html) of Russia's unprovoked invasion. There are increasing signs the war is tilting Moscow's way as Ukrainian solders run out of bullets.

And Zelensky warned that Trump, who has said he'd end the war within 24 hours if elected to a new term - a solution that could only be achieved on terms favorable to Vladimir Putin - simply didn't understand the Russian president. Zelensky said it was "unbelievable" that the Republican front-runner appeared to be on the side of the Kremlin strongman.

"I think Donald Trump doesn't know Putin," Zelensky said. "I know he met him ... but he never fought with Putin. (The) American army never fought with the army of Russia. Never. ... I have a better understanding," Zelensky said in a clip from the interview with Kaitlan Collins that will air in full later Monday on CNN.

"I don't think he understands that Putin will never stop," he said.

Trump has led the party away from its internationalist, anti-Kremlin past represented by conservative traditionalists such as Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell. The increasing hostility of some Republicans to the US lifeline to Kyiv also coincides with fresh evidence of the GOP presidential front-runner's habitual cozying up to Russian President Vladimir Putin. Trump's looking to thwart Biden's central foreign policy goal while highlighting his failure to stem a crisis closer to home - on the southern border.

The ex-president has declined to say who he wants to win the war in Ukraine. He is billing his first term as an oasis of peace before the recent conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East and says only he can prevent World War III.

Biden - who has reinvigorated the Western alliance more than any other president since the fall of the Soviet Union - warns, however, that supporting Ukraine is an obligation given America's founding democratic ideals. He says a Putin victory would encourage Russia to turn on a NATO power and start a war that would see US troops directly involved. He [*reacted with disgust*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/22/politics/biden-bully-pulpit-trump-russia/index.html) to Trump's failure to condemn Putin over the death of opposition leader [*Alexey Navalny*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/22/europe/russia-navalny-mother-body-intl/index.html) and to the [*ex-president's recent warning*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/10/politics/trump-russia-nato/index.html) that he'd let Russia "do whatever the hell they want" with NATO members who fail to reach defense spending guidelines.

"For God's sake, it's dumb. It's shameful. It's dangerous. It's un-American," the president said earlier this month.

How Trump transformed the GOP

The Ukraine war funding showdown highlights how America's domestic ***politics*** are already reverberating around the globe.

The dispute is rooted in the changing face of the GOP. Party principles that once advocated a strong, globalist foreign policy have been rejected in favor of a more transactional approach to US obligations abroad, distilled from growing resentment among rank-and-file GOP voters after years of economic crises and costly foreign wars.

Republican presidents such as Dwight Eisenhower, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush would not recognize their party now.

Pro-Trump Republicans have locked into a concise yet powerful argument among their supporters that could spell doom for Ukraine's hopes of more help from Washington. They say that the US should not be spending billions of dollars abroad to fight Ukraine's war when America is facing a crisis at its border with Mexico.

At the Conservative Political Action Conference last week, Florida Rep. Matt Gaetz, a strong Trump supporter, claimed US aid to Ukraine was now "sloshing around the money laundering capitals of the world" and warned that while the US had a "porous border," it was spending huge sums on "a forever war."

Trump embodies this worldview more than anyone else and has exploited it and curated it since rising to power in 2016.

His refusal to support more aid to Ukraine is anchored in beliefs that form an essential part of his political appeal to millions of Republican voters. This is why a weak, inexperienced House speaker, Mike Johnson - plagued by a [*tiny majority*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/29/politics/speaker-mike-johnson-narrow-majority/index.html) that makes governance impossible - could lose his job if he brings up a Senate-passed foreign aid bill to fund the arms and ammunition Ukraine desperately needs.

Trump's power among the GOP grassroots also explains why some senators who support more aid for Ukraine and have warned against handing victory to Putin voted down a [*border security bill*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/07/politics/senate-border-ukraine-israel-aid-vote/index.html) that included funds for Zelensky's armed forces.

Biden, who has vented increasing frustration that Johnson is sitting on the foreign aid bill, [*has called*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/25/politics/biden-congress-ukraine-aid-shutdown/index.html) the top four congressional leaders to the White House on Tuesday as officials warn the situation in Ukraine is increasingly grave.

"There is a strong bipartisan majority in the House standing ready to pass this bill if it comes to the floor, and that decision rests on the shoulders of one person, and history is watching whether Speaker Johnson will put that bill on the floor," Jake Sullivan, Biden's national security adviser, told CNN's Dana Bash on CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday.

How Trump's growing power is felt around the world

Trump's growing influence, after yet another [*thumping win in the GOP primary*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/24/politics/donald-trump-south-carolina-primary/index.html) in South Carolina on Saturday, is hardening anxiety among among European allies still traumatized by his first term, when he turned the United States - the guarantor of stability in the Western world for more than seven decades - into a force of volatility and disruption.

Trump's views and the prospect that he could be president this time next year are already causing sweeping geopolitical consequences.

· The delay in US funds means Ukrainian forces are running short of bullets and Russia is recording some key battlefield advances.

· The prospect the US will desert Ukraine this year and of a Trump-led US administration means Putin has no incentive to end the war soon.

· In the short term, NATO's European powers may have to do far more to prevent Ukraine's defeat if the US walks away.

· There's also increasing concern that [*Trump could walk out of NATO*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/12/politics/us-out-nato-second-trump-term-former-senior-adviser/index.html) entirely if he's president or that he would neuter the alliance if he repudiates its creed of mutual self-defense.

· If Trump steps back, Russia could threaten the security structures that kept the peace in Europe since the end of World War II and the Cold War.

· The idea that Washington could turn its back on Ukraine - a European democracy under assault from a tyrant - will have far-reaching implications for US power around the globe. It could alter the calculations of other US adversaries - including China as it seeks to fold democratic Taiwan into the mainland.

Much of the Trump GOP's thinking on Ukraine is embodied by recent remarks from Sen. J.D. Vance of Ohio, who is one of the most forceful advocates against America spending billions of dollars over another country's borders when it faces a crisis at its own.

The Republican senator is part of a new generation of pro-Trump lawmakers who reject the traditional US foreign policy consensus. He traveled to the Munich Security Conference earlier this month with a message that was unpopular with European diplomatic elites and US advocates of the transatlantic alliance. And at the subsequent Conservative Political Action Conference in the US - now a pro-Trump bastion - he explained why America should no longer finance Ukraine's fight for its freedom.

"I have ... Republican colleagues, who are much more emotionally invested in what's going on 6,000 miles away than they are in their own country," Vance said at the conference - whose theme was "Where Globalism Goes to Die." He backed Trump's position that the war should be ended and the killing would stop.

"It's good for the country to have somebody saying, 'How long does this go on? How much money are we supposed to funnel into this country?'" said Vance - who has also argued the US lacks the manufacturing capacity or sufficient military reserves to send more ammunition to Ukraine. "If you care about Ukraine, but most importantly, if you care about America, you should be wanting this thing to come to some diplomatic resolution. I think it's the only hope."

Zelensky - who said Sunday the conflict had killed at least 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers, in addition to many civilian casualties - rejected Vance's criticisms of the war in his interview with CNN's Collins.

"To understand it is to come to the front line to see what's going on, to speak with the people, then to go to civilians to understand ... what will (happen to) them without this support. And he will understand that millions ... will be killed. It's a fact," Zelensky said.

"Of course he doesn't understand. God bless you don't have the war on your territory," he said.

A more uncertain future

The White House is not giving up its efforts to get $60 billion in Ukraine aid through the House despite the opposition from Trump, who has suggested the country could be given a loan - even though it is in no state to pay it back after two years of devastating warfare.

The administration is increasingly [*tying the challenges*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/17/politics/biden-zelensky-congress-ukraine-aid/index.html) of Ukraine's front-line forces - including the [*loss of the town of Avdiivka*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/19/europe/ukrainian-avdiivka-soldiers-messages-intl/index.html) - directly to Johnson's refusal to move the spending bill in the House.

But even if Biden wins a second term, there is no guarantee that Ukraine can rely on a perpetual stream of US billions to support its fight for survival. Recent battlefield struggles have only increased concerns in the US that ultimate victory is impossible, sparking debate about how sustainable Western aid would be under such circumstances.

While some Republicans appear to be against Ukraine aid just for political reasons - to please Trump - there is increasing pressure on Biden to justify large amounts of taxpayer funds being sent to a foreign war.

Polls have shown a gradual ebbing of public support for the US financial involvement in the war, especially among Republicans. Some 55% of Americans said in a CNN poll in August that Congress should not authorize additional funding to support Ukraine. The survey found 71% of Republicans opposed new spending. The splits in the GOP over Ukraine were exposed last week when 26 Senate Republicans voted against the bill containing Israel and Ukraine aid while 22 backed it.

And however the 2024 election turns out, the balance of power in Congress is likely to be narrow - meaning that an increasingly nationalist GOP may be able to block future aid tranches.

There's a growing conversation in the foreign policy community about whether an alternative approach - that is more politically sustainable - is possible. Is it, for instance, more feasible for the US and Europe to focus on preventing Ukraine from losing any more territory - in preparation for future ceasefire talks - than it is to think about winning the war? Such a scenario would be complicated by Ukrainians who may be determined to fight on, and the impossibility of ever trusting that Putin would honor any peace agreement. Any deal would also risk rewarding Putin with captured territory for an unprovoked attack on a neighbor.

Zelensky's comments to CNN show he's not close to giving up.

But can the same be said of the United States?

Analysis by Stephen Collinson, CNN

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