

# [***Opinion: When it comes to US politics, Putin can read the writing on the wall***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:69W6-HH01-JBSS-S4GC-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's confidence must be shaken after leaving Washington without the approval of more US military funding for his country amid the ongoing war with Russia.

Although President Joe Biden has stressed the need for Congress to continue supporting Ukraine, Republican opposition to the administration's request for [*more than $60 billion*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/10/20/politics/biden-administration-israel-ukraine-congress-funding/index.html) in emergency supplemental funding has been stiff. As the GOP [*demands*](https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/12/us/politics/republicans-us-mexico-border-ukraine.html) the passage of stringent border policies from Democrats in exchange for backing the military aid package, the future remains pretty bleak for Ukraine. Even if the two parties end up striking a deal, it's likely that each subsequent aid package will only face increasing resistance and more roadblocks.

Russian President Vladimir Putin can certainly read the writing on the wall. In a press conference this week, he was defiant, stating clearly that there was no change in his plans in Ukraine. "Peace will come when we achieve our goals," Putin said. He also added that it would be possible to repair relations with the US once "internal changes" were made.

Putin has long waited for the unified front in Washington and among NATO allies to collapse. While it is impossible to read his mind, it's likely that his bet is one that took into account the growing skepticism of US interventionism, the rife political partisanship on Capitol Hill and our fleeting attention spans.

After the disastrous wars in Vietnam and Iraq, American support for foreign intervention has remained fragile. The legacy of those two major wars means that generations of Americans have seen policymakers justify operations based on false and misleading information. Fears that a military conflict could spin out of control, claim substantial casualties, leave veterans both psychologically and physically scarred, while costing billions of dollars to the detriment of domestic programs have remained all too clear.

None of this is to say that the skepticism is warranted with regards to the war in Ukraine, where threats to the safety and stability of NATO are formidable given that Putin's ambitions might not end with Ukraine. But regardless of the legitimacy of the cause, US presidents operate in a context where maintaining strong public support for a foreign intervention or military aid is challenging. At some point, support is likely to break, and we might be reaching that point soon.

The second point Putin likely understood is that achieving enduring bipartisan support for anything is nearly impossible in an era of intense political polarization. Though there are moments when the parties can come together, as they initially did when Russia launched its assault on Ukraine in February 2022, it's only a matter of time before the red-blue divide takes over.

What the US does overseas is not insulated from the bitter divisions that constantly play out on Capitol Hill. In this case, members of the hard right have drowned out more moderate voices within the GOP on this issue, and the pull to resist Democrats - who still [*largely support*](https://www.cnn.com/2022/12/06/politics/us-support-ukraine-aid-russia-poll/index.html) sending military aid to Ukraine - has proven to be much stronger than any desire to join forces with them. Polls conducted by the Pew Research Center have shown that [*48%*](https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/12/08/about-half-of-republicans-now-say-the-us-is-providing-too-much-aid-to-ukraine/) of Republicans and Republican-leaning Independents think the US has provided too much support for Ukraine.

Former President Donald Trump has only added fuel to the fire with his comments [*about Putin*](https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-pleased-putins-praise-ukraine-russia-meet-the-press-rcna105298), and his claims of somehow ending the war within [*24 hours*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/11/06/europe/ukraine-zelensky-trump-invitation-intl/index.html). His rhetoric will only strengthen Putin's belief that he can remain firm amid the faltering Ukrainian counteroffensive and wait for the possibility that another Trump presidency, or simply continued gridlock in Congress, will further damage Ukraine's war effort.

Finally, Putin is certainly aware that we as a culture have a short-attention span. In the era of never-ending social media feeds, Americans have fleeting interest in any news story. Notwithstanding a serious crisis - and we are already staring down a few - the odds are that Americans will turn their eye toward the next big thing as soon as a new report or viral video emerges. Politicians in the US who are embroiled in controversy have learned to capitalize on this by refusing to step down and choosing instead to weather the storm before the public turns to something else.

With regards to foreign policy, this can prove extremely challenging to presidents who seek long-term support for an initiative overseas. While policymakers of yore could drive home a sense of urgency by railing against communism, for example, there are few guiding principles that can achieve a similar effect today. Even the so-called bully pulpit of the White House is not as effective in an era where information streams are fragmented and decentralized. Partisan media outlets means that much of the news people do see is often filtered through a specific political lens.

While an address from President John F. Kennedy during the Cuban Missile Crisis or President Ronald Reagan during the Cold War could once capture the nation's attention, today these messages can easily be missed in the flood of information online. Even when they land, much of the public is likely to scroll to something else.

All of this makes the vote to approve military aid for Ukraine extremely important. Democrats and Republicans have an opportunity to prove Putin wrong and demonstrate to the world that the US is capable of sustaining long-term commitments to support vital foreign policy objectives. Not only will Putin be watching, but so too will other adversaries and allies who are waiting to see what the US means when it promises to stand by a nation.

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