

# [***Two years into war, Putin gets a propaganda opportunity as Congress dithers over Ukraine***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6B9B-PB71-DY7V-G002-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; As the two-year anniversary of [*Russia's invasion of Ukraine*](https://www.cnn.com/world/europe/ukraine) approaches, it feels like everyone has been sucked into a bizarro world.

Two years ago, in February 2022, Tucker Carlson was a Fox News host, still adjacent to mainstream US ***politics***.

US support for Ukraine seemed ironclad and unflappable as Russia invaded.

Russian President Vladimir Putin was about to be isolated worldwide as a pariah.

Elon Musk would sooncommit to helping Ukraine with his Starlink satellite internet system.

Former President Donald Trump was still plotting his way out of the political wilderness, his presence rarely felt by most of the country.

What a difference two years makes

Some developments this week:

Putin got a platform, thanks to a softball interview by Carlson, who was banished from Fox News last year and has turned to Twitter, the platform Musk bought and renamed X, to spew right-wing conspiracy theories.

American aid for Ukraine is in real question as US politicians, led by Republicans in the House of Representatives, question the investment. Note: When Trump helped [*kill a bipartisan border policy bill*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/07/politics/senate-border-ukraine-israel-aid-vote/index.html) this week, it also put Ukraine aid sought for months by President Joe Biden in jeopardy.

Trump's emergence from the wilderness is complete. He has all but erased any question he will be the Republican presidential nominee for the third time and is plotting his return to the White House.

The Pentagon, by the way, is [*now paying Musk's SpaceX*](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/06/01/starlink-ukraine-pentagon-elon-musk/) for Ukraine to use Starlink.

A propaganda broadcast on X

Carlson was walked on by Putin during the interview in Moscow. CNN's Oliver Darcy called it a [*"propaganda victory"*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/08/media/vladimir-putin-tucker-carlson-interview-reliable-sources/index.html) for Putin.

From Darcy:

Instead of pressing Putin on the many topics at hand, including credible accusations Russia has committed war crimes and the imprisonment of opposition leader Alexei Navalny, Carlson allowed the autocrat a free lane to manipulate the public and tell his version of history, no matter how deceptive it may have been.

At times, between the airing of grievances, Putin appeared to school Carlson on historical events as the host looked on in bewilderment. Or to put it more plainly, Carlson provided Putin a platform to spread his propaganda to a global audience with little to no scrutiny of his claims.

In one notable exchange, Carlson did push back on the idea that Evan Gershkovich, a Wall Street Journal reporter detained in Russia since last March, is a US spy. According to CNN's reporting, Russia rejected an offer to exchange a large number of Russian nationals detained abroad for both Gershkovich and another American, Paul Whelan, who has been detained in Russia since 2018.

Putin told Carlson that perhaps Gershkovich could be exchanged for Vadim Krasikov, a former colonel in Russia's domestic spying service who was convicted for murdering a former Chechen fighter in Berlin in broad daylight in 2019.

CNN's Nathan Hodge, Katharina Krebs and Helen Regan [*have more details*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/09/europe/vladimir-putin-interview-tucker-carlson-gershkovich-intl-hnk/index.html). They also fact-check Carlson on his assertion that US media organizations have not tried to interview Putin. From their report:

In fact, journalists have repeatedly been requesting interviews with Putin, but the Russian president had declined to grant access. And Putin not only has declined to participate in interviews with the free press, but over the past two years he has waged a war against the media, [*locking up journalists*](https://www.usagm.gov/2024/02/01/rfe-rl-condemns-extension-of-american-journalists-detention-in-russia/), [*fining Big Tech companies*](https://e.newsletters.cnn.com/click?Ecm9iZXJ0Lm1jbGVhbkB3YXJuZXJtZWRpYS5jb20/CeyJtaWQiOiIxNzA3Mjc1NjA4MTk2NThjYmQ3Yzk1NTc1IiwiY3QiOiJjbm4tMTFmMWFjM2YzZDdlZTc0MGExNDllMWQzNWQ0ODY5ZTMtMSIsInJkIjoid2FybmVybWVkaWEuY29tIn0/HWkhfQ05OX2lfTmV3c19OREJBTjAyMDcyMDI0YzExNjAwMzliMSxjbjEsaHR0cHM6Ly93d3cucmV1dGVycy5jb20vdGVjaG5vbG9neS9ydXNzaWFuLWNvdXJ0LWZpbmVzLWdvb2dsZS01MDgtbWxuLW92ZXItZmFrZS1pbmZvcm1hdGlvbi11a3JhaW5lLXdhci10YXNzLTIwMjMtMTItMjAv/s7n27e2123a) for hosting "fake" information about the Ukraine invasion, and [*pushing through censorship laws*](https://e.newsletters.cnn.com/click?) that clamp down on news organizations.

Putin, despite the free platform from Carlson, still faces isolation in the West. The CNN reporters note the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Putin regarding an alleged scheme to take Ukrainian children to Russia. And there was a new call Thursday for Putin to face a war crimes inquiry for Russia's assault on the Ukrainian city of Mariupol, which killed thousands.

The reporters also used the word "revanchist," which I had to look up and which perfectly describes Putin's warped view of history and his obsession with occupying Ukraine.

From Merriam-Webster: (re· vanch· ist) of or relating to a policy designed to recover lost territory or status.

Shakeup in Ukraine

Meantime, there are major developments in Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelensky this week replaced his top military commander, Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi.

From [*CNN's report*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/08/europe/zaluzhnyi-ukraine-military-chief-dismissed-intl/index.html): The president's move follows tensions between Zelensky and his hugely popular military chief after the failure of Ukraine's much-vaunted counteroffensive, and with Ukraine facing a renewed Russian onslaught, manpower and ammunition shortages, and US aid stalled in Congress.

Major choices for Americans

But among the many, concrete choices Americans face in November, assuming the presidential election is between Trump and Biden, is how the US president will approach Putin.

Biden has his built his presidency around the idea of a worldwide struggle between democracies and autocracies. Trump frequently expresses admiration for autocrats and his frustration with democratic alliances like NATO.

Ukraine funding has run dry

The Pentagon has [*essentially exhausted*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/19/politics/grim-realization-ukraine-washington-funding-fight/index.html) the money Congress allocated for Ukraine over the past two years.

It's unclear when more might be on the way, particularly after the proposal to tie US border policy to Ukraine funding met its end this week.

In the Senate, there is support for Ukraine aid. A bipartisan group of senators on Thursday cleared a 60-vote threshold to move toward a $95 billion aid bill for Ukraine and Israel. One Republican, Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, plans to use arcane procedural tactics to [*stall a final vote for days*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/09/politics/rand-paul-senate-foreign-aid-package/index.html).

Sen. Mitch McConnell, the Republican minority leader, pushed back against criticism from right-wing lawmakers that the money is charity for Ukraine. Most of the funds would be spent on production of military hardware in the US, he said.

"This is about rebuilding the arsenal of democracy and demonstrating to our allies and adversaries alike that we're serious about exercising American strength," he said on the Senate floor on Friday.

The House is a more formidable roadblock to additional Ukraine funding. Republican Speaker Mike Johnson has not ruled out the idea of approving a Ukraine bill, either as a stand-alone proposition or in conjunction with aid to Israel. But he has certainly not endorsed it either.

Johnson, along with other Republicans, has demanded more transparency and accountability for how the money is spent. And to get more aid passed into law, he would likely need Democratic votes - which will anger hard-line Republicans who have the power to oust him.

Analysis by Zachary B. Wolf, CNN

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