



Republicans Split on U.S. Support for Ukraine

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Republicans are divided over support for Ukraine. Supporters of its continuation, who make up the majority of the party, are seeking more influence in the public debate. But the ongoing campaign ahead of the presidential and congressional elections, dominated by the voices of sceptics, is making it difficult to change the mood among conservative voters. The use of anti-Ukrainian slogans in the campaign may cause the number of supporters of aid to Ukraine in Congress to shrink after this November's elections.

In recent months, the United States has reduced the scale of [military aid to Ukraine](#), due to the exhaustion of funds allocated by Congress. Last October, President Joe Biden requested another \$61 billion in support for Ukraine (military, economic, and humanitarian) as part of a broader "crisis package" that also included [support for Israel](#), border protection, and initiatives in the Indo-Pacific. The creation of a single omnibus package was supposed to guarantee its swift adoption, but it triggered a political clinch between Republicans and Democrats centred on the issues of strengthening border protection and tightening migration laws, a key focus of the package for the conservatives.

Initiatives to Limit the Aid. After the first months of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine and strong bipartisan support for aid to Ukraine, the voices of [those opposed to U.S. involvement began to strengthen in the Republican Party](#). This group has gradually expanded and now numbers about a hundred members of the House of Representatives and a dozen senators (Republicans hold 220 seats in the lower chamber of Congress and 49 in the Senate). The group, whose informal leaders include Marjorie Taylor-Greene, Matt Gaetz, Chip Roy, and Senators JD Vance and Tommy Tuberville, argues that the United States has done enough and should pursue a quick peace at all costs (effectively sacrificing Ukraine's interests) rather than "fuelling" the war. They criticise the Biden administration for trying to drag the U.S. into a "world war" and giving preferential treatment to Ukraine, while ignoring domestic problems. The most extreme of the group argue that the Ukrainian authorities

are seeking the direct involvement of U.S. troops in the fighting and are opposed to Ukraine's membership in NATO. They also argue that, from their perspective, the involvement of European countries in supporting Ukraine is insufficient.

In a Pew Research Center poll conducted last December, up to 48% of Republican voters said the U.S. was doing too much to help Ukraine, 20% said the scale was appropriate, and only 13% said it was insufficient. While the negative sentiment is reflected among some of the party's members of Congress, initiatives by Republicans to reduce support have not received broader legislative support. Amendments to the defence budget that would completely reduce the \$300 million in 2024 funding for the Ukraine Assistance Security Initiative (USAI), funded continuously since 2016, were rejected in the House of Representatives last July (by a vote of 89-341) and again in September (104-330). In those same months, amendments that would have completely banned military support for Ukraine were also rejected (70-358 and 93-339, respectively). In the Senate, an amendment withholding aid to Ukraine until all NATO allies reached 2% of GDP in defence spending was rejected (13-71).

The Republican Plan for Ukraine's Victory. Supporters of continued aid still are the majority among Republican Party politicians. To shape the public debate, last November they unveiled their "Proposed Plan for Ukraine Victory", prepared by the chairs of the House Foreign Affairs, Armed Forces, and Intelligence committees (Republicans Michael McCaul, Mike

PISM BULLETIN

Rogers, and Mike Turner, respectively). The goal was to steady the support of the majority of representatives in Congress around the continuation of aid, but also to force the Biden administration to make detailed declarations and outline the next steps of [administration support](#). The main thrust of the Republican plan is to quickly provide Ukraine with a large amount of key weaponry, including ATACMS missiles, F-16 aircraft, cluster munitions, and artillery and air-defence systems. Republicans point out that while negotiations will be necessary to end the war, Ukraine must negotiate from a position of strength, having achieved significant success on the battlefield. In addition, they want to tighten the sanctions on Russia and the Putin regime, and confiscate and transfer frozen Russian assets to Ukraine. For the latter purpose, a bipartisan draft of the Rebuilding Economic Prosperity and Opportunity (REPO) for Ukrainians Act has emerged in Congress, which will provide the president with the appropriate tools to transfer these assets (estimated at a combined \$300 billion), in cooperation with foreign partners. To underscore the legitimacy of the provision of aid, the plan's authors note that no significant cases of misappropriation of aid have been detected so far, and the U.S. is strengthening control of aid implementation. To make it further credible and formally legitimate, they propose that the Biden administration present a strategy for supporting Ukraine, conclude agreements on the provision of more than half of non-military aid by foreign partners, publish reports on the use of funds for aid to Ukraine, and appoint a special inspector general to oversee the support.

Split in the Presidential Primaries. The Republican presidential campaign, however, is dominated by those with a reluctance to support Ukraine. Leading in the primaries is former President Donald Trump, who favours withholding aid. On the campaign trail, he advocates blocking it until Ukraine hands over its findings on the business activities of incumbent President Biden's son, Hunter, and the father's influence over it when he was vice president (in 2019, an affair over the withholding of military aid to Ukraine over identical demands led to [Trump's first impeachment](#)). Other opponents of supporting Ukraine or the country joining NATO are Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy. Both were candidates in the primaries but withdrew from the race after Iowa and immediately gave their support to Trump, which will further rally the conservative electorate in favour of cutting aid around his candidacy.

The only major candidate remaining, Nikki Haley, the former U.S. Ambassador to the UN (in the Trump administration), favours aid to Ukraine. She believes it is in the U.S. interest to defend Ukraine because of the need to stop Russia's imperial ambitions, including defending against attacks on NATO allies. In her view, a clear U.S. stance will also deter other authoritarian states, such as China, Iran, and North Korea, from escalating and violating international law. Similar views were also expressed by other candidates before they suspended their campaigns even before the Iowa vote because of slim chances to win, including the former Vice President Mike Pence and former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie.

Conclusions and Outlook. Although aid to Ukraine is currently blocked due to the dispute over migration issues, the adoption of the crisis package would ensure continued funding in 2024. A reduction this year is unlikely due to the continued support of Ukraine by the majority of the Republicans in Congress and cooperation with Democrats on this issue. Reaching a compromise is possible, although the latter and the administration must come to terms with calls for tightening some immigration regulations (opposed in particular by the left-wing faction of progressive Democrats). These Republicans, in their view, may view some tightening of the rules now as an advantage (even if Trumpists remain opposed to any settlement), than to wait for the elections and hope to win a majority in both chambers of Congress (which is not certain) and then implement their migration policies in full.

Although opponents of Ukraine support are a minority of elected representatives of the Republican Party, they have been more prominent in the debate in recent months. Also, Trump's position as the leading candidate in the election will reinforce the impression that Republicans as a whole are sceptical of continued aid. While pressure from Republican leaders may counteract the actions of opponents in Congress of Ukraine aid, it will not necessarily translate into broad public sentiment among Republicans. Opposition to Ukraine aid among that electorate favours candidates expressing this position in the elections. This could lead to an increase in the number of opponents of aid after the November elections, which, if they hold a majority of seats in the House of Representatives, will make cross-party cooperation on behalf of Ukraine more difficult. Also at risk in the longer term is NATO cooperation and the presence of U.S. troops in Europe, which are already becoming the subject of criticism from the most extreme Trumpists.