

# A SOLID START

America's new Ukraine aid package will help keep Russia at bay, but only sustained support will beat Putin back to Moscow

House Speaker Mike Johnson did his part, mobilizing enough support for vital Ukrainian military aid, yet munition and manpower advantages remain on Russia's side.



AP Photos

**K**YIV — I was elated on Saturday night as I watched the House of Representatives wrap up its vote on a \$61 billion aid package for Ukraine. Even six months after President Biden proposed the increased aid, bringing the bill up for a vote took historic courage and leadership from House Speaker Mike Johnson, who could still lose his job for defying the will of the majority of House Republicans who oppose aid.



**TAMAR JACOBY**

But here in Ukraine, the reaction has been surprisingly muted. The weaponry likely to flow in coming weeks will be essential on the battlefield and in cities across the country, where Russian air attacks have intensified sharply in recent weeks. It should start to stabilize the front in eastern and southern Ukraine, where Moscow is currently poised to break through, and help Ukrainians shore up their defenses in anticipation of the Russian thrust that many expect in coming months as spring sunshine hardens the muddy ground between the two armies.

What the package is unlikely to do is enable Kyiv to go on the offensive, turning the tide of the war and positioning Ukraine to win.

This isn't new. Since the Russian invasion in February 2022, the US and other allies have kept Ukraine on a short leash, providing just enough weaponry

to prevent Russia from winning, but not enough to enable Kyiv to triumph. This worked for a while, with Ukrainians' ingenuity and resourcefulness making up for what they lacked against a far more powerful enemy. But it's not a winning strategy for the long run.

"It all comes back to the math," one Ukrainian friend reminded me after the House

vote. Russia's population, an estimated 144 million, is more than three times that of Ukraine. According to one authoritative estimate, Russian fighters in Ukraine number more than 450,000 and are growing. The Ukrainian parliament recently passed a new mobilization law, and President Volodymyr Zelensky signed an older bill lowering the draft age from 27 to 25. But neither measure goes far enough to make as much difference as many had hoped in filling out the ranks of the armed forces.

Perhaps most significant — Russia's most daunting advantage — is the gap between the two economies. Despite Western sanctions, President Vladimir Putin has been able to put the Russian economy on a war footing, converting shopping centers into munitions plants and ramping up round-the-clock production. The Ukrainian economy is still clawing its way back from the first year of the war, when GDP fell by a devastating 29%. Also, many recent Russian air attacks have targeted Ukrainian weapons factories, skewing the imbalance

further still.

In the face of numbers like these, Ukraine needs not just matching weapons but overwhelming superiority — in both quantity and quality.

The House bill takes a step in the right direction, mandating that future US aid include long-range ATACMS missiles — a weapon the administration has so far been loath to send. But this is only the beginning of what's needed.

The next tranche of US aid will include artillery shells and ammunition. Defense Department officials have told the media there will be armored vehicles and personnel carriers. There will also be some other new missiles, including crucial interceptors to arm the Patriot air defense systems that have proved so essential in recent months in protecting Kyiv and other cities. All of this will help — Ukraine is running disastrously low on all these items. But it won't be a game changer.

Ukrainians watch with envy as neighboring Poland, a NATO member

increasingly concerned about the Russian threat, shops for US weapons. Among other items, Warsaw is waiting for delivery of 48 Patriot air defense batteries (Ukraine has three), 18 HIMARS mobile missile launchers (this will bring its stock to 38, nearly double Ukraine's 20), 45 ATACMS missiles (Ukraine is said to have 20, but most have been modified to fire only about half as far as the standard variant) and 32 F-35 fighter jets (Ukraine is still waiting for the older F-16s it was promised over a year ago.)

But what's needed from Washington, and Biden could still provide it, isn't just weapons. It's a new resolve — a definition of victory and a plan to achieve it.

What's our vision beyond stabilizing the front? What's our strategy for the long haul — a few more months of stalemate and perhaps, over the coming year, a gradual increase in incoming European weaponry?

The US and other Western allies are afraid of the potential consequences of a Russian defeat — destabilization, the dissolution of the Russian Federation, nuclear weapons falling into the wrong hands or worse.

But ultimately one side will win in Ukraine, which means the other must lose. Will it be Ukraine or Russia? We need to decide. Until then, we're just buying time, and Ukrainians are paying with their lives.



**Beyond shoring up the front, President Volodymyr Zelensky's government is looking to President Biden for a clear path to victory that will end the fighting.**

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