



**ISSUE BRIEF** | Center for American Security

# **ENDING PUTIN'S INVASION: DEFINING THE DIRECTION OF U.S. ASSISTANCE (UPDATED - AS OF DAY 285 OF THE INVASION)**

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## **TOPLINE POINTS**

- To bring Putin's invasion of Ukraine to a peaceful end, it is not enough for the United States to support Ukraine militarily; we must also define a roadmap for peace and initiate peace talks between Ukraine and Russia. The United States must determine a desired end state. This is becoming newly urgent, with concerns about the prospect of depleting the U.S. arsenal of critical weapons it may need for other conflicts.
- More transparency, accountability, and oversight are needed for U.S. military and economic aid to Ukraine.
- If more assistance is needed, the Biden Administration should clarify how the burden for providing it is being shared with European partners.

## **Overview**

The earlier version of this Issue Brief (on day 231 of Putin's invasion) coincided with the publication of the Biden Administration's National Security Strategy (NSS) on October 12. It also predated the publication of the unclassified version of the Biden Administration's National Defense Strategy (NDS) (October 27).

Ukraine has made significant gains on the battlefield since mid-October, notably retaking the city of Kherson. More recently, there are reports that Congress is weighing a new aid package that may exceed \$38 billion and placing the total U.S. assistance to Ukraine in 2022 at more than \$100 billion. At the same time, European allies are raising concerns that weapons transfers to Ukraine are depleting their arsenals, creating a potential vulnerability if Putin chooses to retaliate against them directly. There are also reports that U.S. weapons transfers to Ukraine could constrain U.S. military support to Taiwan, with the Wall Street Journal citing a potential \$19 billion backlog of weapons that are not being sent to Taiwan due to the prioritization of weapons for Ukraine.



## Discussions of Plan and End State Remain Elusive

Neither the NSS nor the NDS made any mention of the Biden Administration’s end state for the Ukraine war. This is unsettling because the Biden Administration’s justification for the delay in producing the NSS was the need to account for Putin’s invasion.

Not only is there no discussion of an end to this conflict, but the NSS appears to commit to an unclear expansion of U.S. support of Ukraine—namely, to “support Ukraine in its fight for freedom...help Ukraine recover economically, and we will encourage its regional integration within the European Union.” The second of these goals requires further explanation and oversight. What does Ukraine’s economic recovery look like, how will U.S. assistance be tracked to ensure it meets specific goals, and who else among our allies in Europe has committed to this objective?

The NDS also does not discuss an end state or strategy for the Ukraine conflict, even as it notes that Russia’s actions in Ukraine “dramatically highlight the importance of a *strategy* that leverages the power of our values, and our military might with that of our Allies and partners” (emphasis added).

## Oversight of Arms in Ukraine

The America First Policy Institute (AFPI) has repeatedly called for instituting a robust and thorough oversight mechanism over U.S. military and economic aid to Ukraine. A model for this is the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR). Indeed, as some Members of Congress have suggested, the entire SIGAR office could be repurposed for oversight over Ukraine assistance because SIGAR has the budget and the in-house expertise and track record of doing precisely this sort of task.

On October 27, 8 months into Putin’s invasion, the State Department announced what appears to be a plan to track the movement of U.S. arms (but not necessarily other forms of assistance) in Ukraine. This is insufficient because oversight over non-lethal assistance is also necessary, given recent statements by the Biden Administration about Ukraine’s economic recovery. The “U.S. Plan to Counter Illicit Diversion of Certain Advanced Conventional Weapons in Eastern Europe,” as the State Department plan is called, not only focuses on the movement of arms but also includes near, medium, and long-term actions into and beyond Fiscal Year 2024 covering issues like border security and support for security forces, law enforcement, and border control agencies.



This plan is vague, ill-defined, and incomplete, and it should be investigated by Congress, especially on how large of a U.S. footprint this entails and which resources will be diverted toward it.

## **New Questions for U.S. involvement in Ukraine**

The language in the NSS, NDS, and the State Department's announcement all suggest a deepening involvement by the United States that extends beyond providing military assistance to include directly supporting Ukraine's broader economic recovery. Although it is not a precise analogy, parallels could be drawn here to America's recent experience in Afghanistan and the Middle East regarding the dangers of making military and economic commitments abroad without articulating a clear end state, set of metrics, or transparency in a clear plan to complete the job. The warning signs of mission creep are flashing.

U.S. leadership must also address what kind of lessons it expects European allies to learn from this entire experience. What should the United States expect of our European partners in terms of how to share the burden of collective security? This question is timely and relevant, given the acknowledgment that, in this instance, the United States and Europe failed to ensure security and peace in Europe, leaving the United States again with a disproportionate share of the responsibility. The United States can begin convening these conversations with European partners and establishing mechanisms to fix what allowed for deterrence to fail against Putin earlier this year. Doing so would not only help streamline how burden sharing takes place in ending the invasion but also in how the U.S. and its European partners will deter Putin moving forward.

Another set of questions concerns the economic and energy circumstances in Ukraine and Europe more broadly, particularly those dependent on Russian energy. In the short term, there is a pressing need to determine how the U.S. can help European nations withstand a difficult winter with likely energy disruptions. In the longer term, the United States also needs to contemplate what steps to take to facilitate European nations transitioning away from Russian energy toward other (to be determined) alternatives.

## **Next Steps**

### ***Towards an End State***

An end state to Ukraine should include a plan not only to bring both sides to end hostilities but also a path forward to deterring and deescalating any future hostilities from Russia. An executable path toward achieving a desired end state could, as a first step, identify a credible and effective interlocutor to carry out these discussions.



As of this writing, it is not clear that the Biden Administration has taken any of these steps. Recent news reports about national security advisor Jake Sullivan holding talks with his Russian counterpart are welcoming but do not compensate for the fact that the first time Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin spoke with his counterpart since the invasion began was last month, and President Biden has still not spoken with Putin. There is a growing, and likely correct, sense that absent a negotiation process, this conflict will move into a protracted state.

There is no question about the clear American interest in a stable Ukraine, particularly in preventing it from being exploited by our adversaries. America's experience during the Cold War, particularly the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan, demonstrates how the United States built and maintained a sphere of influence and prevented our top strategic adversary, the Soviet Union, from spreading its influence.

Today's circumstances are different. Communist China, not Russia, is America's top strategic adversary. Europe, particularly Western Europe, is also generally aligned with the United States boasts the world's strongest economies, and so America should work with European nations to assist them, with meticulous oversight, in a Europe-led effort to ensure Ukraine's recovery.

The more relevant historical context for *how* America should be involved in these efforts is to be found not in its Cold War experience but rather in its two decades in Afghanistan. The question is not the merits of the goal but the methods of its accomplishment. Here the words "protracted conflict," "stabilization," and "economic recovery" that are being used in the context of Ukraine called for a clear definition of what type of aid we are providing, to whom, towards achieving which objectives, and with what kind of metrics for evaluating their effectiveness. These priorities were only instituted after the United States entered Afghanistan and remained undefined as our efforts there expanded.

### *After Action Assessment*

Even though Russia's invasion has not yet ended, the U.S. government should already be actively planning what an after-action assessment of this invasion should look like. It is important for the United States and our allies to know that our success in supporting Ukraine does not erase the failure of U.S. leadership and that of our allies to stop Putin from doing so in the first place. This exercise, which should also be a part of Congress's oversight efforts, should include detailed explanations for U.S. policies and actions that may have paved the way for the Russian invasion, the failures of Europe's largest economies to do more quickly, and the reasons for the delay in U.S. lethal assistance.

This exercise is not only necessary as a matter of learning lessons and fixing what went wrong but is a basic act of transparency that the American people should expect. This



type of after-action exercise also will send a signal to America's adversaries in showing that despite their failures at stopping Putin, the United States and European allies are focused on learning from their mistakes and committing to avoid repeating them.

## BIOGRAPHIES

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