

# WHAT'S NEXT

*Policy Recommendations from the George W. Bush Institute*

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## SUPPORTING UKRAINE

*Why It Is Vital to U.S. National Security Interests*



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# SUPPORTING UKRAINE:

## WHY IT IS VITAL TO U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY INTERESTS

*David J. Kramer, Executive Director, George W. Bush Institute*

President Vladimir Putin's wholly unjustified and unprovoked reinvasion of Ukraine marks the gravest security crisis and the greatest humanitarian catastrophe on the European continent since World War II. The action, which began Feb. 24, 2022, has killed thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and innocent civilians, displaced millions more, and caused massive damage to Ukraine's infrastructure and economy. It came eight years after Russia first invaded the country and illegally annexed Crimea.

While the Kremlin – and even the U.S. intelligence community – thought the war would be over in days, Ukrainian forces have successfully withstood the attack and have now pushed back Russian troops. Russian forces have suffered humiliating and devastating defeats and have drastically scaled back their aims. With our continued support, Ukraine in fact can achieve victory, defined as driving Russian occupying and invading forces from Ukrainian territory.

### OUR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- The United States and its allies must increase military support for Ukraine to help it achieve victory over Russia
- The U.S. administration and its European counterparts must maintain, even tighten, the sanctions on the Putin regime to deter further aggressive behavior and go after corrupt Russian funds
- International lending agencies, together with individual countries, should prepare for massive financial assistance for Ukraine, much of which could be funded by seizing those Russian assets overseas
- Democratic nations should hold Russia accountable for the invasion of Ukraine and other war crimes and signal to authoritarian regimes like the one in China that similar acts won't be tolerated

Putin's "special military operation," as the invasion was called in Russia, aimed to take over vast portions of Ukraine, overthrow its government, and be over in days. Instead, it has been a disaster for Russia, as Ukrainian fighters and determined citizens have bravely fought and defended their land and freedom.

The Ukraine war also caused a global food crisis after Russia imposed a blockade on shipments of Ukrainian agricultural products until a U.N. and Turkish-brokered deal to allow for such shipments. It forced Europe to reduce its dependence on Russian energy imports and drove up inflation worldwide.

Yet Ukraine has made impressive gains territorially, while Russian forces have been plagued by abysmal military leadership and planning, a lack of supplies, and terrible logistics. Putin's mobilization of several hundreds of thousands of Russian men is unlikely to turn the situation around for Russia and instead will probably lead to more Russian casualties, already [estimated](#) at more than 100,000 since the war began.

Ukrainians have fought heroically and are confident that they can prevail. But they also need massive assistance from the outside world, particularly the West. They haven't asked any other country to send troops to fight their war for them, but they do depend on the provision of important weapons systems to defend against Russian artillery and aerial raids and to go on the offense and regain territory occupied by Russian forces. The United States has provided the bulk of the military assistance, though some European countries have done their fair share, too. Ukraine's infrastructure has been badly damaged, and economic and financial assistance will be vital for the country to recover.

There also must be accountability for Russian war crimes and genocidal acts committed against Ukrainians. Led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Ukrainians reject the notion of negotiations involving territorial concessions in exchange for a ceasefire. They simply do not trust Putin – and for good reason.

In response to the invasion, the United States and a coalition of democratic allies imposed unprecedented sanctions against the Putin regime and Russia; provided significant military assistance to help Ukraine both defend itself and regain captured territory; bolstered existing NATO members' defense near the war area; and prepared to welcome Sweden and Finland in as new NATO members.

These actions were crucial not only in dealing with the threat posed by Putin but also those of other authoritarian regimes who might think of launching similar acts against democratic neighbors, like China against Taiwan.

### *The United States and its allies must increase military support for Ukraine to help it achieve victory over Russia*

The United States provided more than \$20 billion in military assistance to Ukraine in 2022. This support has made an enormous difference on the battlefield. The provision of U.S. mobile multiple-rocket launchers known as HIMARS was especially critical in enabling the Ukrainians to take the offensive. Providing the HIMARS and other effective weapons systems before the invasion might have discouraged Putin from acting and saved many Ukrainian lives.

But it's not enough. Ukraine needs more help, including tanks and missile and air defense systems against Russian artillery, aircraft helicopters, and imported Iranian "kamikaze" drones. Still, Ukraine has done well in shooting down Russian aerial targets. Ukraine could also use fighter jets to strengthen its defense even more against Russian advances.

This support is critical to boosting Ukrainian morale, as it lets their fighters know that the United States and others have their back. Russian morale, by contrast, is extremely low, as Putin and his generals treat Russian soldiers as cannon fodder. Reassuring Kyiv that Congress will continue to support funding – on a bipartisan and bicameral basis, with proper oversight – is critical to helping Ukraine to victory, as evidenced by the additional \$45 billion aid package in December, after President Zelenskyy's impressive visit to Washington, D.C. on Dec. 21.

Helping Ukraine push out all Russian occupying and invading forces from Ukrainian territory, including Crimea, is in the interests of the United States. Concern about escalation, including the possibility that Putin would order the use of tactical nuclear weapons, must not deter us from providing Ukraine with the assistance it needs. That, after all, is what is behind Putin's and other Russian officials' reckless but largely hollow threats to deploy such weapons.

Nor must we be deterred by the possibility that a Russian defeat in Ukraine, even a sudden Russian military collapse, could produce dangerous and unknown consequences in Russia itself, including the end of the Putin regime. We must not let such concerns paralyze us. As it is, the known – Russian war crimes and the danger Putin poses to the international community

– should be enough to motivate us to do the right thing and stand with Ukraine for “as long as it takes,” as President Joe Biden has said.

*The U.S. administration and its European counterparts must maintain, even tighten, the sanctions on the Putin regime to deter further aggressive behavior and go after corrupt Russian funds*

The sanctions – unprecedented in scope and swiftness and coordinated with our European and other friends and allies – have had a serious impact on the Russian economy, though they have not yet led to the end to Putin’s invasion. Combined with Ukraine’s successful pushback against the invasion, the sanctions are making life for the Putin regime and average Russians more difficult.

Russian officials stupidly left roughly half the country’s foreign hard currency reserves in Western financial institutions, and those funds have been frozen. Russia should not be allowed to recover these funds. The same applies to Russian oligarchs, many of whose ill-gotten gains – from money and real estate to yachts and sports teams – were frozen in the West. The oligarchs’ lack of access to the West, which they view as a safer place for their assets than Russia, has caused significant loss of riches. All of this builds pressure on Putin. Add in the exodus from the country of hundreds of thousands of Russians following Putin’s mobilization order in September, and support for Putin is likely falling – though that’s always hard to measure.

Export technology controls imposed since February have hurt Russia’s ability to access advanced technology vital to its weapons’ maintenance and production. This has forced Moscow to turn to Tehran and Pyongyang for military assistance, poor substitutes and a sign of desperation for a country deemed a major military power. It’s worth noting that, much to the chagrin of those in the Kremlin, China hasn’t provided Russia with military assistance to date, likely out of fear of crossing the sanctions regime, and Beijing has frowned upon any Russian thought of using nuclear weapons in the conflict.

The brutality of Russia’s invasion and the weaponization of energy have forced Europe to reduce its dependence on Russia for oil and gas. Until autumn, Europe was sending vastly more money to Russia to pay for energy imports than it was providing in assistance to Ukraine. Both the Nord Stream I and Nord Stream II pipelines, which Moscow viewed as leverage with Berlin in particular, have essentially stopped working, and Europe has found ways to ensure it can get through the winter without further Russian energy. Europe’s determination to find alternatives to Russian energy deprives Moscow of needed revenue and removes a key leverage point. Finding alternative buyers for its energy supplies is no easy thing for Moscow.

Too many countries haven’t joined the sanctions regime against Russia – India, South Africa, Brazil, and Mexico, for example. The U.S. administration and the new Congress should press to unite such allies to further isolate Russia from the global economy and cut off revenue streams upon which Moscow depends. This is not a time for fence-sitters.

*International lending agencies, together with individual countries, should prepare for massive financial assistance for Ukraine, much of which could be funded by seizing those Russian assets overseas*

Ukraine will likely need hundreds of billions of dollars to recover from the devastation caused by Putin’s invasion. The World Bank [estimates](#) Ukraine’s economy contracted by as much as 35% in 2022. Indeed, with the United States bearing the brunt of military aid, the Europeans need to ramp up their financial assistance to Ukraine. So, too, do the international lending agencies.

Humanitarian assistance cannot wait for the war to end, and much has already been done in this regard, especially by countries geographically close to Ukraine. Poland and the Baltic states, in particular, have taken in many Ukrainian refugees. Other European countries and the European

Union as a whole need to do much more to actually deliver financial assistance – not simply pledge it.

But the onus for repairing the damage lies with Moscow, and that's where the frozen Russian assets come into play. Europe, Japan, and the United States, where the bulk of those reserves are kept, must move from freezing to seizing the more than \$300 billion in assets and prepare a funding mechanism to provide it to Ukraine.

After what Russian forces have done to Ukraine, it would be unconscionable to consider returning these funds to Moscow or to any oligarchs. This is part of the price Russia must pay for Putin's disastrous decision to invade his neighbor. Aside from budgetary assistance, which must go through the government in Kyiv, much of the reconstruction aid should be handled and overseen outside Ukraine. This will help ensure that the funds go to the intended recipients and with proper oversight.

Sanctions relief should only be considered once all Russian forces have withdrawn from Ukrainian territory, including Crimea; steps are taken to ensure that Russia never again poses such a threat to Ukraine or any other country; and Russia is held accountable for what it has done. It's hard to imagine that that's possible as long as Putin remains in power.

*Democratic nations should hold Russia accountable for the invasion of Ukraine and other war crimes and signal to authoritarian regimes like the one in China that similar acts won't be tolerated*

There is little doubt that Russian forces are guilty of war crimes, crimes against humanity and even genocide against Ukraine. The suffering and images, from Bucha to Mariupol, have been heartbreaking, and the deliberate targeting of apartment buildings, hospitals, schools, and other civilian structures is further evidence of such guilt. These crimes must be thoroughly and credibly investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice. Accountability for such egregious crimes is important not only in the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine but to deter any other authoritarian leaders who might be considering similar actions elsewhere.

The world is watching how we respond to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The best way to avert a similar move on the part of Chinese President Xi Jinping against Taiwan is to help Ukraine prevail over Russia. Xi needs to realize that any move toward Taipei will trigger a sanctions regime against China similar to the one imposed on Russia, the possible involvement of the U.S. military in a direct confrontation, and a massive disruption to China's economy. Looking at what Putin's decision to invade Ukraine has done to Russia's reputation, economy, and military may get Xi to pause before acting on any impulse he may have toward Taiwan.

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Europe – the continent where two world wars started – faces its greatest crisis since 1945. The United States has a massive interest in helping Ukraine defeat Russian invading forces, regain control over its occupied territory, and restore order on the continent. That will end the suffering of the Ukrainian people as well as the global food and energy crises sparked by the invasion and send a signal to authoritarian leaders around the world, especially in Beijing, to think twice before embarking on such a reckless course.

There should be no daylight between the U.S. administration and the new Congress on this issue. Indeed, it's vital that the United States show total, bipartisan solidarity with Ukraine and any other country which might be threatened by thuggish, authoritarian regimes. The United States must lead, together with our allies, and that leadership starts with a united front between the executive and legislative branches on such a vital national security matter.





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2943 SMU Boulevard | Dallas, Texas 75205