

Flagging Support: Zelenskyy Loses Favour in Washington

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Things did not go so well this time around. When the worn Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy turned up banging on the doors of Washington's powerful on September 21, he found fewer open hearts and an increasingly large number of closed wallets. The old ogre of national self-interest seemed to be presiding and was in no mood to look upon the desperate leader with sweet acceptance.

Last December, Zelensky and Ukrainian officials did not have to go far in hearing endorsements and encouragement in their efforts battling Moscow's armies. The visit of the Ukrainian president, as White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre [stated at the time](#), "will underscore the United States' steadfast commitment to supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes, including through provision of economic, humanitarian and military assistance."

Republican Senator from Utah, Mitt Romney, was bubbly with enthusiasm for the Ukrainian leader. "He's a national and global hero - I'm delighted to be able to hear from him." Media pack members such as the Associated Press scrambled for stretched parallels in history's record, [noting another mendicant](#) who had previously appeared in Washington to seek backing. "The moment was Dec. 22, 1941, as British Prime Minister Winston Churchill landed near Washington to meet President Franklin D. Roosevelt just weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor."

Then House Speaker, the California Democrat Nancy Pelosi, also drew on the Churchillian theme with a fetishist's relish. "Eighty-one years later this week, it is particularly poignant for me to be present when another heroic leader addresses the Congress in time of war - and with Democracy itself on the line," she [wrote](#) colleagues in a letter.

Zelenskyy, not wishing to state the obvious, suggested a different approach to the question of aiding Ukraine. While not necessarily an attentive student of US history, any briefings given to him should have been mindful of a strand in US politics sympathetic to isolationism

and suspicious of foreign leaders demanding largesse and aid in fighting wars.

How, then, to get around this problem? Focus on clumsy, if clear metaphors of free enterprise. “Your money is not charity,” [he stated at the time](#), cleverly using the sort of corporate language that would find an audience among military-minded shareholders. “It’s an investment in global security and democracy that we handle in the most responsible way.” Certainly, Ukrainian aid has been a mighty boon for the US military-industrial complex, whose puppeteering strings continue to work their black magic on the Hill.

Despite such a show, the number of those believing in the wisdom of such an investment is shrinking. “In a US capital that has undergone an ideological shift since he was last here just before Christmas 2022,” [remarked](#) Stephen Collinson of CNN, “it now takes more than quoting President Franklin Roosevelt and drawing allusions to 9/11, to woo lawmakers.”

Among the investors, Republicans are shrinking more rapidly than the Democrats. An [August CNN poll](#) found a majority in the country – 55% – firmly against further funding for Ukraine. Along party lines, 71% of Republicans are steadfastly opposed, while 62% of Democrats would be satisfied with additional funding.

Kentucky Republican and Senate Minority leader Mitch McConnell [continues to claim](#) that funding Ukraine is a sensibly bloody strategy that preserves American lives while harming Russian interests. “Helping Ukraine retake its territory means weakening – weakening – one of America’s biggest strategic adversaries without firing a shot.”

The same cannot be said about the likes of Kentucky’s Republican Senator Rand Paul. While Zelenskyy was trying to make a good impression on the Hill, the senator [was having none of it](#). “I will oppose any effort to hold the federal government hostage for Ukraine funding. I will not consent to expedited passage of any spending measure that provides any more US aid to Ukraine.”

In *The American Conservative*, Paul [warned](#) that, “With no end in sight, it looks increasingly likely that Ukraine will be yet another endless quagmire funded by the American taxpayer.” President Joe Biden’s administration had “failed to articulate a clear strategy or objective in this war, and Ukraine’s long-awaited counter-offensive has failed to make meaningful gains in the east.”

Such a quagmire was also proving jittering in its dangers. There was the prospect of miscalculation and bungling that could pit US forces directly against the Russian army. There were also no “effective oversight mechanisms” regarding the funding that has found its way into Kyiv’s pockets. “Unfortunately, corruption runs deep in Ukraine, and there’s plenty of evidence that it has run rampant since Russia’s invasion.” The Zelenskyy government, he also noted in a [separate](#) post, had “banned the political parties, they’ve invaded churches, they’ve arrested priests, so no, it isn’t a democracy, it’s a corrupt regime.”

Republicans such as Missouri Senator Josh Hawley are of the view that the US should be slaying different monsters of a more threatening variety. (Every imperium needs its formidable adversaries.) The administration, [he argued](#), should “take the lead on China” and reassure its “European allies” that Washington would be providing “the nuclear umbrella in Europe”.

On September 30, with yet another government shutdown looming in Washington, the US House approved a bill for funding till mid-November by a 335-91 vote. But the measure did not include additional military or humanitarian aid to Ukraine. In August, the Biden administration had requested a \$24 billion package for Ukraine but was met with a significantly skimmed total of \$6.1 billion. Of that amount \$1.5 billion [is earmarked](#) for the Ukrainian Security Assistance Initiative, a measure that continues to delight US arms manufacturers by enabling the Pentagon to place contracts on their behalf to build weapons for Kyiv.

The limited funding measure proved a source of extreme agitation to the clarion callers who have linked battering the Russian bear, if only through a flawed surrogate, with the cause of US freedom. “I am deeply disappointed that this continuing resolution did not include further aid for our ally, Ukraine,” [huffed](#) Maryland Democrat Rep. Steny Hoyer. “In September, the House held seven votes to approve that vital funding to Ukraine. Each time, more than 300 House Members voted in favor. This ought to be a nonpartisan issue and ought to have been addressed in the continuing resolution today.”

As Hoyer and those on his pro-war wing of politics are starting to realise, Ukraine, as an issue, is becoming problematically partisan and ripe. The filling in Zelenskyy’s cap is inexorably thinning and lightening.

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