



THE DEBACLE OVER UKRAINE AID IN CONGRESS OFFERS PAINFUL LESSONS FOR TAIWAN

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US aid for [Ukraine](#) officially ran out in January 2024 and no further aid will be sent unless Congress approves additional funding. Regardless of whether Congress passes Ukraine funding, the beneficiary of the failure to support Ukraine has not only been Russia, but China. The key lesson for them is that the US may not be fully prepared to support its allies and partners over the course of a prolonged war, leading to uncertainties about its reliability.

Russia sees that the Western alliance doesn't have what it takes to outlast Russia in the war in Ukraine, especially with the Israel-Palestine conflict diverting [attention](#). With the Middle East turmoil increasing, Ukraine will continue to falter as a priority for the West.

As a reminder of the consequences of Congress' indecision, look to Taiwan's presidential elections on Jan. 13, where the rhetoric from China grew increasingly aggressive in the lead-up. Xi Jinping in a New Year's speech [vowed](#) that China and Taiwan will "surely be reunified." China also sent [balloons](#) over Taiwan as a reminder that Beijing is watching. However, [William Lai Ching-te](#) and his Democratic Progressive Party prevailed over China's preferred candidate, in a defiant move that will surely drive more aggressive Chinese actions in the future. China also threatened [Australia](#) before Taiwan's presidential elections, with China declaring that pursuing closer

relations with Taiwan would see the Australian people "pushed over the edge of an abyss." Xi faces crises at home, including real estate turmoil, youth employment, local government debt, etc. Becoming more aggressive on Taiwan could be a successful tool to distract the Chinese people.

The aggressive action and talk from China is not exactly new, but we are getting closer to 2027, forecast by [Taiwan's foreign minister](#) and [US intelligence](#) as the year that China could be ready to invade Taiwan. Taiwan should not rely on Western assistance to save the day. As Ukraine has learned, the West has done what it takes to keep Ukraine alive, but not enough to win the war.

Not fighting to win

US presidential candidate [Nikki Haley](#) stated, "If Russia wins, China wins. There's a reason the Taiwanese want us to help the Ukrainians. And that's because they know that if Ukraine wins, China won't invade Taiwan." The failure to support a Ukrainian victory over Russia [encourages](#) China, and other adversarial states.

Once concerns began to grow that US aid was in doubt for Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Ukraine wouldn't [survive](#) for more than "a week" without Western military and financial aid in October 2023. As the Pentagon repeatedly warned that [funding](#) for Ukraine aid was running out, Putin began to grow even more confident that he could outlast Ukraine and the West in a long-term setting.

On Dec. 14, 2023, Putin [said](#) that "there will only be peace in Ukraine when we achieve our aims," which includes the "denazification of Ukraine, its demilitarization and neutral status." In essence, Russia will not stop waging war until it achieves full victory on the battlefield. And now as the war has grinded into a stalemate, the battlefield conditions are changing to Russia's preferred setting, which is a war of attrition.

Ukraine's commander-in-chief [Valeriy Zaluzhnyi](#) believed that he could stop Russia by inflicting massive casualties against the Russian army. However,

he acknowledged that he was wrong after Russia lost over 150,000 troops. For Putin, the frame of reference for casualties is the First and Second World Wars, where millions were lost and, in the latter case, victory was achieved anyway. So now, Ukraine, with a smaller population and limited by the weaponry it has received from the West, is fighting an aggressor state willing to sacrifice millions of its own people to conquer the country.

The uncertainty of Western support could result in Western governments trying to push Ukraine to the negotiating table. In November 2023, Italian Prime Minister [Giorgia Meloni](#), believing she was speaking with African diplomats who were actually Russian pranksters, revealed that European leaders were tired of the war in Ukraine and wanted to broker a deal with the Kremlin to end it.

However, the blunder in Western policy wasn't merely that its support for Ukraine wavered, but that it didn't go all in in its earlier support and have a clear vision for victory. After Ukraine's successful 2022 [counteroffensive](#), which took back parts of the Kharkiv and Kherson regions, Ukraine lacked the weaponry to push further. Russia therefore began [fortifying](#) its lines for over a year, which Ukraine would be unable to penetrate without the right equipment and air support. Ukraine also pleaded for [long-range missiles](#) and F-16s, which the US [hesitated](#) to provide. Once the US sent 20 ATACMS missiles to Ukraine, the Ukrainians used them to devastating effect, [striking](#) two air bases in Russian-occupied territory, [destroying](#) "nine helicopters, an air-defense launcher, vehicles, and ammunition depots." However, Ukraine hasn't been provided more long-range missiles from the US, continuing a broader trend in which Ukraine has been forced to fight at a disadvantage.

This is because, at first, the US feared the supposed red lines ([which Ukraine has since erased](#)) from Russia and didn't believe Ukraine would last long against the much larger invading force. Once the Ukrainians defeated the Russians in [Kyiv](#), the world saw that not only could Ukraine stand its ground, but actually defeat Russia with the right level of support.

However, the Biden administration dragged its feet on providing the necessary weapons and, as a result, failed to produce a clear-cut plan for victory. By pursuing a policy of drip-feeding Ukraine the weapons it needs, Ukraine stays alive but cannot win. The US being stretched thin is already reflected in Biden's messaging as he went from saying that the US will stand with Ukraine for "[as long as it takes](#)" to "[as long as we can](#)."

A lesson for Taipei

Politicizing aid to [Ukraine](#) shows that Western resolve isn't firm and highlights that the West is vulnerable if it were to face a long and drawn-out conflict with China over Taiwan. US Sen. [Mitt Romney](#) (R-Utah) highlighted that it is "in America's interest to see Ukraine succeed. Walking away from Ukraine signals to the world that America can't be counted on. In the face of growing threats from Russia and China, it's essential to maintain trust with our allies and friends around the world."

China will look to capitalize on the lessons learned from the Russia-Ukraine war, understanding that it simply needs to outlast the West in a prolonged conflict. As observed in Ukraine, Western support may eventually weaken, leading the parties to the negotiating table, where China could secure a favorable settlement. Therefore, if the West continues to hesitate in providing aid to Ukraine, including all the weapons it needs to succeed on the battlefield, it will only embolden future tyrants to wage longer wars.

Taiwan should keep in mind that the Western alliance won't stick around forever in a long war. Cracks will emerge and military aid will fluctuate depending on economic and political conditions. Taiwan will need to step up its own [investment](#) into its military and plan to fight a war without all the support that it will want from the West. The time to prepare is now, and Taiwan would be wise to heed the painful lessons that the Ukrainians have learned.

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