

The War Budget: Biden Wanted \$33 Billion More for Ukraine. Congress Quickly Raised It to \$40 Billion. Who Benefits?

Tens of billions, soon to be much more, are flying out of U.S. coffers to Ukraine as Americans suffer, showing who runs the U.S. Government, and for whose benefit.

By [Glenn Greenwald](#)

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From the start of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on February 24, the Biden White House has repeatedly announced large and seemingly random amounts of money that it intends to send to fuel the war in Ukraine. The latest such dispatch, pursuant to an initial \$3.5 billion fund authorized by Congress early on, was announced on Friday; “Biden says U.S. will send \$1.3 billion in additional military and economic support to Ukraine,” read [the CNBC headline](#). This was preceded by a series of new lavish spending packages for the war, unveiled every two to three weeks, starting on the third day of the war:

- **Feb. 26:** “Biden approves \$350 million in military aid for Ukraine”: [Reuters](#);
- **Mar. 16:** “Biden announces \$800 million in military aid for Ukraine”: [The New York Times](#);
- **Mar. 30:** “Ukraine to receive additional \$500 million in aid from U.S., Biden announces”: [NBC News](#);
- **Apr. 12:** “U.S. to announce \$750 million more in weapons for Ukraine, officials say”: [Reuters](#);
- **May 6:** “Biden announces new \$150 million weapons package for Ukraine”: [Reuters](#).

Those amounts by themselves are in excess of \$3 billion; by the end of April, the total U.S. expenditure on the war in Ukraine was close to \$14 billion, drawn from the additional \$13.5 billion [Congress authorized in mid-March](#). While some of that is earmarked for economic and humanitarian assistance for Ukraine, most of it will go into the coffers of the weapons

industry — including Raytheon, on whose Board of Directors the current Secretary of Defense, Lloyd Austin, [sat immediately before](#) being chosen by Biden to run the Pentagon. As CNN put it: “about \$6.5 billion, roughly half of the aid package, will go to the US Department of Defense so it can deploy troops to the region and send defense equipment to Ukraine.”

As enormous as those sums already are, they were dwarfed by [the Biden administration’s announcement](#) on April 28 that it “is asking Congress for \$33 billion in funding to respond to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, more than double the \$14 billion in support authorized so far.” The White House itself [acknowledges](#) that the vast majority of that new spending package will go to the purchase of weaponry and other military assets: “\$20.4 billion in additional security and military assistance for Ukraine and for U.S. efforts to strengthen European security in cooperation with our NATO allies and other partners in the region.”

It is difficult to put into context how enormous these expenditures are — particularly since the war is only ten weeks old, and U.S. officials predict/hope that this war will [last not months but years](#). That ensures that the ultimate amounts will be significantly higher still.

The amounts allocated thus far — the new Biden request of \$33 billion combined with the \$14 billion already spent — [already exceed](#) the average *annual* amount the U.S. spent for its own war in Afghanistan (\$46 billion). In the twenty-year U.S. war in Afghanistan which ended just eight months ago, there was at least some pretense of a self-defense rationale given the claim that the Taliban had harbored Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda at the time of the 9/11 attack. Now the U.S. will spend more than that annual average after just ten weeks of a war in Ukraine that nobody claims has any remote connection to American self-defense.

Even more amazingly, the total amount spent by the U.S. on the Russia/Ukraine war in less than three months is close to [Russia’s total military budget for the entire year](#) (\$65.9 billion). While Washington depicts Russia as some sort of grave and existential menace to the U.S., the reality is that the U.S. spends more than *ten times* on its military what Russia spends on its military each year; indeed, the U.S. spends three times more than the second-highest military spender, China, and [more than the next twelve countries combined](#).

But as gargantuan as Biden’s already-spent and newly requested sums are — for a ten-week war in which the U.S. claims not to be a belligerent — it was apparently *woefully inadequate* in the eyes of the bipartisan establishment in Congress, who is ostensibly elected to serve the needs and interests of American citizens, not Ukrainians. Leaders of both parties instantly decreed that Biden’s \$33 billion request was not enough. They thus [raised it to \\$40 billion](#) — a more than 20% increase over the White House’s request — and are now working together to create an accelerated procedure to ensure immediate passage and disbursement of these weapons and funds to the war zone in Ukraine. “Time is of the essence - and we cannot afford to wait,” House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said in a letter to House members, adding: “This package, which builds on the robust support already secured by Congress, will be pivotal in helping Ukraine defend not only its nation but democracy for the world.” (***See update below***).

We have long ago left the realm of debating why it is in the interest of American citizens to pour our country’s resources into this war, to say nothing of risking a direct war and possibly catastrophic nuclear escalation with Russia, the country with the largest nuclear stockpile, with the US close behind. Indeed, one could argue that the U.S. government entered this war and rapidly escalated its involvement without this critical question — which should be

fundamental to any policy decision of the U.S. government — being asked at all.

This omission — a failure to address how the interests of ordinary Americans are served by the U.S. government's escalating role in this conflict — is particularly glaring given the [steadfast and oft-stated view](#) of former President Barack Obama that Ukraine is and always will be of vital interest to Russia, *but is not of vital interest to the U.S.* For that reason, Obama [repeatedly resisted bipartisan demands](#) that he send lethal arms to Ukraine, a step he was deeply reluctant to take due to his belief that the U.S. should not provoke Moscow over an interest as remote as Ukraine (ironically, Trump — who was accused by the U.S. media for years of being a Kremlin asset, controlled by Putin through blackmail — did [send lethal arms to Ukraine](#) despite how provocative doing so was to Russia).

While it is extremely difficult to isolate any benefit to ordinary American citizens from all of this, it requires no effort to see that there is a tiny group of Americans who do benefit greatly from this massive expenditure of funds. That is the industry of weapons manufacturers. So fortunate are they that the [White House has met with them on several occasions](#) to urge them to expand their capacity to produce sophisticated weapons so that the U.S. government can buy them in massive quantities:

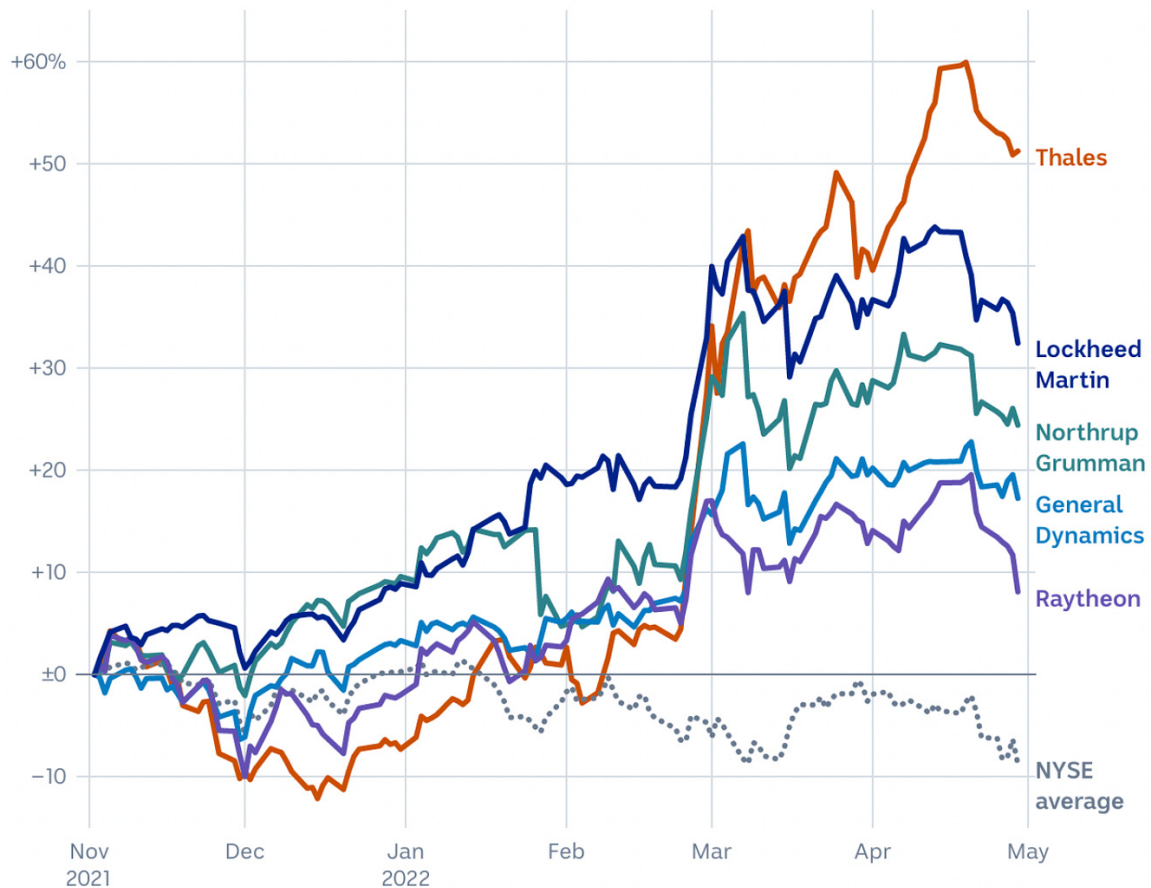
Top U.S. defense officials will meet with the chief executives of the eight largest U.S. defense contractors to discuss industry's capacity to meet Ukraine's weapons needs if the war with Russia continues for years.

Deputy Defense Secretary Kathleen Hicks told reporters Tuesday she plans to participate in a classified roundtable with defense CEOs on Wednesday to discuss "what can we do to help them, what do they need to generate supply"....

"We will discuss industry proposals to accelerate production of existing systems and develop new, modernized capabilities critical to the Department's ongoing security assistance to Ukraine and long-term readiness of U.S. and ally/partner forces," the official added.

On May 3, Biden [visited a Lockheed Martin facility](#) (see lead photo) and "praised the... plant that manufactures Javelin anti-tank missiles, saying their work was critical to the Ukrainian war effort and to the defense of democracy itself."

Indeed, by transferring so much military equipment to Ukraine, the U.S. has [depleted its own stockpiles](#), necessitating their replenishment with mass government purchases. One need not be a conspiracy theorist to marvel at the great fortune of this industry, having lost their primary weapons market just eight months ago when the U.S. war in Afghanistan finally ended, only to now be gifted with an even greater and more lucrative opportunity to sell their weapons by virtue of the protracted and always-escalating U.S. role in Ukraine. Raytheon, the primary manufacturer of Javelins along with Lockheed, has been particularly fortunate that its large stockpile, no longer needed for Afghanistan, is [now being ordered in larger-than-ever quantities](#) by its former Board member, now running the Pentagon, for shipment to Ukraine. Their stock prices have bulged nicely since the start of the war:



The stock prices of many of the world's biggest arms manufacturers shot up in late February after Russia's invasion of Ukraine began. (ABC News: Markus Mannheim/New York Stock Exchange/Euronext Paris)

But how does any of this benefit the vast majority of Americans? Does that even matter? As of 2020, [almost 30 million Americans](#) are without any health insurance. Over the weekend, *USA Today* warned of “the [ongoing infant formula shortage](#),” in which “nearly 40% of popular baby formula brands were sold out at retailers across the U.S. during the week starting April 24.” So many Americans [are unable to afford college](#) for their children that close to a majority are delaying plans or eliminating them all together. [Meanwhile](#), “monthly poverty remained elevated in February 2022, with a 14.4 percent poverty rate for the total US population....Overall, 6 million more individuals were in poverty in February relative to December.” The latest data from the U.S. Census Bureau [found that](#) “approximately 42.5 million Americans [are] living below the poverty line.” Americans with diabetes [often struggle](#) to buy life-saving insulin. And on and on and on.

Now, if the U.S. were invaded or otherwise attacked by another country, or its vital interests were directly threatened, one would of course expect the U.S. government to expend large sums in order to protect and defend the national security of the country and its citizens. But can anyone advance a cogent argument, let alone a persuasive one, that Americans are somehow endangered by the war in Ukraine? Clearly, they are far more endangered by the *U.S. response to the war in Ukraine* than the war itself; after all, a nuclear confrontation between the U.S. and Russia has [long been ranked](#) by the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists as one of the two greatest threats facing humanity.

One would usually expect the American left, or whatever passes it for these days, to be indignant about the expenditure of tens of billions of dollars for weapons while ordinary

Americans suffer. But the American left, such that it exists, is barely visible when it comes to debates over the war in Ukraine, while American liberals stand in virtual unity with the establishment wing of the Republican Party behind the Biden administration in support for the escalating U.S. role in the war in Ukraine. A few stray voices ([such as Noam Chomsky](#)) have joined [large parts](#) of [the international left](#) in urging a diplomatic solution in lieu of war and criticizing Biden for insufficient efforts to forge one, but the U.S. left and American liberals are almost entirely silent if not supportive.

That has left the traditionally left-wing argument about war opposition to the populist right. "You can't find baby formula in the United States right now but Congress is voting today to send \$40 billion to Ukraine," [said Donald Trump, Jr.](#) on Tuesday, echoing what one would expect to hear from the 2016 version of Bernie Sanders or the pre-victory AOC. "In the America LAST \$40 BILLION Ukraine FIRST bill that we are voting on tonight, there is authorization for funds to be given to the CIA for who knows what and who knows how much? But NO BABY FORMULA for American mothers!" [explained](#) Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA). Christian Walker, the conservative influencer and son of GOP Senate candidate Herschel Walker in Georgia, [today observed](#): "Biden should go apply to be the President of Ukraine since he clearly cares more about them than the U.S." Chomsky himself caused controversy last week when he said that there is only one statesman of any stature in the West urging a diplomatic solution "and his name is Donald J. Trump."

Noam Chomsky, in an interview this week, says "fortunately" there is "one Western statesman of stature" who is pushing for a diplomatic solution to the war in Ukraine rather than looking for ways to fuel and prolong it.

"His name is Donald J. Trump," Chomsky says.

WATCH: pic.twitter.com/z3Cug8kFHS

— Glenn Greenwald (@ggreenwald) [May 1, 2022](#)

Chomsky says he regards Trump as a deeply dangerous figure, yet he is "the one statesman in the West who has said it, and it's the right way out."

"Let's tell the truth," Chomsky says.

Full interview here: <https://t.co/UXdbAd2Fft>

— Glenn Greenwald (@ggreenwald) [May 1, 2022](#)

Meanwhile, the only place where dissent is heard over the Biden administration's war policy is on the 8:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. programs on Fox News, hosted, respectively, [by Tucker Carlson](#) and [Laura Ingraham](#), who routinely demand to know how ordinary Americans are benefiting from this increasing U.S. involvement. On CNN, NBC, and in the op-ed pages of *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*, there is virtually lockstep unity in favor of the U.S. role in this war; the only question that is permitted, as usual, is whether the U.S. is doing enough or whether it should do more.

That the U.S. has no legitimate role to play in this war, or that its escalating involvement

comes at the expense of American citizens, the people they are supposed to be serving, provokes immediate accusations that one is spreading Russian propaganda and is a Kremlin agent. That is therefore an anti-war view that is all but prohibited in those corporate liberal media venues. Meanwhile, mainstream Democratic House members, such as Rep. Jason Crow (D-CO), are now [openly talking about](#) the war in Ukraine as if it is the U.S.'s own:



Rep. Jason Crow ✓
@RepJasonCrow



The United States is not interested in stalemates. We are not interested in going back to the status quo.

The United States is in this to win it and we will stand with Ukraine until victory is won.



Nancy Pelosi and 4 others

8:00 PM · May 1, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

Whatever else is true, the claim with which we are bombarded by the corporate press — the two parties agree on nothing; they are constantly at each other's throats; they have radically different views of the world — is patently untrue, at least when it comes time for the U.S. to join in new wars. Typically, what we see in such situations is what we are seeing now: the establishment wings of both parties are in complete lockstep unity, always breathlessly supporting the new proposed U.S. role in any new war, eager to empty the coffers of the U.S. Treasury and transfer it to the weapons industry while their constituents suffer.

One can believe that Russia's invasion of Ukraine is profoundly unjust and has produced horrific outcomes while still questioning what legitimate interests the U.S. has in participating in this war to this extent. Even if one fervently believes that helping Ukrainians fight Russia is a moral good, surely the U.S. government should be prioritizing the ability of its own citizens to live above the poverty line, have health insurance, send their kids to college, and buy insulin and baby formula.

There are always horrific wars raging, typically with a clear aggressor, but that does not mean that the U.S. can or should assume responsibility for the war absent its own vital interests and the interests of its citizens being directly at stake. In what conceivable sense are American citizens benefiting from this enormous expenditure of their resources and the increasing energy and attention being devoted by their leaders to Ukraine rather than to their lives and the multi-pronged deprivations that define them?

CORRECTION (May 10, 2022, 20:47 pm ET): This article was edited shortly after publication to reflect that Russia's total annual military budget is \$65.9 billion, not \$65.9 million.

UPDATE (May 10, 2022, 22:39 pm ET): Shortly after publication of this article, the \$40 billion package for the war in Ukraine passed in the House of Representatives by a vote of 368-57. [According to CNN](#): "All 57 votes in opposition were from Republicans."

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