

Where Are the National Intelligence Estimates?

Seymour Hersh

Congress just passed an enormous aid package for wars in Ukraine and Gaza, but the White House is ignoring news it does not want to hear

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It has been a triumphant fortnight for the Biden White House. First the House and then the Senate overcame meek opposition and at last voted to pass foreign aid bills worth more than \$95 billion that include military funding to continue Ukraine's war against Russia and Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza.

The vote was praised by America's newspapers: a *New York Times* report said that the issue before Congress was whether the United States "would continue to play a leading role in upholding the international order and projecting its values globally." The Associated Press channeled the House leadership, calling the vote "a turning point in history—an urgent sacrifice as US allies are beleaguered by wars and threats from continental Europe to the Middle East to the Indo-Pacific."

The pleasure in the vote shared by the White House and Congress, and the mainstream press's enthusiasm, were more than a little off-putting to those with memories of past wars. Billions of American taxpayer dollars are going to support a war in Ukraine that many believe cannot be won, and perhaps could easily be settled, with more billions going to support the war in Gaza that could cost Biden thousands of votes in contested states where there is intense opposition to the ongoing Israeli attacks.

But there was much more to the legislation, officially known as the "Ukraine Security

Supplemental Appropriations Act 2024,” that did not make it into congressional debate or the reporting about it. At least 14 of the specific procurement requests for funding Ukraine’s military needs, including weapons, intelligence support, general operations and maintenance provided by American taxpayers, called for the president and his secretaries of state and defense to report to Congress about what was done and when within a given time period.

The reality is that such requirements are almost always ignored at the time they are due and usually fulfilled months later by junior officials in the State Department and the Pentagon, with the questions and answers there for all—that is, almost no one—to read. But the questions posed in the bill remind some in the American intelligence community of the sorts of deeper issues that were formerly raised by a one-time staple: National Intelligence Estimates. NIEs are produced on request from the president and his senior policymakers by a team of National Intelligence Officers at work at America’s senior intelligence office, the National Intelligence Council. These men and women are scholars in their fields and are committed to supplying non-political assessments. They are housed at CIA headquarters but are known to be fiercely independent.

I was told that the president and his top national security aides, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan, have yet to request a study that delves deeply into any of the international crises of the day: the wars in Ukraine and Gaza.

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