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European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

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01.04.2022

US escalates arms transfers to Ukraine

Despite ongoing diplomatic efforts to end the war between Russia and Ukraine that has killed thousands and led millions to flee, the United States is continuing and escalating its arms transfers to Kiev.

On Wednesday, the White House announced it would provide an additional \$500 million in “budget aid” to Ukraine—money that Bloomberg reported could be used for military purposes—amid ongoing discussions on intensifying arms shipments to the country.



A Ukrainian soldier fires an NLAW anti-tank weapon during an exercise in the Joint Forces Operation, in the Donetsk region, eastern Ukraine, Tuesday, February 15, 2022. (AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda)

This funding comes in addition to the \$1 billion in military aid announced by Biden earlier this month. According to the *Washington Post*, since January 2021 alone, the US has provided Ukraine with \$2 billion of assistance, including Stinger and Javelin missiles.

In a phone call between Biden and Zelensky on Wednesday, “The leaders discussed how the United States is working around the clock to fulfill the main security assistance requests by Ukraine, the critical effects those weapons have had on the conflict, and continued efforts by the United States with allies and partners to identify additional capabilities to help the Ukrainian military defend its country,” the White House said.

Responding to the announcement, members of Congress pressed for further arms shipments. “Dithering needs to end. We need to flip the script and make Putin afraid of escalating against the West,” said Republican Representative Mike Rogers at a hearing of the House Committee on Armed Services Wednesday. That means, he said, “Giving the Ukrainians the resources to drive out every last Russian on Ukrainian soil.”

General Tod Wolters, the U.S. European Command Chief, told a hearing of the House Committee on Armed Services, “We can’t rest for one second. We’ve got a lot of work to do out in front of us to make sure that the Ukrainian armed forces are getting the right gear at the right time.”

Speaking for the United States European Command, Wolters demanded, “should deterrence fail—we remain ready to respond with lethal and resilient force in all domains.”

Celeste Wallander, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, told the hearing that the US should be prepared to send weapons to Ukraine for a long-term fight.

“Not just days and weeks, but months of sustainment, perhaps longer for the Ukrainian military and Ukrainian people,” Wallander said.

At the hearing, Wallander reported that the United States is delivering 100 “kamikaze drones” to Ukraine.

“We have committed 100 Switchblade tactical unmanned aerial systems to be delivered in the most recent package of presidential drawdown,” Wallander said.

The calls for further arms shipments came as Ukraine, Russia and the United States poured cold water on press reports of a diplomatic breakthrough in negotiations.

There is “no sign of a breakthrough” yet in ongoing peace talks, Kremlin press secretary Dmitry Peskov stated Wednesday.

“No one said that the sides have made headway,” he said. “We can’t point to anything particularly promising.”

On Tuesday, Moscow’s chief negotiator, Vladimir Medinsky, had described proposals from Kiev in the negotiations as a step forward. He announced that Russia would limit its military operations around Kiev.

Just 24 hours later, Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, a close confidante of Putin, said, “[W]e are not making any kind of retreat, Mr. Medinsky is somehow mistaken.”

Speaking Wednesday, Zelensky referred to Russian troop movements away from Kiev and said that was not a withdrawal but rather ‘the consequence of our defenders’ work.’”

U.S Secretary of State Antony Blinken also played down any talk of a peace agreement. “There is what Russia says and there is what Russia does: We’re focused on the latter,” adding, “we have not seen signs of real seriousness” from Russia.

The United States, for its part, is committed to prolonging the conflict as long as possible. As Edward Luce wrote earlier this week in the *Financial Times*, “domestic US pressure is tilting towards escalation. In marked contrast to US post-Vietnam history, America’s liberal consensus is today at least as gung-ho as on the conservative right.”

Rather, all factions of the US political establishment are intent on using the crisis that has erupted in Ukraine to massively expand US military spending.

Earlier this week, the Biden administration announced a \$813 billion budget proposal, up from \$782 billion in 2022.

Commenting in *Newsweek*, Lindsay Koshgarian of the Institute for Policy Studies noted that Biden's military budget is "\$42 billion higher than where former President Donald Trump left it, and nearly 30 percent larger than under former President Barack Obama."

She added that "Over the past 10 years, more than half of the military budget has gone to for-profit contractors. In 2020, the U.S. already spent more on one military contractor, Lockheed Martin, than Russia spent on its entire military."

Koshgarian noted, "The U.S. alone already spends 12 times more on its military than Russia. When combined with Europe's biggest military spenders, the U.S. and its allies on the continent outspend Russia by at least 15 to 1."

She added, "The U.S. spends more by far on defense than any other country, with watchdogs such as the Project on Government Oversight estimating an annual budget of over \$1 trillion on national security. That estimate includes the Department of Veterans Affairs and the cost of servicing debt from previous defense spending."

Yet despite this massive budget proposal, there is every indication that defense spending for the new year will only grow as the budget proceeds through Congress.

Republican Senator Jim Inhofe, the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, declared that there was "need for real growth in the defense budget and a sense of urgency and willingness to take risks both at the Pentagon and here in Congress."

Inhofe declared, "We just received the President's FY23 budget, and it does not request the real growth we need. We'll do our due diligence and our constitutional duty, as we did last year."

These themes were echoed in an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, which complained that "Defense spending will still be about 3.1% of the economy" under Biden's budget.

The *Journal* complained, "To this end, the 298-ship U.S. Navy would buy only nine ships next year while retiring 24. The fleet would shrink to 280 ships in 2027, even as the Navy says it needs a fleet of 500 to defeat China in a conflict. That trend won't impress Xi Jinping as he eyes Taiwan."

Worse, the *Journal* wrote, “The Administration appears to have canceled a program to develop a nuclear sea-launched cruise missile, precisely the kind of weapon designed to deter Mr. Putin from using tactical nukes in Europe.”

The newspaper declared, “Congress can do a lot to improve the Pentagon request, which should be a baseline. Republicans are suggesting the military budget needs to grow 5% in real terms. Congress should set a goal of returning the U.S. to its deterrent strength of the Cold War years, when defense spending was 5% or more of the economy.”

In other words, under conditions in which funding is on the verge of running out for basic measures to fight COVID-19, powerful sections of the US political establishment are demanding a 70 percent increase in military spending.

World Socialist 31.03.2022