**Ukraine’s Day of Reckoning**

[Dr James J Zogby](https://www.nation.com.pk/columnist/dr-james-j-zogby)

December 15, 2023

[Opinions](https://www.nation.com.pk/opinions), [Columns](https://www.nation.com.pk/columns)

Ukraine has been off the front pages of the US press for months—an old story, displaced by the horrors unfolding daily in Gaza.
This past week, however, Ukraine returned to the headlines less because of developments there and more because the US Congress balked at approving the Biden administration’s request for an additional $61 billion in funding to resupply Ukraine’s dwindling arsenal.
Congress’ hesitation is born of a number of factors. Some lawmakers didn’t support the war from the outset and now see it as a two-year-old deadly stalemate. Some Republicans see the urgency behind President Biden’s Ukraine aid request as an opportunity for leverage to push for increased funding to “secure the southern US border.” Other Republicans seek to tie approving Ukraine aid to cuts in domestic spending, while some Democrats argue for reallocating funds for increases in the very same domestic spending.
The internal GOP friction about Biden’s aid request has already toppled one Republican Speaker of the House and is now causing headaches for his successor. Resolution is uncertain, but vocal minorities in both congressional delegations are not on board with continued funding for the war in Ukraine.
Lawmakers’ reticence reflects US public opinion on how best to deal with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In October Zogby Research Services conducted a survey of attitudes toward the war in Ukraine in seven European countries and the US. In most countries we found a growing weariness with the war’s costs and a desire for a negotiated end.
One in five US respondents say the US is mainly responsible for the war and the major obstacle to peace, a view equally shared by Democrats and Republicans. Seven in 10 Americans are concerned with the costs of the war and want a compromise to end it—a position held by three-quarters of Republicans and six in 10 Democrats. A plurality of Republicans sees the war as having weakened the US on the world stage.
Opponents of continued US funding argue that European countries should step up and foot the bill for Ukraine, ignoring important political changes unfolding across Europe. First, no combination of European countries has the resources to match the level of US funding supporting Ukraine. A growing rightward-leaning populist current in several European countries has a strong nativist and isolationist bent. As such, European support for increasing arms shipments and aid to Ukraine has declined.
While the ZRS poll shows that three-quarters of Europeans continue to hold Russia responsible for the war and support sanctions, the increases in cost of living and, in particular, of energy because of this war and sanctions against Russia, have taken a toll on European opinion. Eight in 10 now say that the rising cost of living is their greatest concern with this war and that because the costs of continuing the war are too high a compromise should be found to save lives and resources.
Though US opinion is divided on continuing this war and Europe is increasingly questioning its costs, President Biden has doubled down on his support for Ukraine and Israel as his administration’s signature foreign policy issues. The president recently authored a piece attempting to tie together the wars against Putin and Hamas as defining battles of our generation. Taking up a neoconservative mantle, Biden channeled Ronald Reagan confronting the Evil Empire and George W. Bush challenging his invented Axis of Evil, with America as the force of good against the forces of evil in a battle necessary to secure humanity’s future.
It’s a questionable formulation. Hamas is not Russia and Israel is not Ukraine. Neither poses the existential challenge to the West once posed by the USSR. And while Russia is the occupier and aggressor in Ukraine, Israel is the occupier and aggressor in Gaza.
And so, a growing body of opinion in Europe and the US questions the wisdom of Ukraine being yet another “war without end”—a challenge for both Ukraine and the Biden administration. While Ukraine was out of the headlines, the war in Gaza delayed tough decisions by Congress and the White House about the future. But with budget matters requiring attention by year’s end, the day of reckoning is at hand.