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THE AMERICAN DEBATE ON THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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* Cover picture: US President Joe Biden arrives on stage for his speech, in the gardens of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, February 21, 2023. Source: White House Twitter account @WhiteHouse.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. debate over Russia's war in Ukraine is more complex than it first appears. Support for Kyiv is largely consensual and has reinvigorated American foreign policy elites. However, one should not deny some important nuances that are emerging as the conflict becomes more entrenched and the United States enters an election cycle. This paper proposes to take stock of the U.S. vision of the war and the various groups with diverse readings of the conflict.

1. THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND AMERICAN PUBLIC OPINION

Like some foreign policy issues (but in an exceptional way, as no American soldiers are dying in Ukraine), the war in Ukraine is at risk of becoming a domestic policy issue. Because American political life is in constant campaign mode (midterm elections split presidential terms in half, meaning the country is on the campaign trail more or less every 18 months), all issues are susceptible to being instrumentalized by one side against the other. The Democrats' focus on Donald Trump's alleged Russian connections marked American politics from 2016 to 2020¹, and it is likely that the Republicans will seize on the war in Ukraine to try to weaken the Democrats, especially if Joe Biden will be seeking a second term.

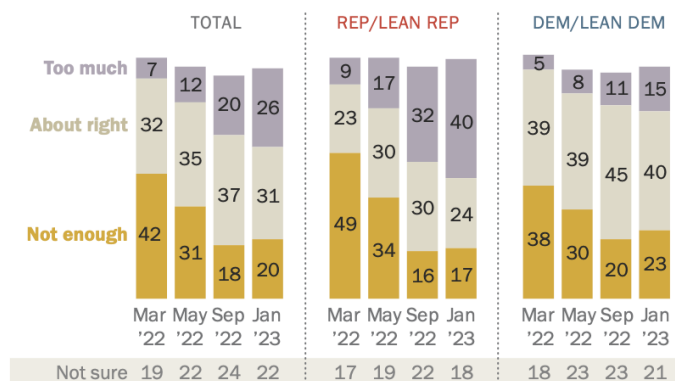
Becoming a domestic political issue means that the extreme polarization of U.S. public opinion could affect the White House's ability to continue to show public and financial support for Ukraine. Support for Ukraine is already on the decline among Americans, more markedly among Republicans than Democrats: the share of those who believe the United States is helping Kyiv too much is increasing, while the share of those who believe Washington is not helping Ukraine enough is on the decline (see Figure 1). This decline in popular support for Ukraine is likely to become more pronounced in the coming months regardless of how the conflict evolves: if the Ukrainian counteroffensive is successful, calls for diplomatic negotiations will intensify, while if it fails, calls for concessions to achieve a ceasefire will grow.

1. Marlene Laruelle, "Reticence and Limitations of the Biden Administration's Russia Policy," *Herodotus* 1-2 (184-185) (2022): 261-270, <https://www.cairn.info/revue-herodote-2022-1-page-261.htm?contenu=resume>.

Figure 1. Evolution of American public opinion on the war in Ukraine

Share of Republicans who say the U.S. gives too much aid to Ukraine has steadily increased since March

% who say, when it comes to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. is providing ___ support to Ukraine



Note: No answer responses not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 18-24, 2023.

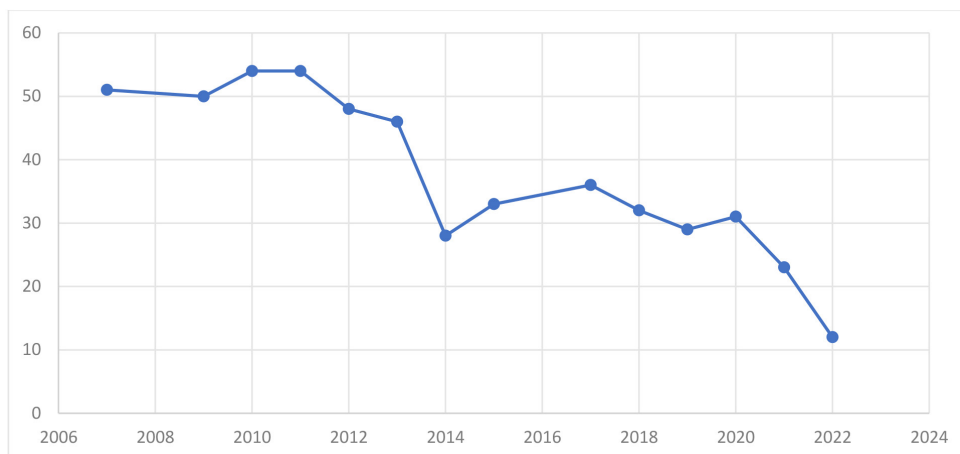
PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Source: Amina Dunn, "As Russian Invasion Nears One-Year Mark, Partisans Grow Further Apart on U.S. Support for Ukraine," Pew Research Center, January 31, 2023, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2023/01/31/as-russian-invasion-nears-one-year-mark-partisans-grow-further-apart-on-u-s-support-for-ukraine/>.

The decline in support for Ukraine must be understood in the context of U.S. political culture. It by no means suggests that Americans, and in particular Republicans, are moving closer to Moscow's positions on the conflict: just as it has for much of American history, U.S. public opinion still holds an extremely negative view of Moscow. This has only been accentuated by the war and is unlikely to change in the years to come (see Figure 2)². Instead, the decline in support for Ukraine reflects a return to the U.S. isolationist tradition, from which perspective the cost of the war is excessive and the funds spent should be redirected to domestic spending.

2. "The Other: Russian-American Relations Through the Centuries with Ivan Kurilla," *SlavX Radio*, December 30, 2022, <https://www.slavxradio.com/kurilla>.

Figure 2. Evolution of American public opinion on Russia



Source: "Topline Questionnaire," Pew Research Center, April 6, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/04/PG_2022.04.06_Russia-NATO_TOPLINE.pdf.

For example, the White House was roundly criticized by the Republican media in February for its attention to foreign affairs during the Ohio environmental disaster (a chemical train derailment that polluted the Ohio River, which runs through the central United States).³ The mainstream media largely ignored the magnitude of the accident, while Republican figures rushed to the scene, sharply criticizing the absence of Joe Biden or Kamala Harris. The timing of the derailment, which coincided with the first anniversary of the Russian invasion, worked against the presidential administration: Joe Biden was in Poland while Donald Trump was distributing bottles of water in the small town of East Palestine, Ohio⁴. The image of an administration focused on foreign policy and unconcerned with the American heartland will be increasingly used by the Republicans as the United States enters the campaign for the November 2024 presidential elections.

3. Christian Datoc, "Ohio Train Derailment: Trump Has a Message for Biden from East Palestine-'Get Over Here,'" *Washington Examiner*, February 22, 2023, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/campaigns/trump-has-message-for-biden-east-palestine>.

4. Max Greenwood, "Trump Accuses Biden Administration of 'Indifference and Betrayal' in East Palestine," *The Hill*, February 22, 2023, <https://thehill.com/homenews/campaign/3869755-trump-accuses-biden-administration-of-indifference-and-betrayal-in-east-palestine/>.

2. MINORITY VOICES: THE OPPONENTS OF SUPPORTING UKRAINE

There are currents of opposition to supporting Ukraine on both the far right and the far left of the American political spectrum. Both refer to the non-interventionist tradition, but they rely on different ideological arguments.

On the far right of the U.S. political field, a handful of voices remain openly Russophile, all of them belonging to the Trumpist MAGA movement. On February 24, 2023, for example, between 200 and 300 people took part in an anti-war demonstration organized in front of the White House, waving Russian and Soviet flags or the black-and-yellow Russian imperial flag⁵. These included members of the extremist organizations Proud Boys and Oath Keepers, as well as a few figures known for their Russophile statements, such as white nationalists/supremacists Matthew Heimbach and Shandon Simpson. Their pro-Russian stance is rooted in a worldview marked by conspiracy theories and the defense of the white and Christian world, of which a mythical Russia would be the herald.⁶

Less Russophile positions that are nevertheless in line with Russian narratives are also expressed by central figures of the Trumpist media ecosystem such as Tucker Carlson, whose show on Fox News is the most-watched in the US, with an average of 3.3 million viewers per show.⁷ Carlson has been expressing pro-Russian positions for several years, espousing Moscow's view of the conflict even before 2022.⁸ Since then, he has been happy to criticize the Biden administration's spending on Ukraine, as well as the failure of Ukrainian offensives and the corruption scandals within the Zelensky administration, and insists that Russia is winning the war. However, this should not be read as support for Moscow per se, much less as Carlson being a tool of Russian influence, but rather as confirmation that Russia and Ukraine are domestic political objects being instrumentalized in the struggles between Trumpist Republicans and Democrats.

On the radical right of the American political field, but outside the Trumpist world proper, we should also mention the Libertarians, who focus on issues of individual freedom and the reduction of taxation and regal powers, and whose ideology advocates opposition to any military alliance. Beyond theoretical positions, libertarian experts such as those at the Cato Institute have always supported defend-

5. Benedetta Carlotti, "A Divorce of Convenience: Exploring Radical Right Populist Parties' Position on Putin's Russia within the Context of the Ukrainian War. A Social Media Perspective," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* (online), January 30, 2023, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14782804.2023.2171969>.

6. Marlene Laruelle, "Mirror Games? Ideological Resonances between Russian and U.S. Radical Conservatism," in *Contemporary Russian Conservatism: Problems, Paradoxes, and Perspectives*, ed. Mikhail Suslov and Dmitry Uzlaner (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 177-203.

7. Stephen Battaglio, "Fox News' 'The Five' Topples 'Tucker Carlson Tonight' to Become New Cable News Ratings Leader," *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 2022, <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/business/story/2022-12-19/the-five-topples-tucker-carlson-tonight-to-become-the-new-cable-news-ratings-champ#:~:text=Nielsen%20data%20for%2022%20rank,million%20viewers%20for%20the%20year>.

8. Aaron Rupar, "Tucker Carlson's Defense of Russia Takes 'America First' to Its Logical Conclusion," *Vox*, November 26, 2019, <https://www.vox.com/2019/11/26/20983778/tucker-carlson-rooting-for-russia-ukraine-invasion-america-first>.

ing national interests (with force, if necessary) but have opposed American efforts to regulate external conflicts and to position the US as the world's policeman. In 2014, some libertarians—including Ron Paul—endorsed the referendum on annexing Crimea to Russia, causing tension within the movement. In 2022, although many have expressed support for Ukraine and U.S. sanctions, the official Libertarian discourse continues to claim that NATO expansion is the main culprit of the war in Ukraine and that the United States must stop providing financial and material support to Kyiv.⁹

On the opposite end of the American political spectrum, the far left, there are also voices opposing the war. Ideologically, their arguments draw on the pacifist tradition and criticism of the military-industrial complex and the large corporations that get rich on war. Here, too, NATO is seen as the main structural culprit of the conflict. Figures such as Noam Chomsky and Cornel West, for example, have blamed Russia's violations of international law on the imperialism of American foreign policy.¹⁰ Major left-wing newspapers such as *The Nation*, which has long denounced NATO expansionism, are concerned about the skyrocketing U.S. military budget and the spiral of co-belligerent status.

3. THE THINK TANK WORLD: DIVERSITY AND UNITY

In the policy world, unity around the Ukrainian cause is clearer, and very few dissenting voices are emerging among think tanks.

Among the more moderate representatives of the latter is the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, funded by the paradoxical alliance of the ultraconservative Koch brothers and the liberal George Soros, which “exposes the dangerous consequences of an overly militarized U.S. foreign policy and proposes an alternative approach that promotes conflict resolution by local actors.”¹¹ Quincy's leading experts on Russia, Anatol Lieven and George Beebe, regularly publish nuanced articles calling for revisiting the United States' absolute and “unrestricted” support for Ukraine and expressing concern about the lack of realism in U.S. foreign policy and the absence of a long-term vision for the relationship with Russia. Quincy experts have also regularly denounced the chasm between the American vision and that of the Global South, advocating for re-engaging the non-Western world without asking them to take a position on the war.¹²

On the opposite end of the ideological spectrum are the most pro-Ukrainian hawkish think tanks, committed to unwavering support for Kyiv and a policy of “zero compro-

9. Libertarian Party, Twitter post, February 26, 2023, 3:58pm, <https://twitter.com/LPNational/status/1629873422879604740>.

10. Bill Fletcher, Jr, “Noam Chomsky: A Left Response to the Russian Invasion of Ukraine,” *TheRealNews*, April 8, 2022, <https://therealnews.com/noam-chomsky-a-left-response-to-the-russian-invasion-of-ukraine>; Chris Hedges, “The Chris Hedges Report with Cornel West,” *TheRealNews*, April 15, 2022, <https://therealnews.com/the-chris-hedges-report-with-dr-cornel-west>.

11. Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft, “About QI,” accessed March 19, 2023, <https://quincyinst.org/about/>.

12. Sarang Shidore, “Winning the Majority: A New U.S. Bargain with the Global South,” *Quincy Brief* 33 (November 10, 2022), <https://quincyinst.org/report/winning-the-majority-a-new-u-s-bargain-with-the-global-south/>.

mise” with Russia. These include, among others, the Atlantic Council, the German Marshall Fund, the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA), and the Jamestown Foundation. Specialists more in advocacy than in empirical research, they have long been known for their pro-NATO stances and democracy promotion in the post-Soviet space. They have always held very anti-Russian positions and are now calling for the dismantling of the Russian state and a Nuremberg Tribunal for Russian war crimes. Jamestown Senior Fellow Janusz Bugajski, for example, recently published *Failed State: A Guide to Russia’s Rupture*, which calls on the US to “develop an effective strategy for dealing with Russia’s rupture by supporting regionalism and federalism and recognizing sovereignty and separation.”¹³ These think tanks serve as sounding boards for the voices of central European states such as Poland and the Baltic States, as well as for the Russian liberal opposition in exile.

Likewise very pro-Ukrainian and anti-Russian are the two main think tanks in American conservative circles, the Hudson Institute and the American Enterprise Institute, while a third, the Heritage Foundation, has been closer to Trumpist positions.

Two highly respected think tanks that have traditionally been considered centrist on many issues, Brookings and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, feature many prominent voices who clearly position themselves in the “hawks” camp. Some Brookings experts, for example, advocate increased military engagement with Ukraine,¹⁴ deny the risks of escalation,¹⁵ and reject the idea of strategic prudence.¹⁶ Some at the Carnegie Endowment also push for escalation, in contrast to the official U.S. policy of arms supplies and restraint.¹⁷ That being said, both institutions feature prominent scholars who are more moderate in their views such as Eugene Rumer, Mike O’Hanlon, Chris Chivvis, etc.

Two other major institutions in the Washington world—the RAND Corporation, which is partly funded by the U.S. Department of Defense, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)—offer a broader range of perspectives. Some RAND Corporation scholars emphasize the distance between American and Ukrainian strategic interests, the cost of a long-term war, and the risks of escalation.¹⁸ One of the main reports published by RAND, “Avoiding a Long War: US Policy and the Trajectory of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict,”¹⁹ was widely discussed because it was the

13. The Jamestown Foundation, “NOW AVAILABLE-Failed State: A Guide to Russia’s Rupture,” accessed March 19, 2023, <https://jamestown.org/product/failed-state-a-guide-to-russias-rupture-published/>.

14. Michael O’Hanlon, “The Time for Incrementalism in Ukraine Is Over. Send in the Tanks,” *The Washington Post*, January 16, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/01/16/biden-ukraine-weapons-russia-tanks/>.

15. Pavel K. Baev, “Giving Ukraine a Patriot Missile Defense System Is Good-but Not Enough,” *NBC News*, December 15, 2022, <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/ukraine-russia-war-sees-us-mull-patriot-missile-defense-battery-kyiv-n-rcna61887>.

16. Constanze Stelzenmüller, “The West’s Axis of Prudence Risks a Kremlin Victory by Default in Ukraine,” *Financial Times*, December 20, 2022, [ft.com/content/7ae8433c-c8c3-4e34-b555-9c1548bcd4cb](https://www.ft.com/content/7ae8433c-c8c3-4e34-b555-9c1548bcd4cb).

17. Judy Dempsey, “The West’s Race Against Time in Supporting Ukraine,” *Carnegie Europe*, February 21, 2023, [carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/89074](https://www.carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/89074).

18. Brian Frederick et al, “Pathways to Russian Escalation Against NATO from the Ukraine War,” *RAND Corporation Perspective* (July 2022), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1971-1.html>.

19. Samuel Charap and Miranda Preibe, “Avoiding a Long War: U.S. Policy and the Trajectory of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict,” *RAND Corporation Perspective* (January 2023), <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA2510-1.html>.

first to acknowledge so openly that U.S. strategic interests might not match Ukrainian interests, and to suggest that since complete Ukrainian victory was unlikely, it was the United States' duty to its own citizens to consider other options for ending the conflict. However, other RAND analysts have taken a very hard line, among them Raphael Cohen and Gian Gentile.

A similar argument to the one made in the RAND report has been put forward by Anthony H. Cordesman, a veteran strategic researcher at CSIS and longtime voice of reason on the conflict in Afghanistan and the unsustainability of the U.S. position in the Islamic world. In a lengthy analysis of the U.S. position on the war in Ukraine, Cordesman argues that the central balance to be struck is “pursuing the right kind of war to achieve the right kind of peacemaking.”²⁰ While asserting that the high financial cost of the war is largely beneficial to the United States because it gives the US strategic leverage, he explains that it is time to recognize that “the best outcome for Ukraine appears to be not to fight for a total victory that recovers all lost territory [...] but to negotiate an end to the conflict and the destruction of the Ukrainian economy even if it means Russian territorial gains, no reparations and no war crimes tribunals for Russia.” But here, too, CSIS opinion is not monolithic, and other experts—such as Seth Jones—have been more hawkish.

The voices of the policy community are not expressed solely through their institutional publications. Many experts have been speaking out in opinion pieces published by major newspapers like *The New York Times* or the *Washington Post*, as well as in articles in foreign policy magazines like *Foreign Affairs*, *The National Interest*, *Foreign Policy* or *The Atlantic*. While the latter two maintain a hard line on the war, including by publishing articles calling for the dismantling of Russia as an empire,²¹ *Foreign Affairs* has regularly featured more diverse and nuanced voices, such as Samuel Charap of RAND;²² Michael Kimmage, a former State Department policy planner now at Catholic University of America;²³ and Professor John Mearsheimer, leader of the realist school.²⁴

There are some common features of the mainstream U.S. discourse, as well as some divisions on key issues. In the category of common features, there is, for example, complete unanimity on sanctions, including from Cato, even if some voices—such as the Quincy Institute—insist that sanctions can be counterproductive in the sense that they discourage Russian elites from defecting. The simplicity of the American debate

20. Anthony H. Cordesman, “United States Aid to Ukraine: An Investment Whose Benefits Greatly Exceed its Cost,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 21, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/united-states-aid-ukraine-investment-whose-benefits-greatly-exceed-its-cost>.

21. Anne Applebaum, “The Russian Empire Must Die,” *The Atlantic*, November 14, 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2022/12/putin-russia-must-lose-ukraine-war-imperial-future/671891/>.

22. “Author Directory: Samuel Charap,” *Foreign Affairs*, accessed March 19, 2023, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/authors/samuel-charap?gclid=Cj0KCQiAjbagBhD3ARIsANRrQEsQnAp8RT0Yho9dmECmh4pKjklwjqSidiC11cGDIEK-guUbGfah5lQaAgnEEALw_wcB.

23. Liana Fix and Michael Kimmage, “Go Slow on Crimea: Why Ukraine Should Not Rush to Retake the Peninsula,” *Foreign Affairs*, December 7, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/go-slow-crimea>.

24. John J. Mearsheimer, “Playing with Fire in Ukraine: The Underappreciated Risks of Catastrophic Escalation,” *Foreign Affairs*, August 17, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/ukraine/playing-fire-ukraine>.

on Ukraine's accession to the EU is also noteworthy, with almost no discussion of the complexity of the accession process and the chapter-by-chapter vote by the 27 members, which make Kyiv's rapid accession unlikely.

Divisive issues are few and far between. In the early months of the war, attacks on realists, especially John Mearsheimer, who worried about the West's cobelligerent status and the risk of nuclear war, were virulent. Some U.S. newspapers, such as *The Hill*, which primarily covers the life of Congress, give voice on a weekly basis (but only in its online versions) to figures such as Rutgers University professor Alexander Motyl, who publishes laud articles on support for Ukraine.

Since the beginning of 2023, the cost of the war has become a key topic of debate, confirming that Ukraine has become a U.S. domestic political issue. An article published by Timothy Ash for CEPA explains, for example, that "it costs peanuts for the United States to defeat Russia" via Ukraine,²⁵ an argument that has generated strong reactions, such as that of Trita Parsi, the vice president of the Quincy Institute, who denounced the cost of the war and reminded the U.S. public of the astronomical sum spent on the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, only to result in the political defeat of the United States.

The American mainstream press has also begun to discuss more openly issues that were previously taboo, such as the ultra-centralization of Volodymyr Zelensky's government,²⁶ corruption scandals, the lack of data on the number of Ukrainian soldiers killed in combat,²⁷ and (more recently) the Ukrainian choice to hold Bakhmut despite the cost of doing so in terms of lives and ammunition,²⁸ as well as the fact that Europe will have to bear the lion's share of the burden of reconstruction, with a shift in the EU's center of gravity toward the East if Ukraine joins.²⁹

25. Timothy Ash, "It's Costing Peanuts for the US to Defeat Russia," Center for European Policy Analysis, November 18, 2022, <https://cepa.org/article/its-costing-peanuts-for-the-us-to-defeat-russia/>.

26. Andrew E. Kramer, "Tempered in a Crucible of Violence, Zelensky Rises to the Moment," *The New York Times*, February 25, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/25/world/europe/ukraine-zelensky-war.html>.

27. Carlotta Gall, "From the Graveside to the Front, Ukrainians Tell of Grim Endurance," *The New York Times*, June 8, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/06/08/world/europe/ukraine-war-front-line-trenches.html>.

28. Thomas Gibbons-Neff, Lara Jakes, and Eric Schmitt, "Ukraine Burns Through Ammunition in Bakhmut, Putting Future Fights at Risk," *The New York Times*, March 16, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/16/world/europe/ukraine-ammunition-bakhmut.html>.

29. Steven Erlanger, "The EU Offered to Embrace Ukraine, but Now What?" *The New York Times*, March 3, 2023, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/03/world/europe/ukraine-eu-nato.html?action=click&pgtype=Article&state=default&module=stylIn-russia-ukraine&variant=show®ion=BELOW_MAIN_CONTENT&block=storyline_flex_guide_recirc.

4. THE REPUBLICANS' INTERNAL GAMES AND THE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHINA AS DECISIVE ELEMENTS

Two central elements could undermine the current consensus. The first is the political instrumentalization of support for the war in the upcoming presidential campaign. Already in March 2022, 69 members of the House of Representatives (54 Republicans and 15 Democrats) voted against aid to Ukraine, and the new speaker of the House of Representatives, Kevin McCarthy, declared that there would be no “blank check” for Ukraine.³⁰ More radical voices, such as that of Trumpist Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, have been heard, but they are not supported by the majority of Republican House and Senate members.³¹

However, it is within the Republican Party, divided into two major foreign policy schools, that the true game of support for Ukraine will play out. Some hawks are pushing for an offensive American foreign policy. Figures such as former Vice President Mike Pence and former Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley, as well as figures with less international exposure such as former New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, South Carolina Senator Tim Scott, and Kentucky Senator Mitch McConnell, are all passionate about the Ukrainian cause and are demanding that the Biden administration step up its arms deliveries to Kyiv.

On the other side, the isolationist school has gained momentum during the Trump years and seems poised to take over the party thanks to the meteoric success of Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, Republican presidential primary candidate, and the election of Kevin McCarthy as speaker of the House of Representatives. In an interview with Tucker Carlson on March 13, DeSantis declared that “the United States has many vital interests...but getting caught up in a territorial dispute between Ukraine and Russia is not one of them”³²—a statement that implied that he might follow in Trump’s footsteps on foreign policy. But his remarks provoked massive criticism, including among fellow Republicans, and pushed the Florida governor to nuance his viewpoint in a subsequent interview, accusing Putin of being a “war criminal.”³³

There will also be a tug-of-war within the Democratic Party. In October 2022, the Progressive Caucus, which includes the most left-leaning figures, issued a letter calling on the Biden administration to reopen direct channels of communication with Moscow and to begin considering peace negotiations.³⁴ The letter caused a public

30. Emily Brooks, “McCarthy Defends ‘Blank Check’ Remark on Ukraine,” *The Hill*, October 19, 2022, <https://thehill.com/homenews/house/3695482-mccarthy-defends-blank-check-remark-on-ukraine/>.

31. Ana Faguy, “Marjorie Taylor Greene Ramps Up Anti-Ukraine Rhetoric: Zelensky ‘Wants Our Sons and Daughters to Go Die,’” *Forbes*, March 3, 2023, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/anafaguy/2023/03/03/marjorie-taylor-greene-ramps-up-anti-ukraine-rhetoric-zelensky-wants-our-sons-and-daughters-to-go-die/?sh=752f724b5924>.

32. Jonathan Swan and Maggie Haberman, “Ron DeSantis Says Protecting Ukraine Is Not a Key U.S. Interest,” *The New York Times*, March 13, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/13/us/politics/ron-desantis-ukraine-tucker-carlson.html>.

33. Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan, “DeSantis Calls Putin a ‘War Criminal,’ Clarifying Earlier Comment on Ukraine,” *The New York Times*, 23 mars 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/03/22/us/politics/desantis-putin-ukraine-russia.html>.

34. Ed Pilkington, “Progressive Democrats Retract Biden Ukraine Letter after Furious Debate,” *The Guardian*, October 25, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/oct/25/democrats-joe-biden-ukraine-war-russia-letter>.

outcry, forcing the Caucus to withdraw it the next morning and claim that it was a draft that should never have been published.

The issue has since been buried, but it is destined to reappear in various forms. For example, the announcement of Joe Biden's 2023 budget request to Congress in March, which includes the highest budget ever requested for the Pentagon (\$842 billion), was roundly criticized by the left wing of the Democratic Party,³⁵ especially as the Department of Defense flunked its fifth consecutive audit, failing to account for more than half of its spending.³⁶

The second element that could undermine the current consensus on support for Ukraine has to do with the Pentagon's view of the international scene and the increased tensions with China. Many officials privately express concern about the prospect of being thrust into a military crisis with Beijing while the war in Ukraine is still going on. The potential depletion of weapons stockpiles in order to supply Ukrainian troops poses strategic problems for U.S. own needs (and Taiwan's), even though the major corporations of the U.S. military-industrial complex have promised to speed up production.

For example, Navy Secretary Carlos del Toro said, "With respect to the delivery of military systems to Ukraine...Yes, that's always a concern for us. We're following it very, very closely. I wouldn't say we're there yet, but if the conflict goes on for another six months or a year, it's certainly going to impact the supply chains in a difficult way."³⁷ Some top brass, such as General Michael A. Minihan, who oversees the Air Force's transport fleet, have mooted the possibility of a war with China around 2025, but without mentioning Ukraine.³⁸ Some journalists report anonymous comments from U.S. officials about the difficulty of supplying Taiwan as resources are absorbed by Kyiv,³⁹ and even challenges with supplying Ukrainian troops with ammunition.⁴⁰

More broadly, the issue of the Moscow-Beijing relationship divides American experts and policy circles. The hawks project an alliance of dictatorships against the "free world" and therefore insist on the need to disarm Russia as quickly as possible via the war in Ukraine in order to focus on the danger coming from China. Those belonging to the more realist school fret about Russia's growing dependence on

35. Joan E. Greve, "Progressives Praise Biden for Tax Hike Plan-but Pentagon Budget Stirs Anger," *The Guardian*, March 12, 2023, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/mar/12/biden-budget-progressives-tax-increases-pentagon-spending>.

36. Carlotti, "A Divorce of Convenience."

37. Marcus Weisgerber, "Navy Secretary Warns: If Defense Industry Can't Boost Production, Arming Both Ukraine and the US May Become 'Challenging,'" *DefenseOne*, January 11, 2023, [defenseone.com/threats/2023/01/navy-secretary-warns-if-defense-industry-cant-boost-production-arming-both-ukraine-and-us-may-become-challenging/381722](https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2023/01/navy-secretary-warns-if-defense-industry-cant-boost-production-arming-both-ukraine-and-us-may-become-challenging/381722).

38. Dan Lamothe, "U.S. General Warns Troops that War with China Is Possible in Two Years," *The Washington Post*, January 27, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/01/27/us-general-mini-han-china-war-2025/>.

39. Gordon Lubold, Doug Cameron, and Nancy A. Youssef, "U.S. Effort to Arm Taiwan Faces New Challenge with Ukraine Conflict," *Wall Street Journal*, November 27, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-effort-to-arm-taiwan-faces-new-challenge-with-ukraine-conflict-11669559116>.

40. Isabelle Khurshudyan, Paul Sonne, and Karen DeYoung, "Ukraine Short of Skilled Troops and Ammunition as Losses and Pessimism Grow," *The Washington Post*, March 13, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/03/13/ukraine-casualties-pessimism-ammunition-shortage/>.

China and the long-term impact thereof on the strategic autonomy of a post-Putin Russia that will have to be re-engaged at some point.⁴¹ They are also concerned that the US is sending dangerous signals to Beijing (e.g., Nancy Pelosi's contentious trip to Taiwan) while the EU is trying to avoid polarizing the complex relationship with China.⁴² Richard Fontaine, a former State Department and National Security Council official and former adviser to John McCain who now heads the think tank Center for New American Security, for example, published an article with an explicit title: "Dealing with China and Russia. To Compete, the United States Will Have to Pick Its Battle."⁴³

CONCLUSION

The longer the war lasts, the more its timing will overlap with the U.S. presidential campaign and thus the greater the risk that it will be politically instrumentalized by Republicans—with the issues of cost and equipment supply, as well as tensions with China, becoming the key components of the equation. While political support for Kyiv and deep opposition to any form of compromise with Russia are long-term determinants that are unlikely to change, U.S. voices in favor of diplomatic negotiations are likely to grow in the coming months. Although few voices are speaking out publicly on the issue, some think tanks are beginning to organize internal discussions and forecasting exercises on the acceptable terms of a ceasefire in preparation for the moment when the State Department and the White House consider it acceptable to put the issue on the table publicly.

41. Alexander Gabuev, "China's New Vassal: How the War in Ukraine Turned Moscow into Beijing's Junior Partner," *Foreign Affairs*, August 9, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/chinas-new-vassal>.

42. Michael D. Swaine and Jake Werner, "How Biden's New National Security Strategy Gets China Wrong," *The National Interest*, October 13, 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-biden-s-new-national-security-strategy-gets-china-wrong-205323>.

43. Richard Fontaine, "Taking on China and Russia: To Compete, the United States Will Have to Pick Its Battles," *Foreign Affairs*, November 18, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/taking-china-and-russia#author-info>.