



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on February 9, 2024

U.S. Senate Advances Aid Bill for Ukraine and Israel

On Thursday, U.S. lawmakers inched closer to approving a new round of military aid for Ukraine after 17 Senate Republicans joined with Democrats in pushing the funding legislation closer to a vote, overcoming a potential procedural roadblock.

The 67-32 cloture vote surpassed the 60-vote majority needed to advance the \$95 billion spending bill, meaning opponents would not be able to use a filibuster to block a vote. It still faces a potentially lengthy Senate debate and negotiations over amendments, and if it passes the Senate, the bill will still need approval from the Republican-controlled House of Representatives before going to U.S. President Joe Biden for final approval.



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The development followed a weeks-long stalemate, surprisingly gaining Republican support after border-security measures were removed from the bill. Negotiators had previously demanded provisions to address the influx of illegal migrants across the border with Mexico to help overcome Republican opposition to continued funding of Ukraine's conflict with Russia.

The latest version of the bill includes \$60 billion for Ukraine, \$14 billion to fund Israel's war against Hamas, and nearly \$5 billion to help deter Chinese "aggression" against Taiwan and other Indo-Pacific partners. An earlier version included more than \$20 billion in funding to help secure the nation's southern border.

"This bill sends the message to Americans that their elected officials don't care about them," Senator Rand Paul, a Kentucky Republican, said. "I've never met any Kentuckian who says, 'Fix the border of Ukraine before you fix our border.'" He added that he would fight efforts to speed the bill's passage unless it's amended to adequately address the border crisis.

With the Senate scheduled to begin a two-week recess this weekend, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, stated that he would keep lawmakers from leaving Washington "until the job is done."

A rising number of House Republicans have opposed additional aid to Ukraine, saying Biden is merely prolonging the conflict while offering no plan to end the bloodshed. The Biden administration confirmed last month that it had run out of funding for Kyiv after burning through \$113 billion in previously approved aid packages.

Also, the American-supplied Patriot missile launcher was used in the January 24 shooting down of the Russian Il-76 transport over Belgorod, *The New York Times* confirmed on Thursday, citing anonymous U.S. officials.

The plane was carrying 65 Ukrainian prisoners scheduled to be exchanged that afternoon, along with



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three observers and six crew members. There were no survivors. Ukraine initially claimed responsibility, then said the planes were legitimate targets because they had been delivering missiles, then called for an investigation into what happened.

Reports that a Patriot missile had been used to shoot down the plane “were accurate,” officials told the *Times* privately, on condition of anonymity, as the U.S. government had no public comment. The missile was supplied to Ukraine by “a European partner,” the officials claimed, without naming the country.

Besides the United States, Germany and the Netherlands have supplied Kyiv with the Patriot systems and missiles.

American officials also told the *Times* that the Ukrainian military might not have known the POWs were on board and that the strike was based on “legitimate but flawed intelligence” because the same plane had been used to transport Russian missiles.

It “appeared probable that at least some” people on board may have been Ukrainian prisoners, but Russia “may have overstated” the number of deaths, according to unnamed U.S. officials.

“If there were prisoners on the plane, as appears likely, American officials said the loss of life was regrettable,” the newspaper noted.

Most of the article focused on the “innovative” use of Patriots by the Ukrainians, who claim to have shot down almost a dozen Russian fighter jets with it since May last year. The *Times* and U.S. officials took those claims at face value.

The Patriot was originally constructed as an anti-aircraft weapon, but was repurposed for ballistic missile interception during the First Gulf War in 1991. Its actual effectiveness was rather low, as opposed to its image cultivated in the media.

Although initial reports on the demise of the Russian transport plane suggested a French-made missile may have been involved, the French military quickly issued a statement attributing the shoot-down to the U.S.-made Patriot.

As per Russia’s Investigative Committee, the Il-76 was brought down by two MIM-104A surface-to-air missiles, launched from a Patriot battery located near the village of Liptsy, in the Kharkov Region around 10 km from the Russian border. The U.S. government has estimated the price of each missile at \$4 million.

Moscow has accused Kyiv of crimes against its own citizens and Washington of complicity in the tragic death of Ukrainian POWs.

On February 9, *The New York Times* reported that Ukraine’s battle fatigue and lack of ammunition will most likely force Kyiv to jettison its current front-line positions unless it receives new aid from the West.

The paper said that Ukrainian defenses near the key stronghold of Avdeevka in Russia’s Donetsk Region are grappling with relentless attacks, and Kyiv’s problems extend beyond one single battle.

Ukrainian troops, the *Times* added, are exhausted and suffer from a lack of weapons and ammunition, particularly with regard to air defense systems. Per unnamed U.S. officials interviewed by the outlet, Kyiv only has ample air defense assets to last until March, unless it obtains new shipments.

The United States — Ukraine’s main backer — is locked in congressional gridlock over Biden’s request to approve a \$118 billion security bill, \$60 billion of which is earmarked for Kiev. Many Republicans



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have been hesitant to support the measure, claiming it does too little to boost security on the border with Mexico.

Western officials believe that without U.S. aid, “a cascading collapse along the front is a real possibility” in 2024, the article says. However, they reportedly estimate that it will take at least a couple of months for the shortages to take a toll.

According to analysts, by March, Ukraine could be struggling to carry out local counterattacks, and by summer, Kyiv could find it difficult to repel Russian assaults. Without sustained U.S. support, *Times* sources say, “it’s hard to see how Ukraine will be able to maintain its current positions on the battlefield.”

Ukrainian officials have repeatedly bemoaned a shortage of ammunition, calling it “a very real and pressing problem.” Meanwhile, the *Financial Times* reported on Friday, citing a senior EU official, that “It will not be easy for the Europeans to substitute for the US” in terms of military assistance.

Last year, the EU announced an ambitious plan to provide Ukraine with one million artillery shells by the spring of 2024. However, the bloc has struggled to deliver on this pledge, with top EU diplomat Josep Borrell saying Kyiv will receive only half of that amount by March.

Russia has repeatedly condemned Western arms shipments to Ukraine, warning that they will only drag the conflict on without changing the ultimate outcome.



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