



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on November 30, 2023

Zelensky Is “Dreamer of the Year,” Pentagon Struggles to Finance Middle East Buildup

On November 28, leftist news outlet Politico reported that the Pentagon was grappling to raise money to fund its military buildup in the Middle East amid the Hamas-Israel crisis owing to a stalemate in the U.S. Congress, which has thus far been unable to authorize full defense funding.

At the moment, the U.S. Department of Defense, together with many other federal agencies, is operating under a stopgap funding bill that was signed by President Joe Biden earlier this month to forestall a potential government shutdown. Moreover, the bill, which did not fulfill Biden’s request for additional funding for Israel and Ukraine, freezes other types of defense spending at the previous year’s levels.



AP Images
Volodymyr Zelensky

According to Pentagon spokesman Chris Sherwood, since no one planned for a massive redeployment of U.S. forces to the Middle East after the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel, the military “had to pull money from existing operations and maintenance accounts.” This means less funding for exercises and deployments that had already been planned.

“We’re taking it out of hide,” Sherwood said.

Since the beginning of the Middle East crisis, the United States has mobilized two aircraft carriers with escorts, additional missile and air defense systems, more than 1,000 troops, and an Ohio-class nuclear-powered submarine to the region.

America’s military buildup came as it proclaimed unequivocal support for Israel in its conflict with the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas, as well as fears that clashes could cause a major regional escalation entailing Iran and Islamist groups with links to Tehran.

U.S. defense officials had hitherto voiced concerns about the congressional stalemate, warning that a lack of funding could undermine shipbuilding, procurement programs, as well as the defense industrial base itself.

Speaking to Defense News, Deputy Under Secretary of Defense Radha Plumb did not exclude the possibility of an “additive domino effect of delays,” noting that suppliers could be particularly affected by this.

Meanwhile, Under Secretary of Defense Bill LaPlante cautioned against potential layoffs in contractor companies owing to the lack of Pentagon funding.

Politico claimed that if U.S. lawmakers could not pass a full spending bill by spring, the Pentagon and other federal departments will have to reduce their overall expenses by one percent.



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In another article published on November 28, Politico predicted in its yearly ranking of influential people that 2024 would pose a huge challenge for Europe's top "dreamer," Ukrainian authoritarian leader Volodymyr Zelensky.

The Ukrainian leader emerged in first place in the "dreamers" section as "dreamer number one." The section is a ranking of people "who represent an idea driving the debate," the magazine explained, with the other two sections singling out "doers" and "disruptors," respectively.

Likening Zelensky to Winston Churchill, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela, Politico pointed out that his pugilistic rhetoric and publicity stunts had persuaded Western countries to back Kyiv's cause and start weaponizing Ukrainian troops to combat Russia.

Nonetheless, Politico warned that 2024 would be "challenging" for Zelensky, owing to the loss of interest in the conflict among the rest of the world, and because ordinary Ukrainians were "exhausted by two years of battles and struggling to reclaim territory."

"Zelensky has moved from pleading with Western countries for help to lecturing them — and that hasn't landed quite as successfully as his more uplifting orations," Politico posited.

Notably, Zelensky's approval rating has fallen from 91 percent in May of 2022 to 76 percent in October 2023, based on a poll by the Kyiv Institute of Sociology (KIIS).

The Ukrainian leader presently has had to deal with public frustration over the results of the country's much-anticipated summer counteroffensive, which failed to overcome Russian defenses and obtain any significant territory. Various reports have hinted that Ukrainian troops suffered heavy losses from artillery fire and drone attacks, and when attempting to cross minefields.

In his recent interview, Valeriy Zaluzhny, Ukraine's top general, admitted that the situation on the battlefield was "a stalemate." Zelensky has rebuffed such claims, calling for additional shipments of Western weapons instead.

Meanwhile, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told journalists on November 29 that Finland has no reason to boost its military posture on the Russian border, saying that such actions by Helsinki could only worsen relations with Moscow.

On November 28, Poland declared that it would deploy a team of military specialists to the Finnish border with Russia. A request by Helsinki "for allied support" was made "in the face of a hybrid attack on the Finnish border," the head of the Polish National Security Bureau, Jacek Siewiera, announced in a statement on X.

"A team of military advisors will provide on-site knowledge on border security, including in an operational sense," the Polish official added, without specifying the exact number of specialists Warsaw plans to send.

"No one and nothing is threatening Finland," spokesman Peskov said, slamming the military buildup as an "absolutely excessive measure in defense of the border, because there is no threat and no real tension there."

In 2021, Poland deployed its military to its border with Belarus and declared a state of emergency in nearby areas to deal with an influx of asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa. Warsaw blamed the asylum problem on Minsk, a claim which Belarusian authorities rebuffed.

Helsinki has announced plans to fully close the border with Russia over what it castigated as a "Russian



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hybrid operation” involving asylum seekers from third-world nations. The last land crossing between the two countries — at Raja-Jooseppi, situated above the Arctic Circle — was to be shut down on November 30 and will remain closed until at least December 13.

Earlier this month, seven other checkpoints were closed owing to a surge in migrant arrivals. Finnish authorities linked the a situation to Moscow’s retaliation for Helsinki’s accession to NATO in April. Russia has denied the allegations as “completely baseless.”

The Kremlin spokesman warned that, if new NATO forces are stationed at the frontier with Russia, it might lead to more tensions between the two neighbors. “The Finns must be fully aware of the fact that it would pose a danger for us,” he said. “That is how we see it,” Peskov added.

Over 600 migrants seeking asylum have arrived at the border this month alone, a Finnish border officer revealed to *The Guardian* last week. Such a figure represented a considerable increase over the usual single-digit numbers, with 62 reportedly arriving on a single day.

The migrants came from countries including Yemen, Afghanistan, Kenya, Morocco, Pakistan, Somalia, and Syria, immigration authorities revealed.



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