



## NATO Divide Growing, US & EU May Drastically Reduce Ukraine Aid by Summer

### Description

The Biden administration has recently announced a new \$400 million military assistance package for Kiev, while EU defense ministers discuss the supply of additional ammo to Ukraine on March 7-8. However, behind the scenes, the Ukraine conflict fatigue and divisions are growing in the western camp, US military expert David T. Pyne told Sputnik.

Joe Biden's pledge to support Ukraine as long as necessary seems to be in dissonance with US officials' private remarks and plummeting public support for Washington's proxy war in Ukraine.

"The Biden administration is only saying the US will support Ukraine as long as it takes for public posturing and public consumption," said David T. Pyne, an EMP Task Force scholar and former US Army combat arms and headquarters staff officer. "Behind the scenes, they have informed [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky that they will not be able to maintain current levels of US military support past June or so, as we are running low on weapons and ammo to give them. Accordingly, the administration has advised him to capture as much territory as possible in advance of bilateral peace talks with Russia in the summer."

Mainstream media recently quoted US officials as saying that "we will continue to try to impress upon [Ukrainians] that we can't do anything and everything forever" and that "at some point assistance would be harder to come by." They further noted that Biden and his top aides are aware that the situation will get tough once Ukraine has exhausted the current US assistance, which could happen as early as this summer.

The Washington Post was one to cite top Biden officials, including Deputy National Security Adviser Jon Finer, Deputy Secretary of State Wendy Sherman and Under Secretary of Defense Colin Kahl, as saying that the "coming months" will be critical for "Ukraine to retake as much territory as possible... before sitting down with Putin at the negotiating table."

CIA Director William Burns was even reported to have traveled to Russia and forwarded a plan on ceding 20% of Ukraine's territory in exchange for an apparent ceasefire deal with Russia. However,

both the White House and the Kremlin denied these reports.

## **US Officials Accept Idea That Crimea is Russian**

Mixed signals are also continuing to come from the Biden administration with regard to Crimea.

In January 2023, the US press alleged that Biden officials had warmed to help Ukraine target Crimea, the peninsula that reunified with Russia as the result of a March 2014 referendum.

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland partially backed this idea by stating in mid-February that the Russian military bases in Crimea should be considered legitimate targets for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. However, almost simultaneously, Secretary of State Antony Blinken insisted in a Zoom call with a group of experts that Crimea constitutes a Russian “red line” and that Washington would not encourage Kiev to attack the peninsula.

“I think the administration is a little bipolar when it comes to Crimea,” said Pyne. “On the one hand they have said they support Ukrainian drone strikes on Crimea because they consider it to be Ukrainian territory (...) On the other, they have conducted multiple classified briefings of Congress informing them that Ukraine lacks the military capability to retake Crimea while also clearly stating that any Ukrainian military incursions would be a violation of Putin’s nuclear redline.”

US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland speaks at a press briefing at the State

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US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs Victoria Nuland speaks at a press briefing at the State Department in Washington, DC, on January 11, 2022.

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What's more, Nuland herself has recently stated on a webinar, which Pyne attended, that any peace deal to end the Russo-Ukrainian conflict would have to end with Moscow retaining control of Crimea.

These contradictions apparently indicate that Washington did not expect that the conflict would protract for so long. In fact, the Biden administration would like to end it long before the Democratic presidential primary season begins in February 2024, ideally by this summer, according to the former Pentagon officer.

Earlier, some US observers presumed that the uncertainty over the outcome of the Ukraine conflict could take its toll on the Democratic Party's election odds and make it an easy target for the GOP

during the primaries. Indeed, House Republicans have already brought forward the Ukraine Fatigue bill, urging Biden to stop all US funding of Kiev until a peace deal with Russia is signed. **“I think Republican attacks on Biden putting Ukraine First and America Last will take its toll on Biden’s resolve to continue the fight in Ukraine,”** Pyne noted.

## Divisions Growing Inside NATO

Meanwhile, on the other side of the pond, Washington’s European allies have also found themselves on the horns of a dilemma amid soaring inflation, growing prices and creeping de-industrialization, fanned by skyrocketing energy costs and Biden’s protectionist climate bill.

On March 7-8, EU defense ministers gathered in Stockholm to attend an informal meeting within the framework of the Foreign Affairs Council. According to western press, they discussed how to boost ammunition supplies to Kiev in both the short and long term with European Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton calling to switch the EU to **“war economy”** mode. **“European industry is not adapted for the needs of a high-intensity conflict,”** Breton told journalists on March 7.

However, the unfolding energy crunch and the lack of clarity of how the bloc will secure enough natural gas for 2023/2024 may nip the war economy plans in the bud. Despite bellicose public statements, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz were reported to have approached Ukrainian President Zelensky and encouraged him to negotiate a way out of the conflict with Russia, as per the Wall Street Journal’s anonymous sources.

“I think rising concerns about having to endure another winter without Russian gas is just one of the many reasons that will cause both the US and the EU to drastically reduce military aid to Ukraine by this summer forcing Zelensky to negotiate a peace deal on terms acceptable to Russia,” suggested Pyne.

“We are already seeing deepening divisions within NATO as the more militaristic Eastern European states like Poland want to keep fighting their proxy war against Russia while saner voices in Germany and France and to a lesser extent the US understand that the current levels of western military support are completely unsustainable. Unfortunately, the impact of the peace movement has been underwhelming thus far in the US so hopefully the efforts to form a left-right coalition against further US prolongation of the war in Ukraine will be more successful in the next few to several months to further pressure US leaders to wind down US involvement in the proxy conflict,” he continued.

## Europeans & Americans Tired of Ukraine Conflict

EU populations appear to have grown weary of the conflict. Late last month, a wave of peace protests swept through Europe, bringing together over 50,000 in Berlin. In Germany, rallies were organized by both the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) and left-wing Die Linke.

At the same time, YouGov, a British international data analytics firm, found that Europeans are becoming less enthusiastic about sending assistance to Kiev, let alone dispatching EU troops or stepping up anti-Russia sanctions. The latter has already meant an increase in the cost-of-living in the Old Continent.

"I think there is growing Ukraine war fatigue particularly in Europe but also with the American people," noted Pyne.

Indeed, the same YouGov survey indicated that support among the Republicans and Democrats to sending financial assistance to Ukraine has plummeted from 67% and 87%, respectively, in April 2022, to 39% and 75% in February 2023. **Earlier, NORC Center for Public Affairs Research revealed that only 48% of American respondents either "strongly" or "somewhat" supported arming Kiev in February, sliding from 60% in May 2022.**

## Ukrainian Army Spring Counter-Offensive is Doomed

When it comes to how the situation will evolve on the ground, Pyne does not see any preconditions for a successful advance by the Ukrainian Armed Forces. While US leaders have been encouraging Ukraine to engage in a spring counteroffensive to retake as much territory as possible, the chances that Kiev will be able to do so are slim, and the US Joint Chiefs of Staff are aware of this, Pyne claims.

According to the expert, the present military balance on the Ukrainian battlefield overwhelmingly favors Russia which carried out a partial mobilization of military reservists last year.

If Russia launches a spring offensive, it may force the US and its NATO allies to revise their military plans and force Kiev to consider ending the conflict: **the longer the West waits to negotiate a peace deal, the worse the terms will likely be for Ukraine, the ex-Pentagon officer noted.**

"I think it is extremely unlikely they will seek to prolong the [proxy] war past summer knowing that Ukraine has no prospects for victory against Russia and that accordingly they will be looking for a face-saving way out of the conflict," Pyne concluded.

by Ekaterina Blinova

### Category

1. Army-Wars-Conflict Zones-Military Tech.
2. Main

### Date Created

04/17/2023