



No, Weakening Russia Is Not “Costing Peanuts” for the U.S.

Description

All wars come down to a battle of wills. The Ukrainian people have shown a ferocity of resistance that few expected given Russia’s vastly superior military power. President Vladimir Putin should know by now that he can’t outwill the Ukrainians. But he can likely outlast the Americans, he calculates, since the imbalance of interest between the U.S. and Russia favors him. Washington’s rhetoric aside, Ukraine is vital to Russia but peripheral to America. And without America’s military support, Ukraine may not run out of willpower, but it will run out of bullets.

The cost of the war thus far is not, contrary to Ash, “peanuts.” The U.S. support for Ukraine in 2022 amounted to \$68 billion, and the White House requested another \$34 billion. In comparison, the war in Afghanistan [cost](#) \$23 billion per year in its first two years. In 2011, at the height of the surge, the war cost \$107 billion. The Iraq War cost [\\$54.4 billion and \\$91.5 billion](#) in its first two years, respectively. According to the Cost of War project at Brown University, the failed global “war on terror” cost \$8 trillion and caused more than 900,000 deaths over the course of 20 years.

Neither the Iraq nor the Afghanistan war targeted major power rivals of the U.S. So in that sense, yes, the war in Ukraine is cheap and degrades the military of a nuclear power. Still, arguing that continuing the war is an affordable way of achieving a major strategic objective is misleading—not least because, prior to February 2022, few in Washington considered Russia a major power whose military needed to be degraded to protect the U.S. The national security establishment has long identified China as the top potential military competitor, while Russia has been seen as a challenge of a [much smaller magnitude](#).

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