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Politics of Aid During the War in Ukraine

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This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. All our studies are available on www.finabel.org

DIRECTOR'S EDITORIAL

It is becoming difficult to analyse the 2022 conflict in Ukraine without also evaluating the political debate in Washington, D.C. This debate is becoming particularly relevant among 'America First' supporters who question the continued financial and military aid provided by the United States. Despite initial bipartisan support for aid packages, dissent has been growing, with critics arguing for fiscal caution rather than continued support.

This paper outlines the aims of the 'America First' foreign policy. The primary aim of 'America First' politicians is that US allies contribute their fair share to collective deterrence in NATO and internationally. This paper highlights that since 2022, many European allies have contributed more than their fair share of defence spending. 'America First' politicians also demand that the foreign policy focus on cost-effectiveness. Understanding the specifics of this term is critical to measuring the success of the US aid program to Ukraine. This paper has contended that supporting Ukraine aligns with US long-term interests, such as countering "Russian adventurism." Deterring Russian adventurism is more cost-effective for the US in the long term as it prevents an emboldened Russia from threatening NATO allies and interests.

In essence, the paper argues that the aid to Ukraine, despite initial bipartisan support, faces challenges due to fiscal concerns and shifting political priorities. It contends that supporting Ukraine is in the long-term interest of the US, given the strategic and financial implications of 'Russian adventurism' in Europe. The ongoing debate reflects broader ideological tensions within US foreign policy.



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ABSTRACT

Ukraine is facing a new challenge in the conflict, which has been continuing since Russia invaded at the start of 2022. The source of international aid they have relied on has been losing political support among some of Ukraine's allies. Most notable among these allies is the United States, which has contributed most extensively in bilateral terms to Ukraine's war effort in military equipment and financial support. This paper assesses the US' waning support for providing aid to Ukraine in the context of President Trump's 'America First' foreign policy.

The 'America First' foreign policy is notable

for demanding cost-effectiveness in the US strategic interests. Its adherents expect the US allies to contribute a fair share to the collective security interests. The 'America First' foreign policy also refocuses the US' support for causes that more directly affect the US's strategic interests. However, since 2022, the US allies have significantly increased their contributions to collective defence and provided substantial bilateral contributions to Ukraine. Such a development undermines many of the criticisms of 'America First' supporters. However, this school of thought is increasing in relevance and political support.

INTRODUCTION

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, Ukraine has received billions of USD in financial, military and humanitarian aid. The US has provided Ukraine with the most extensive bilateral aid package, allowing it to halt Russia's invasion. However, many politicians within Washington who subscribe to the 'America First' foreign policy principles are critical of the US's continued aid supply to Ukraine. 'America First' supporters have historically been critical of the US allies for not contributing their "fair share" (Nelson, 2018, para. 2). Furthermore, these supporters have historically critiqued the US aid contributions to allies as being cost-ineffective. This paper will analyse how the conflict in Ukraine may have challenged some of these criticisms and their increasing popularity in Washington.

The US has been supplying aid to Ukraine ever since the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea (The White House, 2014). However, the US aid supply to Ukraine vastly grew over the months following the full-scale Russian invasion (Arabia & Bowen, 2023, p. 1). In March 2022, the US supplied just \$700.000 worth of military aid to Ukraine through grants and loans (Pallaro & Parlapiano, 2022). In May 2022, Biden signed an aid package worth \$40 billion for Ukraine (Snell, 2022). Such a move demonstrated to the US allies globally, but especially in Europe, that it would financially support Ukraine against Russia's invasion. As a result, many US allies in Europe and elsewhere similarly contributed billions of USD to support Ukraine. How-

ever, as of September 2023, the continued funding for Ukraine is a contentious subject in Washington. A particularly apparent showcase of that fact was the blocking of the Biden Administration's budget by the supporters of an 'America First' foreign policy. As a result, the following implemented emergency budget prioritised domestic spending over the continued supply of aid to Ukraine (Mascaro et al., 2023). There will not be a discontinuation of the already pledged aid supplies, but the future of the US commitment is undoubtedly of concern for NATO allies and Ukraine (Murphy, 2023).

Support for Biden's aid package initially saw significant bipartisan support (Snell, 2022). However, there have been warning signs since 2022 of growing dissent among 'America First' supporters. Due to objections from some Republican politicians, such as Senator Rand Paul, a vote in the Senate to provide aid to Ukraine was delayed (Snell, 2022). Senator Paul's main criticism towards Biden's aid package admitted sympathy for the Ukrainian cause but argued that the package size was fiscally irresponsible (Snell, 2022). Financial responsibility is central to an 'America First' foreign policy (Ferrarello, 2017, p.1). Senator Paul suggested that the aid package be paid for with the existing military budget without further burdening taxpayers (Snell, 2023). He went on to suggest that "(heaven forbid), Congress would loan the money to Ukraine" (Snell, 2023 para.8). Senator Paul's criticism of the aid package reflects the 'America First' principle, in which US foreign policy must

more directly reflect its citizens' interests (Ferrarello, 2017, p.1). Thus, Senator Paul is making a financial argument to criticise the aid package the US is supplying Ukraine (Snell,

2022; Rubin, 2022; Ferrarello, 2017). However, this paper will explore how supporting Ukraine is in the US's financial and strategic long-term interests.

US ALLIES, A UNITED FRONT

NATO Members Increase Defence Spending

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022, most members of NATO have vastly increased their military spending. In 2006, NATO Defence Ministers agreed to set the target of spending 2% of their Gross Domestic Product on their militaries (NATO, 2023a). In 2014, only the US, the United Kingdom and Greece met this minimum target (UK Parliament, 2022). Such a situation occurred due to a few military conflicts directly affecting European states since introducing the 2% target. Meeting the 2% target had lost significant political support within NATO member states. Therefore, it was no longer a priority for politicians (Dowdy, 2017). The 2% target has thus become an indicator of each member's political will to contribute to independent and collective defence objectives (NATO, 2023a).

There is a remarkable difference when comparing NATO members' defence spending before and after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. In 2022, nine NATO member states met the 2% target, six more than in 2014 (UK Parliament, 2022). The majority of the new six members are Baltic and Eastern European

states, reflecting that meeting the target depends on political support for military spending. While only nine NATO states currently meet the 2% target, this should not diminish the considerable spending increases across many NATO member states. Indeed, seven states have pledged to meet the 2% target over the coming decade (UK Parliament 2022). Germany, the wealthiest country in Europe, pledged to spend more than \$100 billion to modernise its military (Thiessen, 2023, para. 8). Such a move would mark the most significant increase in military spending since the Second World War.

Increased military spending across NATO member states is crucial for the organisation, especially since the wealthiest and most powerful states would participate in it. Further promisingly, some states moved to exceed their commitment to 2% military spending. For instance, Poland has increased their spending to 3%, while Romania and the Baltics have pledged to spend 2.5% (UK Parliament, 2022). This trend represents a significant shift towards the objectives of collective defence by almost all of NATO's members. Supporters of the 'America First' foreign policy will likely view such a development as a significant victory. A prominent argument

made by President Trump and other ‘isolationists’ was that NATO member states were not paying their fair share towards the collective defence of the organisation (Nelson, 2018, para. 2). In 2018, ahead of a NATO summit, Trump announced, “the US is spending far more on NATO than any other country”, further stating that “this is not fair, nor is it acceptable” (Nelson, 2018, para. 2). On the Trump administration often criticised NATO members which were not meeting their commitments, including the more influential ones within the organisation (Rose & Shirbon, 2019, para. 5). In 2019, Trump clashed with the French President, Macron, questioning whether the US should defend countries which were “delinquent” on their military spending (Rose & Shirbon, 2019, para. 5). During the Trump Administration, some member states of NATO increased their military spending (Dowdy, 2017), which may have been in response to Trump’s criticism and warnings. However, since the war in Ukraine, military spending among member states has increased (Thiessen, 2023, p. 4). Clearly, since the invasion of Ukraine, NATO has seen a resurgence in political and material support through military spending increases across its member states. Moreover, significant US commitment to provide aid to Ukraine further demonstrates its intention to safeguard European NATO allies from potential Russian aggression. Following the leadership of more influential NATO states, like the US, the political support among NATO states for bigger defence budgets and aid to Ukraine has vastly increased. By committing to a significant spending increase, the US has bolstered NATO’s strength through solidarity.

Therefore, when considering the criticisms of ‘America First’ supporters, NATO members are now doing their “fair share” to provide collective security within the organisation (Nelson, 2018, para. 2). Finally, by taking on a leadership role in the context of Ukraine, the US has more successfully encouraged NATO spending (Arabia & Bowen, 2023, p. 1), in comparison with the Trump administration’s threats to withdraw military support from allies (Rose & Shirbon, 2019, para. 5).

Bilateral Aid to Ukraine

As previously referred, the US provided Ukraine’s largest aid package, approximately \$70 billion in May 2023 (Statista, 2023; Arabia, 2023). This support has been the cause of concern for some US politicians, especially when evaluating its cost-effectiveness (Rubin, 2022; Snell, 2022). For ‘America First’ supporters, aid burden needs to be fairly distributed among allies, which would make aid cost-ineffective. Trump raised similar concerns, insisting on NATO members contributing their “fair share” (Nelson, 2018, para. 2). However, since the outbreak of the conflict in Ukraine, NATO members have contributed more than their “fair share” to common defence (Nelson, 2018, para. 2).

As of 31 May 2023, the UK and Germany provided more than \$10 billion to Ukraine (Statista b, 2023). Most of this amount was in the form of military equipment, yet the UK provided an additional \$3.9 billion in financial aid, while Germany provided \$1.9 billion in humanitarian aid. Furthermore, Japan provided \$6.6 billion in aid, of which the majority was financial and humanitarian.

Canada also provided \$5.3 billion in financial and military aid to Ukraine. Poland and the Netherlands provided similar amounts, between \$4 and \$4.3 billion each. Both countries offered their support primarily through military aid, yet they also provided some form of humanitarian and financial assistance. A further 30 countries provided aid in some form to Ukraine, the majority of which were European states. However, South Korea, Taiwan, Australia and New Zealand were also among the contributing countries.

These are significant sums of aid provided to Ukraine. Moreover, the cost of processing and hosting Ukrainian refugees has undoubtedly made a noticeable difference in the global measure of Global Development Assistance. The OECD recorded a rise from \$186 to \$204 billion between 2021 and 2022 (OECD, 2023), a 13.6% increase in real terms. Such an increase will only have grown since the conduct of this study. Those developments demonstrate the size of the international effort to support the Ukrainian government and its citizens. Furthermore, a particularly noticeable factor is the large portion of the humanitarian aid not being conducted by the US. Due to practical reasons, Europe is the location of most donor countries that process and host. Germany has thus far accepted over one million refugees from Ukraine, while Poland has accepted 965,000 (Statista c, 2023). States bordering Ukraine, such as Czechia, Slovakia and Moldova, as well as Western European countries like the UK, Spain and Italy, have all accepted over 100,000 refugees each (Statista c 2023). Providing this type of aid would only be possible with a coordinated and united European effort. Those develop-

ments further demonstrate the importance of providing Ukraine with a wide range of aid. Better-equipped states like the US specialised in military equipment and financial support to Ukraine (Statista b, 2023), whereas smaller European states brought humanitarian relief. Although the US has provided the most aid in absolute terms, the collaborative efforts of its allies bolstered its effectiveness.

Finally, while the US has donated the most in absolute terms, many countries have provided more aid as a percentage of their gross domestic product (GDP). The US's aid commitments comprise only around 0.33% of its GDP (Statista a, 2023). Therefore, they are only the 12th highest contributor to aid when measured as a proportion of GDP. The three states donating the most as a proportion of GDP are the Baltic states (Hartwell et al., 2022). Estonia contributed the highest proportion of their GDP, which amounted to 1.25%, with Latvia and Lithuania just behind at 1.09% and 0.95% (Statista a, 2023). The drain on those countries' budgets is thus much more extensive. Moreover, Estonia donated almost 40% of its military budget to Ukraine in 2022 (Hartwell et al., 2022, p.9). The Baltics and Ukraine were former Republics of the Soviet Union, which explains the Baltic states' affinity with the Ukrainian cause (Hartwell et al., 2022, p. 9). The other nine states contributing a higher GDP proportion to Ukraine than the US are European allies bordering Ukraine, such as Poland and Slovakia. Even though these states were not part of the former Soviet Union, they were still forced behind the 'Iron Curtain' during the Cold War. Thus, a similar parallel may occur here due to the shared anti-Russian feelings

in the region.

Having examined the aid donated to Ukraine as a proportion of GDP, it is clear that many US allies contribute a “fair” amount to Ukraine (Nelson, 2018, para. 2). As previously explored in this chapter, some American politicians are concerned that the US is overspending on supporting Ukraine compared to

the international community (Rubin, 2022). This analysis showcased that although the US is the largest overall net contributor to Ukraine, many of its allies donate a similar or higher proportion of their GDP. These allies are thus clearly as committed to supporting Ukraine as the US, which they demonstrated financially.

THE EUROPEAN UNION’S “WATERSHED MOMENT”

Financial Aid

After the US, the second highest contributor to Ukraine are collectively the institutions of the European Union. This occurrence is particularly notable considering the size of the contributions, Ukraine’s lack of EU membership and military equipment encompassing parts of the aid package. Many have described such a development as a “watershed moment” for the EU’s foreign policy (International Crisis Group Podcast, 2022; Baume & Barigazzi, 2022). This section will explore the EU’s new role in European security and how this relates to NATO and the US. It will be noteworthy to explore whether the EU’s new leadership role conflicts with the principles of the ‘America First’ adherents, specifically regarding those US politicians concerned about its spending in Ukraine.

On the 31 May 2023, European Institutions had bilaterally contributed €35 billion to Ukraine (Statista b, 2023). Other than the US, this is more than three times the UK’s and Germany’s contributions, which are next best. The lion’s share of this, €27.5 billion,

was in financial aid to Ukraine. Surprisingly, over €5 billion of this aid was in the form of military assistance. It is worth considering not just short-term aid contributions but also long-term “total contributions” (Trebesch, 2023, para. 1). The “total contributions” of EU institutions and its member states are now twice as large as the US aid commitment to Ukraine (Trebesch, 2023, para. 1). This considers promised aid to Ukraine in the form of multi-year packages between 2023 and 2027, such as the new “Ukraine Facility” (Trebesch, 2023, para. 2). The Ukraine Facility, confirmed in the EU’s summer budget, announced a further €50 billion to Ukraine. By 2027, the EU will have contributed over €130 billion to Ukraine (Trebesch, 2023, para. 1). This pledge further demonstrates that the European commitments match and exceed the US ones. This fact further undermines the narrative of the ‘America First’ supporters that the US is overspending on its support for Ukraine and that US allies are not contributing their fair share (Rubin, 2022; Snell, 2022; Nelson, 2018, para. 2).

The EU is financially interested in providing

this aid to Ukraine to stabilise the economic pressure on European Union members. The Euro Zone experienced an increase in inflation from 0.3% in 2020 to 8.4% in 2022, according to the European Central Bank (Arce et al., 2023). Two-thirds of this inflation is due to significant price increases in the energy and food sectors (Arce et al., 2023). The war in Ukraine halted an ample supply of these goods to European states, further driving up prices and leading to inflation (Arce et al., 2023). Providing financial aid to Ukraine will be essential for its reconstruction after the conflict, an objective already discussed by institutions of the European Union and its member states. The World Bank estimated that Ukraine will need over \$400 billion to rebuild in full (Tamma, 2023). This enormous figure far exceeds the current amount pledged to Ukraine over the coming years. However, the main focus of the financial aid provided by EU institutions will be to restart Ukraine's key industries, such as the export of goods. The goal of such actions will be to stabilise the price of these goods and reduce the inflationary pressure on European economies. In this perspective, EU institutions and member states act not merely from kind-heartedness but rather in self-interest. Such a characteristic could lend credibility to the critiques of 'America First' politicians who feel that the US supplying aid to Ukraine is no longer in their financial interests (Rubin, 2022).

It is worth noting that the EU has tied the aid provided to Ukraine to specific objectives and targets. These conditions include anti-corruption laws and structural reforms aligning Ukraine with EU standards (Tamma, 2023). Tamma (2023) notes that such an alignment

fits into the context of Ukraine's bid for EU accession. Tamma's analysis suggests that the EU may also seek Ukraine's economic and political integration into the bloc by supporting the Ukrainian reconstruction effort. On 22 June 2022, the European Council endorsed the Commission's Opinion to grant "Candidate Status" to Ukraine (EUEA, 2022). Of course, it has not been possible to predict whether their application will succeed as Ukraine must first overcome many financial and political obstacles.

Moreover, this potential enlargement necessitates a consideration of the security challenges of accepting a member state currently involved in an international conflict. Whether Ukraine's ascension to the Union will be accepted is beyond the scope of this paper, although Tamma's (2023) analysis is worthy of consideration. If Tamma's (2023) assessment is correct, then the aid that Ukraine receives from the EU compared to the US should be reanalysed. Politicians adhering to the 'America First' ideology may favour the EU paying the aid costs towards Ukraine but be sceptical of the associated political integration. Indeed, Rubin (2022) notes that many 'America First' supporters who "whined" that allies did not shoulder their obligations are now "peevled" that Europe is leading. The US still needs to attach equivalent political conditions on the aid given to Ukraine. If Tamma's (2023) analysis proves to be correct over the coming years, then this may be another point of contention for 'America First' supporters.

Military Aid

For the first time, the EU will "finance the

purchase and delivery of weapons and other equipment for a country under attack” (Baume & Barigazzi, 2022). The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, described this as a “watershed moment” (Baume & Barigazzi, 2022). Such a donation is particularly notable as Ukraine is not an EU member state. It also demonstrates that both parties have a significant mutual interest in defending Ukraine from invasion. For the EU, as previously discussed, this interest is in part based on financial reasons, but there are also strong political and strategic motivations to it.

These funds were made possible by the European Peace Facility. This initiative is an “off-budget instrument” to allow the EU to act as a “global security provider” (European Commission, 2023). Undertaking such a new role is a significant development in the EU’s foreign policy. The EU will use this instrument to provide military equipment to increase their partners’ security and defence capacity (European Commission, 2023). The European Union External Action website describes Ukraine as a “priority partner”. Furthermore, as previously discussed, since June

2022, Ukraine has had “Candidate Status” as an EU member state (EUEA, 2022). Therefore, the European Peace Facility (EPF) has a legal basis to provide this military assistance to Ukraine as a partner.

The EPF will only release funds if respect for human rights and compliance with international humanitarian law can be guaranteed (European Commission, 2023). This criterion is one of the main reasons the EPF has been used to support Ukraine’s defence against Russia. Furthermore, the proximity of the conflict to the EU’s borders has severe strategic implications for the EU. Multiple EU member states share a border with Ukraine, raising the conflict’s profile for Eastern EU member states. For these states, there may exist anxieties that violence from the conflict could spill over from Ukraine. Indeed, earlier this year, on the Polish border with Ukraine, Polish civilians were killed by a projectile from a Ukrainian anti-air missile system (Charlish, 2023). It is easy to understand why the EU Eastern border.

By arming the Ukrainian Armed Forces with military equipment, the army will be able

COST EFFECTIVENESS?

A 60% majority of Republicans favour supporting Ukraine until Russia is defeated, according to a Harvard CAPS-Harris poll conducted in March (Thiessen, 2023, p. 2). However, support within the Republican party is softening, as the percentage of Republicans who believe the US is providing too

much aid increased from 9% to 40% (Thiessen, 2023, p. 2). As previously explored, overspending on aid to allies was a dominant concern of the ‘America First’ foreign policy pursued by Trump’s administration. Of course, achieving a cost-effective foreign policy is a goal of any presidential administra-

tion, so seeking cost-effectiveness alone is not a defining feature of an 'America First' foreign policy. However, supporting Ukraine from the Russian invasion has been far more central to the US interests since the end of the Cold War and perhaps the formation of NATO. Ukraine is a partner state of NATO (NATO b, 2023), and it borders multiple NATO member states. Therefore, supporting Ukrainian defence against Russian invasion is an objective which transcends the need for a fiscally prudent foreign policy. With this in mind, this chapter will explore the two reasons why the US aid program has been cost-effective for its goals. Firstly, the cost of a drawn-out war has been far more costly for Russia in the long term than the US. Secondly, the cost of non-interference would have been far more harmful to the US in the long run.

Aid to Ukraine: A long-term investment?

From an international strategic perspective, the US and their allies save money by confronting Russia now rather than later. Following the 2014 annexation of Crimea, Russia's foreign policy has been increasingly assertive. Academics have described this as "Russian adventurism" (Williams, 2020; Thiessen, 2023, para. 5). Examples of Russian adventurism include interference in the 2016 US elections, support for Assad's regime in Syria and issuing bounties on US soldiers for the Taliban (Williams, 2020, para. 4). Furthermore, multiple assassinations took place across European states against Russian dissidents, linked with the Russian Government (Pelley, 2022). Successive Presidential administrations have

taken positions on "Russian adventurism" with varying degrees of success (Macdonald, 2018, p. 405). Prior to the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, US and UK intelligence services warned the international community that Russia was building up their forces on Ukraine's border (Sabbagh, 2022). Despite these warnings from Ukraine's allies, Putin and Russian decision-makers felt emboldened enough to launch an invasion. Separating this event from the many other affairs that comprise the so-called "Russian adventurism" (Thiessen, 2023; Williams, 2022) is hard. The strategies the US and its allies employed to address "Russian adventurism" were unsuccessful in deterring the invasion. Thiessen (2023) argues that without a united response in opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "Russian adventurism" will only continue to cause expensive foreign policy issues for the US.

Thiessen (2023, para. 5) argues that by "decimating the Russian military threat", it will reduce the overall financial amount which the US will spend defending Europe whilst not risking the lives of American soldiers. Russia has suffered more combat deaths in Ukraine than in all of the wars since WW2 combined (Thiessen, 2023, para. 5). Its military has lost over 2000 tanks, half of its operational fleet, as well as "thousands of other pieces of military equipment, including combat aircraft, combat vehicles, unmanned aerial vehicles, radar and anti-aircraft systems, and at least 18 Navy ships" (Thiessen, 2023, para. 5). The British Defence Ministry estimates that 97% of the Russian army is committed to Ukraine (FitzGerald, 2023; Thiessen, 2023, para. 5). It will take years or likely decades for the Rus-

sian military to recover its losses since the start of the invasion. Furthermore, the support offered to Ukraine since the invasion may serve as a warning to future “Russian adventurism in Europe”. By making these financial sacrifices, the US and NATO allies may save themselves far more resources over the coming decades. This reasoning extends further than



the conflict in Ukraine and “Russian adventurism” in Europe. As a result of the war in Ukraine, Russia has been “forced to reduce its presence in Syria” (Thiessen, 2023 para. 5). Of course, 97% of Russia’s military has been dedicated now to fighting in Ukraine, demanding the redeployment of “critical military hardware” to this conflict (FitzGerald, 2023; Thiessen, 2023 para. 5). Forcing Russia to shrink its global military footprint, it will also have to re-evaluate its international objectives. US politicians would welcome this development as they could manoeuvre other global strategic challenges without effective Russian opposition. This development is certainly of note in the Arctic and Pacific regions, where Russia and the US have competed for strategic advantage (Thiessen, 2023, para. 5). Thiessen (2023, para. 5) even argues that as Russia recovers from the costs of invasion, the US economy may supplant Russia’s share of

the European energy markets, in addition to bolstering its position as a leading trade and investment partner.

From another perspective, the current US decision to neglect aid supplies could cost it enormously in the long run. If Ukraine could not defend itself from invasion, Russia would likely have taken over vast areas of its territory or even dominated the entire country. Such a situation would be problematic for NATO due to further encouraging ‘Russian adventurism’. An emboldened Russia could then decide on expansion into the territories of other former Soviet republics, which are current NATO members bordering Ukraine and Belarus (Lowry, 2022). In such a situation, NATO would need defence spending increases in its Eastern members far exceeding their current expanded budgets. This scenario would be expensive for individual NATO member states but also the US, potentially having to burden some of this load (Lowry, 2022; Thiessen, 2023, para. 5). Thiessen (2023, para. 5) suggests that this would require the deployment of more US troops to Europe, massive increases in US defence spending whilst attempting to defend their interests globally from another revanchist power like China. However, by avoiding this scenario, the US saves much more financially and strategically in the long run.

Having analysed the problems caused by “Russian adventurism”, both financial and strategic, this section displayed that ignoring this issue now will not support the US’ long-term objectives. ‘Some US politicians supporting the ‘America First’ foreign policy have criticised the spending on aid to Ukraine as being too expensive and unnecessary for

the US (Thiessen, 2023; Snell, 2022). Indeed, the US has contributed vast sums of aid to Ukraine, especially military equipment. However, by supporting Ukraine from invasion, the US has weakened Russia's military significantly, potentially even over the coming decades. Such actions will thus likely save US finances from opposing further "Russian adventurism" over the coming years, allowing them a strategic advantage over Russia in other regions. Furthermore, by funding the defence of Ukraine, the US has maintained a buffer between Russia and NATO member states bordering Ukraine. Such a development may save significant amounts of future spend-

ing, possibly directed toward strengthening NATO member states on the organisation's Eastern flank (Lowry, 2022). In this perspective, the US and its allies have saved a lot of future resources by providing aid in the short term. Considering this perspective makes the aid programme to Ukraine essentially cost-effective, contrary many US politicians criticising it as too expensive and unnecessary (Stokes, 2021; Rubin, 2022).

THE POLICIES OF SUCCESSIVE PRESIDENTIAL ADMINISTRATIONS

This paper well documented Senator Rand Paul's criticism of the US \$40 billion aid package to Ukraine (Snell, 2022). Senator Paul argued that the aid package was not fiscally responsible as the money would either be sourced from the existing US military budget or financed by charging higher taxes for Americans (Snell, 2022). He further stated - "Heaven forbid, Congress would loan the money to Ukraine" (Snell, 2022, para. 8). Indeed, loans have become an increasingly large portion of the aid the US supplies to Ukraine. It is worth exploring whether this is an effective solution to supporting Ukraine while saving US taxpayers money. This section will discuss how the US employs aid in the form of loans. It will further continue with outlining the approach of the Trump and Biden administrations to this tool.

Transition to Loans

Understanding the different structures of conventional US aid to Ukraine compared to its other allies is essential to this topic. The primary US tool to provide military aid to allies is the Foreign Military Financing (FMF) program. According to the Defence Security Cooperation Agency website, "FMF enables partner nations to purchase U.S. defence articles, services and training through either Foreign Military Sales or direct commercial grants for some countries" (Defence Security Cooperation Agency, 2023 para. 1). FMF is a source of financing based on either a grant or direct loan basis (Defence Security Cooperation Agency, 2023 para. 1). This characteristic allows US allies to access military equipment directly from US companies either through a

repayable scheme or a non-repayable scheme. US Department of State (2009) has stated the key objectives of the FMF. These objectives include improving the military capabilities of key friendly countries to contribute to crisis response operations, such as peacekeeping and humanitarian crises (USDOS, 2009 para 2). Furthermore, supporting democratically elected governments that share values similar to those of the United States for democracy, human rights, and regional stability is one of the goals (USDOS, 2009 para 2). However, perhaps of most significance to Ukraine is assisting the militaries of friendly countries and allies to procure U.S. defence articles and services that strengthen legitimate self-defence capabilities and security needs (USDOS, 2009). These objectives align with the US decision to support Ukraine in defending itself from Russian invasion. Therefore, Ukraine has a legal basis for receiving a large share of FMF, predominantly through grants.

Trump

The Trump administration has re-evaluated the FMF scheme for cost-effectiveness, specifically providing grants to countries that met the criteria for FMF support (Stokes, 2021, p. 5). President Trump's administration sought to phase out the use of grants under the FMF scheme and replace them with loans (Stokes, 2021, p. 4). Indeed, the Trump administration's skinny budget for the programme, released in March 2017, incorporated this transition to loans. Thus, the executive stated its intention to reduce costs to the taxpayer and allow recipients to purchase more American-made weaponry with US assistance on

a repayable basis (Hurley, 2017 para 1; Ferrarello, 2017, p.1). Then, in 2020, the Trump administration included caveats in the transition from grants to loans. Those caveats allowed for Egypt and Israel to continue receiving FMF grants, "while other FMF partners would receive either a blend of grants and loans or nothing at all" (Stokes, 2021, p.4).

Political concerns - such as prioritising taxpayer money, deciding which partners need the most support and the ethics of saddling poorer reliant countries with debt, - underpin this change. However, such a transition also created some international strategic concerns, as reliant partners may instead seek military equipment from Russia or China (Stokes, 2021, p.5). Such a situation could decrease the domestic production of the US military-industrial complex and drive former allies to their strategic rivals. For 'America First' politicians, this solution was favourable as it is fiscally prudent, saving taxpayer money and only supporting powerful partners with grants (Ferrarello, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, this relationship balanced fiscal prudence against maintaining the international US system of alliances.

and only supporting powerful partners with grants (Ferrarello, 2017, p. 1). Furthermore, this relationship balanced fiscal prudence against maintaining the international US system of alliances.

Biden

The Biden administration took a different position from the Trump administration whilst maintaining some of its predecessor's policies. Interestingly, the Biden administration has yet

to entirely halt the transition to loans made by the Trump administration.

Quantifying the exact proportion of aid provided to Ukraine exclusively through loans meets some difficulties. Most aid packages from the FMF scheme are bundles of grants and loans (USAID, 2023). 6% of Ukraine's total aid has been in grants and loans under the FMF scheme, around \$4.7 billion in September 2023 (Masters & Merrow, 2023). This figure represents around 10% of the military aid that the US has provided to Ukraine (Masters & Merrow, 2023). The other 90% comprises training, military equipment and other forms of support. Assuming that all of the 10% provided by FMF required repaying to the US at a later date, this is a small proportion compared to the overall size of the aid package received. However, this figure may be increasingly significant for Ukraine if the war continues on its current trajectory, requiring more aid from allies, increasingly supplied through loans. Furthermore, the state of Ukraine's post-war economy will heavily impact their ability to repay these loans.

The primary purpose of financial aid to Ukraine is to support and facilitate its post-war reconstruction (Becker et al., 2022, p. 7). Becker et al.'s (2022, p. 7) key principles for this reconstruction include putting Ukraine on a path to EU accession and establishing an EU-authorized agency to coordinate the reconstruction programme. Additionally, Ukraine must own its reconstruction programme, encouraging and facilitating foreign capital inflows. Finally, Becker highlights the importance of focusing aid on grants rather than loans (2022, p. 7). Prioritising these objectives would allow Ukraine's economy to

bounce back following the conflict while guaranteeing its lack of dependence on aid-providing states. The focus on grants rather than aid is significant, which Becker et al. (2022) highlight. A country "destroyed by war will be unlikely" to "repay additional debts in the short term" following the conflict (USAID, 2023; Becker et al., 2022, p. 7). Such an outcome will only increase the possibility of Ukraine facing a debt crisis in the future (Becker et al., 2022, p. 7), potentially requiring further grants or loans (Conahan, 1983). Therefore, it is essential to differentiate between financial costs concerning the effectiveness and efficiency of foreign aid (Olofsgard, 2022 para. 3). Proponents of supplying loans to Ukraine must decide whether the purpose of aid is a short-term fix to its dire situation or a means to help Ukraine's long-term reconstruction effort. It would be a political decision which is likely to split opinion. 'America First' proponents, such as Senator Paul, may reconsider the willingness to provide loans in this context if they will have to pay more money to a struggling Ukraine in the future. Becker et al. (2022, p. 7) point to the Marshall Plan as a postwar reconstruction model, which provided grants for 90% of disbursements. In contrast to this example, Olofsgard (2022, para. 6) cites the condition of the German economy after WWI as one of the risks of saddling a post-war country with high debt. In the long term, such a situation created more political and economic instability than if grants were provided instead of loans.

The Biden Administration has struggled with political disagreements over the nature of the US policy on foreign aid. At the start of the Russian invasion, support for significant

financial and military aid packages received bipartisan support (Snell, 2022). Such consensus even included many politicians who were otherwise supporters of the ‘America First foreign’ policy (Snell, 2022). However, this bipartisan support has shifted, with many Republicans again questioning the extent of the US involvement in Ukraine. Nevertheless, in September 2023, the Biden administration pledged a new class of missiles with long-range capability to Ukraine (Graham-Harrison, 2023).

At the end of September 2023, Republicans threatened to shut down Congress, rejecting the budget set forward by the Biden administration (Murphy et al., 2023). In order to avoid a shutdown, the White House dropped aid to Ukraine and increased federal disaster aid by \$16 billion instead (Mascaro et al., 2023). Of course, this money was not taken directly from a potential spending fund concerning Ukraine. However, ‘America First’ supporters largely viewed it as a win (Ferrarello, 2017, p. 1). This situation was due to the decrease in funding for international allies compared to the significantly increased funding for a domestic disaster budget (Ferrarel-

lo, 2017, p. 1). Support from ‘America First’ adherents has been central to this budgetary disagreement, with some politicians stating that merely funding Ukraine is already between “more than enough and way too much” (Murphy et al., 2023, para. 13). A Georgia representative was even quoted as saying that “Ukraine is not the 51st state” (Murphy et al., 2023, para. 14).

As of the first week of October 2023, Biden has vowed that his administration will “get it done” when referring to providing aid to Ukraine (Freking, 2023, para. 11). However, European allies have expressed concern about the political turmoil in Washington (Freking, 2023). Josep Borrell, the European Union foreign policy chief, told reporters that he is not expecting Biden’s vow to be the final word from Washington on aid to Ukraine (Freking, 2023). However, he highlighted that the threat of Russia has remained strong in the eyes of Europeans, who will act accordingly (Murphy, 2023; Freking, 2023). The message from Zelensky, criticising Washington decision-makers, has been similarly clear. In his daily address from Kyiv, he stated that “no one should be able to turn off Ukraine’s resilience” (Murphy, 2023, para. 25).

CONCLUSION

Decision-making regarding the conflict in Ukraine within Washington has become increasingly political. A particularly crucial point will be the number of political concessions won by 'America First' supporters regarding Ukraine. The concept of cost-effectiveness is a hurdle the Biden Administration may need to keep justifying to secure funding for Ukraine. This paper has highlighted that it is in the US's long-term strategic and financial interests to continue supporting Ukraine with aid packages. Further analysis also focused on

the significant contributions to Ukraine made by European allies. These contributions show far less political fatigue than in Washington, meaning that aid contributions to Ukraine will likely continue over the coming years. It will be worth observing how US decision-makers and 'America First' supporters react to the continuing US support for its allies. This continued assistance undermines a vital feature of the 'America First' foreign policy, as the US contributes disproportionately more than its allies to collective security objectives.

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