



A man holds a placard in support of Russian President Vladimir Putin as a tower of the Kremlin is seen in the background in Moscow June 24. (OSV News/Reuters/Maxim Shemetov)



by Michael Sean Winters

[View Author Profile](#)

Follow on Twitter at [@michaelswinters](#)

## [Join the Conversation](#)

December 15, 2023

[Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Email to a friend](#)[Print](#)

How did today's Republican Party become so willing to carry water for the Kremlin? As President Joe Biden [said](#) during Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's visit to Washington this week, failure to pass more aid to Ukraine would give "Putin the greatest Christmas gift they could possibly give him."

Republicans were unmoved. House Speaker Mike Johnson defended Republican intransigence. "I have asked the White House since the day that I was handed the gavel ... we need a clear articulation of the strategy to allow Ukraine to win," he said, "and thus far their responses have been insufficient."

The strategy? To push the Russian invaders back across the border. What is there to explain?

In addition to lame complaints about a lack of strategy, Republicans are using the funding for Ukraine to push for a crackdown on immigration here in the U.S.

**[Related: Ukraine vs. the US border: They are not alike](#)**

At [The New Yorker](#), Jonathan Blitzer offered a fine analysis of the status of negotiations about border security:

Typically, congressional negotiations on immigration involve an exchange: harsh enforcement measures at the border for the legalization of some portion of the country's undocumented population. Now, however, legalization of any sort is anathema to Republicans; Trump radicalized the Party on the issue and drove more moderate dealmakers into retirement or hiding. Party members are also claiming that measures beyond immediately tightening border enforcement represent a failure of national security. This is an old talking point with a new pretext.

None of that has anything to do with the clamant necessity of funding Ukraine's forces. Tacking unrelated bills to must-pass legislation is an old parliamentary trick. It sometimes backfires when negotiators overplay their hand.

In this case, however, the problem seems not that the GOP is overplaying its hand. It is that the leadership of the Republican Party is uninterested in the basic task of governance.

Stalin needed to send the Red Army into Eastern Europe to assert control.  
Putin only has to entice Mike Johnson.

[Tweet this](#)

Sustaining Ukraine's effort to maintain its independence is clearly in the national interest. Our NATO allies are watching, and if we allow Russian President Vladimir Putin to put Ukraine under his thumb, our allies will seek other alliances to preserve their integrity and independence. Stalin needed to send the Red Army into Eastern Europe to assert control. Putin only has to entice Mike Johnson.

It used to be the case that partisan politics stopped at the nation's borders. (It used to be a lot of things.) During the Cold War, a bipartisan consensus existed within the halls of Congress to contain the Soviet empire.

When the bipolar geo-strategic landscape collapsed with the Berlin Wall and was replaced by a multipolar geo-strategic one, the domestic political consensus collapsed into multipolarity too.

There are divisions not just between the parties but within them. Former Govs. Nikki Haley of South Carolina and Chris Christie of New Jersey continue to advocate for robust U.S. engagement in the world. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, [during a CNN town hall Tuesday night](#), complained about the amount of U.S. funding — "taxpayer dollars" — which had all the sincerity of Ronald Reagan's argument that eliminating "waste, fraud and abuse" would bring down domestic spending.

Advertisement

Former President Donald Trump has been [criticizing aid to Ukraine all year](#). Of course, he and Putin have a bromance going on and it is not hard to pinpoint the reason: Does anyone doubt that Trump watched Putin's [grandiose entrance](#) into the Kremlin for his inauguration and thought, "Wow, I would like something like that?"

It is not clear that Congress will come to Ukraine's aid before they break for a Christmas recess. Biden should play hardball. [Article II, Section 3](#) of the U.S. Constitution states that the president "may, on extraordinary occasions, convene both Houses, or either of them, and in case of disagreement between them, with respect to the time of adjournment, he may adjourn them to such time as he shall think proper."

This is the kind of extraordinary occasion that provision envisioned, and Biden should invoke it. Bring them back on the day after Christmas.

The president should also make a campaign swing through some of the Slavic neighborhoods of the Midwest and remind voters of the stakes.

The Polish neighborhoods of Cleveland, Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Louis might be receptive to his call for swift congressional action on Ukraine aid. They know that [Alexei Navalny has disappeared](#) and that Putin wants to make Ukraine disappear too. They know the consequences for Poland that would follow.

Today's Republican Party seems unwilling to risk anything to support democracy here at home, so perhaps it is not surprising that they are willing to abandon Ukraine to her fate. Democrats, starting with the president, need to follow Biden's lead in making clear to the American people that the GOP is doing Putin's bidding. Republicans are supporting the worst thugocracy of our time.