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Russia's War on Ukraine: U.S. Policy and the Role of Congress

On February 24, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, a country Russia first invaded in 2014 and has partially occupied for a decade. The war has led to hundreds of thousands of killed or wounded, according to U.S. and other estimates, and the displacement of more than nine million people as of May 2024, according to international humanitarian organizations. In 2024, Russia has conducted multiple offensives, seizing some additional Ukrainian towns and settlements. Ukraine continues to wage defensive operations, bolstered by military assistance mainly from the United States and Europe.

“The General Assembly ... reaffirms its commitment to the sovereignty, independence, unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine [and] declares that the unlawful actions of the Russian Federation ... have no validity under international law.”

U.N. General Assembly Resolution ES-11/4, Oct. 12, 2022

Leaders of the United States, NATO, the European Union (EU), and other partners have called the war against Ukraine “unprovoked and unjustified.” The United States, in coordination with the EU, NATO, and others, has provided substantial assistance to Ukraine, imposed a series of increasingly severe sanctions on Russia and its enablers, and sought to promote accountability for Russian war crimes. To deter further aggression, the United States and NATO have increased their military presence in Central and Eastern Europe. In the United States, policymakers and observers continue to consider the impact of assistance to Ukraine, the effectiveness of sanctions, the course of the conflict, and the implications of a protracted war. Congress may consider additional actions and oversight with respect to these and related issues.

Assistance to Ukraine

Since FY2022, Congress has enacted five supplemental appropriations measures providing assistance to Ukraine and other countries affected by the war, as well as related funding. Of a total \$174.2 billion in emergency appropriations made available by these acts, including \$60.8 billion in FY2024 supplemental appropriations (P.L. 118-50, Division B), Congress has appropriated about \$127.6 billion for assistance to Ukraine and other countries affected by the war. Of this amount, about \$77.4 billion has been for security assistance (including to replace U.S. defense articles provided to Ukraine), \$40.3 billion for economic assistance, and \$9.8 billion for humanitarian assistance. Congress appropriated another \$44.6 billion to support U.S. military operations in Europe and other U.S. government responses to the war, including for sanctions enforcement and refugee and entrant assistance (about \$2.1 billion has been appropriated for other global assistance purposes).

For Ukraine specifically, the Biden Administration to date has committed more than \$51 billion in security assistance, \$22.9 billion in direct financial assistance (with another \$7.85 billion anticipated for FY2024), and \$2.3 billion in humanitarian assistance since February 2022. The Administration also has provided, according to CRS estimates, around \$5 billion for Ukraine’s energy, governance, and agriculture sectors, among others, and to support the needs of Ukrainian refugees in other countries.

As of April 2024, European countries and EU institutions had made available more than \$100 billion in assistance for Ukraine since February 2022, including more than \$45 billion in security assistance. In February 2024, EU leaders approved an additional \$54 billion in assistance to Ukraine, to be disbursed through 2027. The EU has allocated an additional \$18 billion to provide for the needs of Ukrainian refugees in Europe; individual EU members also have provided refugee assistance. Japan, Canada, other countries, and international organizations also have provided assistance to Ukraine.

Sanctions

The United States, the EU, and others also have responded to Russia’s war on Ukraine with sanctions. Prior to 2022, the United States had imposed sanctions on Russia in response to Moscow’s 2014 invasion of Ukraine and other malign activities. Since February 2022, the United States has imposed sanctions on more than 4,400 individuals and entities, including Russian President Vladimir Putin, other Russian elites, Russia’s legislature, defense and technology firms, state-owned companies, and facilitators of sanctions evasion. U.S. sanctions restrict Russia’s central bank from drawing on its U.S.-dollar-denominated reserves, prohibit most major Russian banks from conducting transactions in U.S. dollars or with U.S. persons, and bar new U.S. investment in Russia. The United States has expanded export controls affecting Russia’s access to sensitive or desired U.S.-origin goods and technology; restricted the import of energy, gold, certain diamonds and metals, and certain other goods from Russia; banned the export of luxury goods and certain services to Russia; raised tariffs on many imports from Russia; and prohibited Russian use of U.S. airspace and ports.

In addition to executive branch actions, Congress has suspended normal trade relations with Russia (P.L. 117-110), prohibited the import of Russian oil and other energy products (P.L. 117-109), established sanctions on foreign persons who engage in gold transactions with Russia (P.L. 117-263, §5590), and imposed restrictions on the import of Russian uranium (P.L. 118-62).

The United States and the EU have closely cooperated in imposing sanctions on Russia for its ongoing aggression

toward Ukraine. In December 2022, the United States joined the EU and others in seeking to establish a global price cap of \$60 per barrel on Russian oil exports by banning nationals from providing maritime transport services for transactions above that price. Although the EU has not imposed sanctions on Russian natural gas imports, Russia has reduced natural gas flows to Europe. The Biden Administration has sought to help the EU reduce its dependence on Russian gas, including by boosting U.S. liquefied natural gas shipments to Europe.

By some metrics, Russia has weathered new sanctions better than many anticipated. According to the International Monetary Fund, Russia's economy, the 11th largest in the world in 2021, contracted by 1.2% in 2022 and grew an estimated 3.6% in 2023. A number of factors have buoyed Russia's economy: nimble policy responses by Russia's central bank; increased oil exports to China, India, and Turkey; imports of sanctioned items through intermediaries; increased military spending; and expropriation of foreign assets.

Sanctions also have created challenges for Russia. Its financial sector has lost hundreds of billions of dollars, its military has difficulty procuring key components, many Russian factories have suspended production because they cannot access foreign-origin parts, and hundreds of international companies have exited Russia. Russian government revenues from energy exports fell in 2023, military expenditures have increased, and Russia cannot borrow from international capital markets.

Seizures and Forfeitures

Through the U.S. Department of Justice's (DOJ's) Task Force KleptoCapture and the international Russian Elites, Proxies, and Oligarchs Task Force, the DOJ and the Department of the Treasury are working "to seize illicit Russian assets for the benefit of the people of Ukraine, and to prosecute those who facilitate the evasion of sanctions imposed on Russia." In February 2024, Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said that Task Force KleptoCapture had "restrained, seized, and obtained judgments to forfeit nearly \$700 million in assets from Russian enablers and charged more than 70 individuals for violating international sanctions and export controls levied against Russia." FY2023 appropriations provide authority for the transfer of proceeds of "covered forfeited property [forfeited on or before May 1, 2025] to provide assistance to Ukraine to remediate the harms of Russian aggression towards Ukraine" (P.L. 117-328, §1708). The DOJ used this authority in February 2023 for a \$5.4 million forfeiture of funds belonging to a Russian national who was indicted in 2022 for sanctions evasion.

In April 2024, Congress passed the Rebuilding Economic Prosperity and Opportunity for Ukrainians Act, which President Biden signed into law on April 24, 2024 (P.L. 118-50, Division F). The act authorizes the President to "seize, confiscate, transfer, or vest," for the purpose of providing compensation or assistance to Ukraine, Russian sovereign assets that are subject to U.S. jurisdiction and have been blocked or effectively immobilized. The act states that \$4-\$5 billion in immobilized Russian sovereign

assets is reportedly subject to U.S. jurisdiction, out of approximately \$280 billion immobilized worldwide (mostly in the EU, which in May 2024 authorized the use of "extraordinary revenues" generated by immobilized Russian assets to support Ukraine).

War Crimes Accountability

In February 2023, the Biden Administration determined that "members of Russia's forces and other Russian officials have committed crimes against humanity in Ukraine." Ukrainian authorities and others have accused Russian forces of perpetrating indiscriminate and mass killings, rape and other forms of sexual violence, the intentional targeting of civilians, and the forced "filtration" (interrogation and separation) of civilians and noncombatants—including children—from Russia-occupied territories in Ukraine. In May 2024, the State Department "made a determination ... that Russia has used the chemical weapon chloropicrin against Ukrainian forces in violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention."

DOJ is working "in partnership with Ukraine and the international community ... to hold Russia accountable for war crimes committed in its unjust invasion." In December 2023, DOJ "filed the first ever charges under the U.S. war crimes statute against four Russia-affiliated military personnel" for crimes against a U.S. citizen in Ukraine.

U.S. and NATO Force Posture in Europe

The United States has increased military deployments to Europe and led a broader NATO effort to deter further Russian aggression and to defend NATO allies, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe. Congress has supported the enhanced U.S. force presence and U.S. leadership of NATO defense and deterrence measures. In the 117th Congress, the Senate gave its advice and consent (Treaty Doc. 117-3) to approve Finland's and Sweden's accession to NATO (Finland and Sweden became NATO members in April 2023 and March 2024, respectively).

Following Russia's 2022 full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the United States deployed or extended about 20,000 additional armed forces to Europe. As of December 2023, the U.S. force posture in Europe, including permanently stationed forces, totaled approximately 80,000 military personnel. This includes rotational deployment of up to two Brigade Combat Teams in Central and Eastern Europe; deployment of about 10,000 troops to Poland, including 800 soldiers deployed to a U.S.-led NATO battlegroup; about 3,000 troops in Romania; and additional naval and air assets.

The increased U.S. military presence is part of an enhanced NATO defense and deterrence posture in the eastern part of the alliance. Allied troops deployed to the region for the first time in NATO's history after Russia's 2014 invasion of Ukraine. According to NATO, about 10,000 allied soldiers currently serve in multinational battlegroups in eight countries along NATO's eastern flank.

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