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OPINION

Pass Ukraine support now

Putin's aggression won't be stopped with appeasement





A woman walks by Ukrainian flags placed at a memorial for fallen soldiers downtown Kyiv, Ukraine, Wednesday, March 20, 2024. A Russian border region being pounded by Ukrainian shelling and drones is expanding its closure of schools and colleges amid a major evacuation plan, authorities announced Wednesday, as Kyiv's forces extend their campaign of long-range strikes that aim to put the Kremlin under pressure. (AP Photo/Vadim Ghirda) (Vadim Ghirda / ASSOCIATED PRESS)

By Larry Andre, Josh Busby, Paul Edgar, J. Paul Pope, Steve Slick and Jeremi Suri
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We are scholars and practitioners of national security at the University of Texas at Austin. We are alarmed that the United States may abandon the people of Ukraine, who are fighting bravely to repel an unprovoked invasion. The United States should act in its own interest by continuing to support Ukraine diplomatically, financially and militarily.

Vladimir Putin is a dictator and likely a war criminal. He started his attacks on Ukraine in 2014, using covert means and, eight years later, ordered a full-scale invasion. Based on our experience and reading of history, we judge that abandoning Ukraine would have profound consequences for the national security of the United States.

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By failing to appropriate additional funds to support Ukraine's defense against Russian aggression, Ukraine is likely to lose the war in the next two years, either by surrendering territory or by a government collapse and its replacement with an authoritarian regime led by a puppet sympathetic to Russia. A defeated Ukraine will become a second Belarus — a stalking horse for Putin's additional aggression in Europe.

Ukraine is a pivotal country in Europe. It is a major food producer through its production and export of grains. Its stability and pro-Western orientation is of profound significance to the region, the world economy and the United States. There can be no business as usual if this important part of Europe is under Russia's thumb.

D Opinion

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Should Ukraine fall and become a Russian proxy state, Putin would have the ability and incentive to go further and to destabilize NATO members, notably Poland and the Baltic countries. Other countries with large Russian-speaking minorities such as Moldova would be subject to further Russian intimidation, aggression and possible invasion.

The costs of supporting Ukraine are manageable and the benefits to U.S. national security are enormous. The pending appropriation of \$60 billion is a necessary and appropriate investment compared to the strategic consequences of Ukraine's defeat. Appeasing Putin now by abandoning Ukraine will make it likely that the U.S. will be required to send troops to Europe in future years and spend even more money – and potentially place our troops directly in harm's way. We are much better off stopping Putin now, before he threatens a NATO ally.

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Ukrainian patriots are defending their country from the Russians at enormous cost but with no expectation of comparable American sacrifice. Our aid to Ukraine is not charity. It's in our national interest. Indeed, up to one-third of the proposed aid package is actually to resupply the U.S. military with the weapons and equipment provided previously to Ukraine.

So far, our support for Ukraine has persuaded our allies in Europe to spend more of their own resources on defense and to approve more than \$50 billion in aid to Ukraine. Countries like Finland and Sweden have asked to become NATO members to protect themselves from Russian aggression.

President Ronald Reagan successfully pursued "peace through strength," standing up to Russian aggression, especially in Europe. His policies and those of his successor, George H.W. Bush, helped bring the Cold War to an end on favorable terms for the United States. The countries of Eastern and Central Europe were finally able to choose their destinies, and they embraced market economies, democracy and freedom.

Vladimir Putin has tried to reverse the course of history and re-create the Soviet Empire. We cannot let him reverse our victory in the Cold War. The world is watching whether the United States has the will to continue its defense of freedom and democracy. Americans are still determined to lead the world and punish lawless aggressors. We are confident Congress will reaffirm our nation's proud history.

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We conclude with three points that all Texans should understand.

1. Support for Ukraine is in America's interest.
2. If he succeeds in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin will pursue further conquests that will directly affect the lives of Americans and could require the use of U.S. forces.
3. The cost of supporting Ukraine today is far less than the future burden of defending America's interests in Europe against an emboldened Russian dictator.

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