

Is US aid to Ukraine really 'unprecedented'? New studies destroy the myth propagated by supporters of Western and Russian imperialism

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Politicians of Western governments never tire of asserting that aid from the US and EU for Ukraine is “unprecedented”. Supporters of Russian president Vladimir Putin basically say the same, albeit for different reasons, as they use such assertions to substantiate their claim that Ukraine is a “proxy” of Washington and Brussels.

While the US and Western Europe have sent military and economic aid to Ukraine to weaken their Eastern rival, it has always been wrong to assume that Ukraine's war of national defense is a struggle “in the service of Western imperialism”. Ukraine is an oppressed country and its people are fighting, first and foremost, for their right of national self-determination. [1] This is a struggle that socialists should support. At the same time, however, they must keep a strict policy of intransigent opposition against all imperialist powers – in the West as well as in the East. [2]

In any case, the assertion of “unprecedented” Western aid for Ukraine is completely wrong. This has been confirmed by two recently published documents. One is a statement by Michael McCaul, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the US House of Representatives. The second is a detailed study published by the *Kiel Institute for the World Economy*.

Only 20% goes to the Ukraine

Michael McCaul initiated a “hearing with the Inspectors General of the State Department, USAID, and Department of Defense on the transparency & accountability mechanisms for U.S. assistance to Ukraine.” [3] While McCaul is a Republican, he is not a Trumpian moron and remains fully committed to Washington's Great Power policy against its rivals: “It's been a year since Vladimir Putin launched his unprovoked war of aggression in Ukraine. And in response, Europe has provided significant aid, but must continue to do more to keep the Government of Ukraine from defaulting, and ensure it is able to prosecute this war. Additionally, Congress has also provided a significant amount of assistance to Ukraine to ensure Putin's aggression is stopped at Ukraine's border – and that a NATO ally is not next. I have supported U.S. assistance, because a victory by Putin in Ukraine would further embolden America's adversaries, from Chairman Xi in Beijing to the Ayatollah in Tehran to Kim Jong Un in North Korea.”

It is all the more remarkable that even such an unwavering advocate of military aid to Ukraine reveals the following facts: “Of the 113 billion dollars appropriated across four supplementals, approximately 60 percent is going to American troops, American workers, and to modernizing American stockpiles. In fact, only 20 percent of the funding is going directly to the Ukrainian government in the form of direct budgetary assistance.”

In other words, only 1/5 of U.S. aid for Ukraine actually goes directly to Ukraine, while 3/5 goes to the Pentagon and other US institutions. Hence, Ukraine aid is first and foremost “aid” for US imperialism, or to be more precise, subsidies from the US public budget to US monopolies and the Pentagon.

Revealing historical comparisons

However, even if one takes aid to Ukraine as a whole (and not only the share which actually goes to Kyiv), Western aid is not as unprecedented as its leading politicians boast. A few weeks ago, the German-based Kiel Institute for the World Economy published a comprehensive study which analyzes Western aid to Ukraine in detail and makes interesting historical comparisons. [\[4\]](#)

According to the authors, aid to Ukraine – calculated as total bilateral commitments plus refugee costs – is very uneven between Western countries when measured as a share of their GDP. While Eastern European countries make sizable contributions of 1-2% of their GDP, rich imperialist states are much more restrained. The US, Germany, France and Britain contribute no more than 0.31 to 0.37% of their GDP.

In terms of military aid, the study also reveals some interesting information. The authors show that Russia’s pre-war stock of heavy weapons was much larger than that of Ukraine (about three times). Newly committed heavy weapons by Western countries “amount to less than half of Ukraine’s pre-war stocks and only a fraction of Russia’s pre-war stocks.” Such weapons also constitute only a small fraction of NATO weapon stocks: “In aggregate, NATO countries have thus far committed about 3% of their tanks, 6% of their howitzers, and 5% of their MLRS to Ukraine.”

Another highly interesting finding of the study is the historical comparisons of Western aid to Ukraine with those in the Spanish Civil War as well as during World War II. The USSR, for example, received about 11,000 combat aircraft and about 7,500 tanks from the US during WWII. The authors conclude: “The difference in the scale of weapons committed is drastic. During 1941-45, the US sent more than 25,000 tanks and more than 15,000 airplanes to Great Britain alone. The USSR and France also received thousands of heavy weapons through the US Lend-Lease program. Compared to that, the total number of heavy weapons to Ukraine are just a fraction - less than 500 tanks and howitzers, respectively, and less than 100 MRLS. Also, the tally of weapons sent by foreign powers during the Spanish Civil War clearly outnumber that sent to Ukraine.”

The huge difference is also revealed when such military aid is measured as a share of GDP. The so-called Lend-Lease program of the US – as such military aid was called during World War II – to Britain corresponded “to 14.2% in total, or 3.2% of US GDP when averaged by year. Next comes the USSR, which received Lend-Lease support in the magnitude of 5.6% of US GDP in total, or 1.4% when averaging per year. The annual averages are significantly higher than the total support of the US or the UK committed to Ukraine in 2022 (0.21% and 0.18% of GDP, respectively).”

The authors also compare U.S. aid to Ukraine with its contributions in other wars after 1945. They conclude that “estimates suggest that the US expenses for the Korean war (2.8% of GDP per year) were more than 13 times higher than the amount committed to Ukraine in 2022 (0.21%). Similarly, the yearly expense numbers were almost 5 times higher in Vietnam, 3 times higher in Iraq, after 2003, and similar to expenditures in Afghanistan (0.25%).”

The difference is also huge if one compares Western contributions to Ukraine with those during the Gulf War 1990/91: “Germany has committed bilateral aid worth 0.17% of its GDP to Ukraine, but it has committed three times as much to liberate Kuwait in 1990/91 (0.55% of German GDP in 1991). The gap is even larger for Japan and South Korea, which thus far have given only limited bilateral

aid to Ukraine, especially when compared to the sizable commitments in the context of the Gulf War (0.02% and 0.01%, respectively)."

Conclusions

Well-known English historian Adam Tooze, who is a professor at Columbia University, commented "that the Kiel data reveal a vast gap between the declared intentions of the United States and Europe in backing Ukraine and what they are actually delivering. So what explains this shortfall? This raises the questions with which we began this newsletter. Are the Western powers cynical in promising to stand by Ukraine? Are they implicitly steering towards a stalemate? Do they actually favor a Ukrainian victory, but incompetence and "friction" causes them to fall short in matching the necessary means to the desired ends? Or are they struggling with a "reality gap" - failing to grasp the scale of what might be needed and what on other occasions and for other purposes they have been able to deliver? Personally, I think it is a mixture of all three." [5]

What is true is that Western imperialism has never been a serious supporter of Ukraine's war efforts. It tries to tactically utilize its struggle to weaken Russian imperialism - a long-standing rival of Washington and Brussels. [6] Furthermore, there exists a growing trend within the leading circles of Western imperialism to push Ukraine to bring the war to a close and accept a stalemate with Russia; that is, to accept Putin's occupation of several regions in the South and East of their country. [7]

In summary, we can arrive at the following conclusions.

1. Governments of Western imperialist powers boast about their support for Ukraine. Yet such support is not particularly large compared with other wars.
2. Actually delivered aid by Western governments is substantially smaller than the amount of money and weapons that has been promised.
3. Only a small proportion of aid goes to Ukraine directly. Three-fifths of US aid "for Ukraine" actually goes to US monopolies and the Pentagon.
4. Socialists need to denounce the propaganda of Putinists and semi-Putinists that claim Western aid to Ukraine is "unprecedented" and that Ukraine is a "proxy" of US and EU imperialism. In fact, the Ukrainian people are fighting, first and foremost, for their right of national self-determination.
5. Socialists should support the right of Ukraine to get material aid (including weapons) from wherever possible. They should oppose any political conditions attached to such aid by Western governments.

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P.S.

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<https://links.org.au/us-aid-ukraine-really-unprecedented-new-studies-destroy-myth-propagated-supporters-western-and>

Footnotes

- [1] For an analysis of the Ukraine I refer readers to a recently published pamphlet: Michael Pröbsting: *Ukraine: A Capitalist Semi-Colony. On the exploitation and deformation of Ukraine's economy by imperialist monopolies and oligarchs since capitalist restoration in 1991*, January 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/theory/ukraine-a-capitalist-semi-colony/>; see also by the same author: "The gigantic destruction of Ukrainian society", 15 December 2022, <https://links.org.au/gigantic-destruction-ukrainian-society>
- [2] I have elaborated such a position – together with my comrades in the RCIT – in a number of documents which are compiled at <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/compilation-of-documents-on-nato-russia-conflict/>.
- [3] McCaul Delivers Opening Remarks at Full Committee Hearing on Ukraine Oversight and Accountability, Press Release, 29.03.2023, <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-release/mccaul-delivers-opening-remarks-at-full-committee-hearing-on-ukraine-oversight-and-accountability/>. All quotes in this chapter are from this statement if not indicated otherwise.
- [4] Kiel Institute for the World Economy: "The Ukraine Support Tracker: Which countries help Ukraine and how?" Working Paper No. 2218, February 2023. All figures and quotes in this chapter, if not indicated otherwise, are from this study resp. the attached data file.
- [5] Adam Tooze: "Chartbook #197: The Ukraine-Aid Reality Gap", 25 February 2023, <https://adamtooze.substack.com/p/chartbook-197-the-ukraine-aid-reality>
- [6] For an analysis of Russian imperialism see e.g. Michael Pröbsting: "Russian Imperialism and Its Monopolies", in: *New Politics* Vol. XVIII No. 4, Whole Number 72, Winter 2022, https://newpol.org/issue_post/russian-imperialism-and-its-monopolies/ (the same essay has been republished by *International Viewpoint*, 21. April 2022, <https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7618>); by the same author: "Russia: An Imperialist Power or a 'Non-Hegemonic Empire in Gestation'? (Reply to Claudio Katz)", *New Politics*, <https://newpol.org/russia-an-imperialist-power-or-a-non-hegemonic-empire-in-gestation-a-reply-to-the-argentinean-economist-claudio-katz-an-essay-with-8-tables/>; "'Empire-ism' vs a Marxist analysis of imperialism: Continuing the debate with Argentinian economist Claudio Katz on Great Power rivalry, Russian imperialism and the Ukraine War", 03 March 2023, <https://links.org.au/empire-ism-vs-marxist-analysis-imperialism-continuing-debate-argentinian-economist-claudio-katz/>; "Lenin's Theory of Imperialism and the Rise of Russia as a Great Power", August 2014, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialism-theory-and-russia/>; "Russia as a Great Imperialist Power. The formation of Russian Monopoly Capital and its Empire", 18 March 2014, in: *Revolutionary Communism* No. 21, <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/imperialist-russia/>
- [7] See on this e.g. "Towards a Turning Point in the Ukraine War? The tasks of socialists in the light of possible lines of development of the war of national defence in combination with the inter-imperialist Great Power rivalry", 11 March 2023, <https://www.thecommunists.net/worldwide/global/towards-a-turning-point-in-the-ukraine-war/>