

White House considers adding Ukraine to Israel aid package

House Republicans warn sharply against effort to link support for Jerusalem and Kyiv, but some Biden officials see an advantage in doing so

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The White House is considering a move to attach Ukraine funding to a request for urgent aid to Israel, according to several people familiar with the deliberations, in the hopes that such a pairing would increase the chance that Congress would approve aid to Kyiv despite growing opposition from House Republicans.

No final decisions have been made on whether to link the requests, said two senior administration officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations. One of the officials said such a move could make sense because it “jams the far right,” which is firmly opposed to more Ukraine aid but strongly supportive of aid to Israel.

Top Biden administration officials have told leaders of the House and the Senate, as well as members of key committees, that the White House will soon ask Congress to approve additional military aid to Israel, after Palestinian gunmen from Hamas infiltrated the country Saturday and launched the deadliest attack in Israel since the 1973 Yom Kippur War, according to two people familiar with the matter, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe the private call. That request could come as early as next week, the people said.

More than 1,000 people in Israel and Gaza, including nine U.S. citizens, have died in the fighting so far. The surprise attack came after months of worsening tensions over violence at al-Aqsa Mosque, a Muslim holy site.

Israel has retaliated by announcing a full siege of Gaza, cutting off electricity, food and fuel in the densely populated enclave of 2 million people, where conditions are becoming dire. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned Monday that Israel's response was only just starting.

Democratic and Republican lawmakers have expressed overwhelming support for Israel since Saturday's attack and vowed that the United States would stand by one of its closest allies. That includes hard-right members of Congress who oppose continued aid

to Ukraine and argue that U.S. taxpayer dollars should not be used to fund a war thousands of miles from American borders.

While providing military and economic aid to Ukraine has fractured the GOP, there is near-unanimous support in the party for helping Israel. The thinking among White House officials, and some pro-Ukraine lawmakers, is that linking the two aid requests could prompt some Republicans to vote for the combined package, because they would be unwilling to block military aid to Israel after Netanyahu declared the country at war.

White House spokesman John Kirby declined to say whether the White House would link the two packages but said, “We believe both are important.” President Biden is scheduled to deliver remarks about the Hamas attacks on Tuesday afternoon.

Rep. Tony Gonzales (R-Tex.), a supporter of assistance to both Israel and Ukraine, said he does not see how the aid would not be tied together, especially if Congress hopes to address both before the next fiscal deadline.

But the potential plan was already facing roadblocks Monday. Asked about the prospect of a joint funding package, Rep. Elise Stefanik (N.Y.), the No. 3 House Republican, said, “Absolutely not.” House Republicans have the votes to pass a stand-alone Israel aid package, she said — a move that could put pressure on Senate Democrats to approve it without strings attached.

Rep. Kelly Armstrong (R-N.D.) is a supporter of Ukraine, but he said he wants a clearer understanding of how the aid to Kyiv is being spent and warned against using Israel emergency funding as a vehicle to push through Ukraine aid. “If they try to jam me with more money on Ukraine without telling us what the plan is, where we’re at and how we’re doing it, that’s going to be a real problem — not just for me, but for a lot of people,” he said.

The White House probably faces obstacles no matter how it proceeds. Chief among them is the turbulence in the House, which has not had a speaker since last week, when Republican lawmakers ousted Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-Calif.).

Under current House rules, it is the speaker who moves legislation, so the chamber’s ability to approve any foreign aid package is in doubt until McCarthy’s successor is chosen. That process will start Tuesday, but it is not clear when any candidate will secure enough support to declare victory.

In the meantime, House lawmakers could vote to give interim speaker Patrick T. McHenry (R-N.C.) temporary authority to bring bills to the floor, one congressional aide said.

But the White House was facing challenges in getting Ukraine aid passed in the House long before the chaos in the chamber's leadership. While a bipartisan majority of lawmakers support continued aid to Ukraine, a growing contingent of far-right Republicans has balked at additional requests.

One of the leading contenders to replace McCarthy, Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio), is openly opposed to the aid, while the other, Rep. Steve Scalise (R-La.), is considered more supportive but will have to respond to the outspoken faction of House Republicans who have said another package is a nonstarter.

Some analysts, even those who support aid to both countries, say the White House needs to be cautious of appearing to play political games at a time when Israel needs help.

"I definitely support both, but we should not tie them together," said Ariel Cohen, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center and a member of the Council on Foreign Relations. "This would be over-politicizing the Israel aid, and we should make the case for it on the merits."

The move also could also alienate some progressives, who in the past have expressed concern about, or outright opposition to, sending more military aid to Israel, which has imposed a years-long punishing blockade of Gaza and aggressively ramped up the development of settlements in the occupied West Bank. Netanyahu has also formed the most far-right government in Israel's history, sought to overhaul its independent judiciary and all but dismissed the idea of a two-state solution.

Now the region is bracing for a hard-hitting Israeli incursion into Gaza in retaliation for the weekend attacks. "What we will do to our enemies in the coming days will reverberate with them for generations," Netanyahu said, while Defense Minister Yoav Gallant added that Israel is fighting "animals" and would act accordingly, rhetoric that alarmed some observers who called it dehumanizing and urged restraint.

Still, congressional opposition on the left is unlikely to include more than a handful of House Democrats, according to two congressional aides, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal dynamics.

Linking Ukraine and Israel could give the White House a way to amplify its broader message that America has an obligation to help its democratic allies when they are attacked by ruthless or undemocratic forces.

The White House is not alone in seeing a connection between the causes of Jerusalem and Kyiv.

“We in Ukraine have a special feeling about what has happened,” Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky posted Saturday on X. “Thousands of rockets in the Israeli sky ... People killed just on the streets ... Civilian cars shot through ... Detainees being humiliated ... Our position is crystal clear: anyone who causes terror and death anywhere on the planet must be held accountable.”

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), a strong supporter of aid to Ukraine, also made the connection, in an op-ed published in the Wall Street Journal. “The world has again seen the face of evil,” McConnell wrote. “Those blessed to live in the democratic West must understand that this barbarism, like that in Russia’s war against Ukraine, threatens all of us.”

Israeli officials have made several specific requests to Washington in response to the military offensive by Hamas, including a replenishment of Iron Dome interceptors, small-diameter bombs, various rounds of ammunition for machine guns and heightened cooperation on intelligence-sharing related to potential military activities in southern Lebanon, according to U.S. officials familiar with the requests.

White House officials said they do not need congressional approval to begin providing the aid, and Biden has already directed Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to meet several of the requests. But officials said they will need congressional action to replenish the stocks.

The simultaneous requests for military aid from Ukraine and Israel, meanwhile, could add to the strain on U.S. stockpiles as it supports two allies at the same time. Israel’s request for 155-millimeter high-explosive shells, in particular, could cause irritation among Ukraine’s supporters, as the munition is in short supply and desperately needed by Kyiv.

It is not the first time the shells have been at issue. Following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last year, U.S. officials sought to transfer 155mm shells to Ukraine that were kept in storage in Israel. Though the shells did not belong to Israel, Israeli officials balked at Washington’s request, forcing a negotiation that resulted in a smaller transfer.

U.S. officials declined to say how many U.S. rounds are currently left in Israel, but one official said Israel’s refusal to approve Washington’s full munitions request means that a significant amount remain in the country.

Israel’s request for Iron Dome interceptors is a precautionary step in anticipation of future bombardments, not an indication that it is running low on a missile defense tool that has been key to shielding Israelis from incoming rocket fire, officials said. Military operations could last for several weeks, and Israel made the request in case other regional actors join in, according to people familiar with the request.

Rep. Ralph Norman (R-S.C.), an opponent of Ukraine aid, said he would “absolutely” support an emergency request for Israel because it is a U.S. ally and a “shining light” in the Middle East. He said that he hoped requests for Ukraine and Israel aid would not be connected but that he would not rule out voting for a package that includes aid for both countries.

“I hope it’s not tied together,” Norman added. “It doesn’t need to be.”

Jacqueline Alemany and Marianna Sotomayor contributed to this report.