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# 'Protect Our Sky,' Pleads Ukraine Leader in Gut-Punch U.S. Address

By Frankie Taggart for AFP

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Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky. **vk.com/vladimir_zelenskiy95**

Ukraine's besieged leader invoked September 11 and Pearl Harbor in an impassioned address Wednesday to the U.S. Congress, imploring Washington to step up military aid and impose a no-fly zone to counter the Russian invasion closing in on Kyiv.

Paraphrasing civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and presenting a chilling video of the death and destruction visited on Ukrainian cities by Moscow's onslaught, President Volodymyr Zelenskiy delivered a speech tailored for maximum impact on his audience as he seeks to ramp up pressure for a more aggressive U.S. response.

President Joe Biden was expected to follow-up by announcing an additional $800 million in military aid to Ukraine, but the White House has consistently rejected the idea of a no-fly zone for fear of an escalation that could bring NATO countries into direct conflict with Russian forces.

More than three weeks into a war that has claimed hundreds of civilian lives and displaced three million people abroad, Zelensky addressed Congress by video link from an unknown location in Kyiv, telling lawmakers his country was battling "a terror that Europe has not seen... for 80 years."

"Remember Pearl Harbor, terrible morning of December 7, 1941, when your sky was black from the planes attacking you," he said, recalling the air raid that brought the United States into World War II.

"Remember September 11, a terrible day in 2001 when evil tried to turn your cities, independent territories, in battlefields," he told lawmakers.

"Our country experienced the same every day," said Zelensky, wearing his now trademark green army T-shirt, a Ukrainian flag behind him.

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The third president of post-Soviet Ukraine to address the U.S. Congress, Zelenskiy's appearance was being touted as the most dramatic by a foreign leader since Winston Churchill in 1941.

But it was the civil rights activist King that the comedian-turned-wartime leader recalled as he pleaded for a no-fly zone to defend Ukraine's skies.

"I have a dream, these words are known to each of you today I can say. I have a need, I need to protect our sky. I need your decision, your help," he said.

## 'Leader of peace'

Addressing Biden directly, Zelenskiy urged him to be "the leader of peace" as he showed lawmakers wrenching footage of ruined buildings and injured Ukrainian civilians including children, with the final frame showing the words "close the sky."

Zelenskiy's appearance — greeted by a standing ovation in the U.S. Capitol complex — came less than a week after lawmakers green-lit nearly $14 billion in humanitarian and military aid for the war-torn nation.

It was his second speech to members of Congress, having talked to 300 of them during a video call earlier this month, but the first time he appealed directly to the American public.

Biden is expected to announce a total of $1 billion in new security help to Ukraine later Wednesday — $200 million already allocated over the weekend and $800 million in new funds from the aid package signed into law on Tuesday.

And the House of Representatives is set to vote this week on legislation to revoke normal trade relations with Russia, just days after Biden announced a U.S. ban on Russian oil and gas.

But the renewed call for more help to beef up Ukrainian air defenses beyond Stinger and Javelin missiles is likely to maintain the pressure on Biden to go further.

The Democratic chairman of the powerful Senate intelligence committee, Mark Warner, declared himself "incredibly moved" by Zelenskiy's address, saying Washington must heed his call for additional anti-tank weapons and anti-aircraft missiles — though stopping short of backing his call for a no-fly zone.

## 'That's called World War III'

Short of closing Ukraine's skies, many lawmakers have backed Zelensky's pleas for U.S. officials to help broker the transfer of Soviet-style weapons to Ukraine, including MiG fighter jets from Poland and S-300 surface-to-air missile systems.

Biden — who heads to Europe next week for talks with NATO allies — is grappling with concerns Russia might see any such move as an escalation, while officials have also raised questions about how useful MiG fighters would be to Kyiv.

"The idea that we're going to send in offensive equipment and have planes and tanks and trains going in with American pilots and American crews — just understand, don't kid yourself, no matter what you all say, that's called World War III," Biden told House Democrats last week.

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