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U.S. Announces Emergency Ukraine Aid, as Poles Warn of Russia Threat

By Danny Kemp for AFP

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U.S. President Joe Biden (C) and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken (2L) look on during a joint meeting with Polish President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Donald Tusk at the White House in Washington, March 12. **Brendan Smialowsky / AFP**

U.S. President Joe Biden announced an emergency $300 million military aid shipment for Ukraine on Tuesday, as Poland's leaders visited the White House to warn of the growing threat from Russia.

The White House sidestepped Republicans in Congress, who have for months blocked a much larger package for Kyiv's desperate fight, by using money that the Pentagon had saved on recent purchases.

But it warned that the new stopgap package would only last weeks, far too little to stem recent military advances by Russian President Vladimir Putin's troops as they take advantage of U.S. paralysis.

The announcement came as Biden was preparing to host Poland's President Andrzej Duda and Prime Minister Donald Tusk, who came bearing warnings that Russia's aggression will not stop at Ukraine.

"This ammunition will keep Ukraine's guns firing for a period, but only a short period," White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan told reporters as he announced the aid package.

Sullivan added that the aid may only last a couple of weeks, leaving Ukraine outgunned in the face of a Russian war machine that is churning out arms and throwing troops at stalemated towns to force a breakthrough.

"It is nowhere near enough to meet Ukraine's battlefield needs and it will not prevent Ukraine from running out of ammunition in the weeks to come."

The shipment would include long-range U.S.-made HIMARS rocket systems, anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons, artillery shells and small arms ammunition, the Pentagon said.

"It is a relatively small package to give Ukraine the minimum of what it needs for a short amount of time," a senior defense official told reporters, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Republican lawmakers have been stalling Biden's request for a $60 billion aid package for Ukraine, with the Democratic president's rival Donald Trump urging them not to give him a legislative win in an election year.

'Out of time'

Also Tuesday, the State Department notified Congress that it was approving nearly $3.5 billion in missile sales to Poland.

The sales include 821 AGM-158B-2 air-to-surface missiles and 745 AIM-120C-8 air-to-air missiles.

Alarm has been growing among US allies over both the Republican blockage of the Ukraine aid as well as threats by Trump to cut funding for Kyiv if elected in November, while encouraging Russia to invade NATO countries that fail to meet defense spending goals.

Moscow is meanwhile pushing forward with an offensive in the east of Ukraine where it has made a series of recent gains as the war grinds on into its third year.

The head of the Central Intelligence Agency said on Tuesday of the price of inaction.

"Ukraine is not running out of courage and tenacity — they're running out of ammunition. And we're running out of time to help them," CIA Director William Burns told Congress.

A US intelligence assessment published Monday said that the deadlock was "increasingly shifting the momentum in Moscow's favor."

The war has sparked fears in Poland and other eastern European countries formerly under the Soviet boot that an aggressive Russia could strike a NATO nation next if it is allowed to win in Ukraine.

Biden warned at the start of his meeting with Poland's Duda Tuesday, "We must act before it literally is too late."

"Russia won't stop at Ukraine. Putin will keep going, putting Europe, the United States and the entire free world at risk," Biden said.

Before leaving for Washington, Duda had said that NATO members should increase their defense spending to 3% of GDP in response to Russia's war in Ukraine.

Duda said NATO must give a "clear and courageous response to Russian aggression."

The Western defense alliance currently has a defense spending target of 2% of gross domestic product, though Poland already spends around 4% and the United States spends 3.5%.

Biden's meeting with Duda and Tusk comes on the 25th anniversary of the day that former Soviet-bloc Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joined NATO.

The U.S. president will meanwhile try to push pro-EU premier Tusk and right-wing president Duda to patch up their differences to ensure a key ally of Ukraine remains stable.

Tusk, a former EU chief, won elections in October and has since faced near-daily battles with right-wing president Duda. Biden would discuss "democratic values" with the feuding pair, the White House said.

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