

Zelenskyy Pleads to US Congress: 'We Need You Right Now'

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy summoned the memory of Pearl Harbor and the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks on Wednesday as he appealed to the U.S. Congress to do more to help Ukraine's fight against Russia. But he acknowledged the no-fly zone he has sought to "close the sky" to the Russians over his country may not happen.

Livestreamed into the Capitol complex, Zelenskyy said the U.S. must sanction Russian lawmakers and block imports. But rather than an enforced no-fly zone, he instead sought other military aid to stop Russian airstrikes.

For the first time in a public address to world leaders, he showed a packed auditorium of lawmakers a graphic video of the destruction and devastation his country has suffered in the war, along with heartbreaking scenes of civilian casualties.

"We need you right now," Zelenskyy said. "I call on you to do more."

Lawmakers gave him a standing ovation, before and after his short remarks, which Zelenskyy began in Ukrainian through an interpreter but then switched to English in a heartfelt appeal to help end the bloodshed.

"I see no sense in life if it cannot stop the deaths," he said.

Nearing the three-week mark in an ever-escalating war, Zelenskyy has used the global stage to implore allied leaders to help stop the Russian invasion of his country. The actor-turned-president often draws from history, giving weight to

his appearances.

President Joe Biden's administration has stopped short of providing a no-fly zone or the transfer of military jets from neighboring Poland as the U.S. seeks to avoid a direct confrontation with Russia.

Biden was to deliver his own address following Zelenskyy's speech, and was expected to announce an additional \$800 million in security assistance to Ukraine, according to a White House official. That would bring the total announced in the past week alone to \$1 billion. It includes money for anti-armor and air defense weapons, according to the official, who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Zelenskyy has emerged as a heroic figure at the center of what many view as the biggest security threat to Europe since World War II. Almost 3 million refugees have fled Ukraine, the fastest exodus in modern times.

Wearing his now trademark army green T-shirt, Zelenskyy began the remarks to his "American friends" by invoking the destruction the U.S. suffered in 1941 when Japan bombed the naval base at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii, and the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon by militants who commandeered passenger airplanes to crash into the symbols of Western democracy and economy.

"Remember Pearl Harbor? ... Remember September 11?" Zelenskyy asked. "Our countries experience the same every day right now."

The U.S. Congress has remain remarkably unified in its support of Ukraine and lawmakers emerged steadfast in their resolve.

Sen. Angus King, the Maine independent. said there was a "collective holding of the breath" in the room during Zelenskyy's address. Republican Sen. Lisa Murkowski of Alaska

said, "If you did not look at that video and feel there is an obligation for not only the United States but but the free countries of the world to come together in support of Ukraine, you had your eyes closed." Majority Whip Dick Durbin called the address "heartbreaking" and said, "I'm on board with a blank check on sanctions, just whatever we can do to stop this Russian advance."

Outside the Capitol demonstrators held a large sign lawmakers saw as they walked back to their offices. "No Fly Zone=World War 3."

The Ukrainian president is no stranger to Congress, having played a central role in Donald Trump's first impeachment. As president, Trump was accused of withholding security aid to Ukraine as he pressured Zelenskyy to dig up dirt on political rival Biden. Zelenskyy spoke Wednesday from a giant screen to many of the same Republican lawmakers who declined to impeach or convict Trump but are among the bipartisan groundswell in Congress now clamoring for military aid to Ukraine.

He thanked the American people, saying Ukraine is grateful for the outpouring of support, even as he urged Biden to do more.

"You are the leader of the nation. I wish you be the leader of the world," he said "Being the leader of the world means being the leader of peace."

It was the latest visit as Zelenskyy uses the West's great legislative bodies in his appeals for help. Invoking Shakespeare's *Hamlet* last week, Zelenskyy asked the British House of Commons whether Ukraine is "to be or not to be." On Tuesday, he appealed to "Dear Justin" as he addressed the Canadian Parliament and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. Zelenskyy called on European Union leaders at the start of the war to do the politically unthinkable and fast-track Ukraine's membership – and he has continued to push for more help to save his young democracy than world leaders have so far

pledged to do.

To Congress, he mentioned the faces of past presidents on Mount Rushmore and told the lawmakers that people in his country want to live “our national dream, just like the you have.”

“Democracy, independence, freedom.”

Biden has insisted there will be no U.S. troops on the ground in Ukraine and has resisted Zelenskyy’s relentless pleas for warplanes as too risky, potentially escalating into a direct confrontation with nuclear-armed Russia.

“Direct conflict between NATO and Russia is World War III,” Biden has said.

Zelenskyy appeared to acknowledge the political reality.

“Is this too much to ask to create a no-fly zone over Ukraine?” he asked, answering his own question. “If this is too much to ask, we offer an alternative,” he said, calling for weapons systems that would help fight Russian aircraft.

Already the Biden administration has sent Ukraine more than 600 Stinger missiles, 2,600 Javelin anti-armor systems, unmanned aerial system tracking radars, grenade launchers, 200 shotguns, 200 machine guns and nearly 40 million rounds of small arms ammunition, along with helicopters, patrol boats, satellite imagery and body armor, helmets, and other tactical gear, the U.S. official said.

The White House is considering giving Ukraine access to Switchblade drones that can fly and strike Russian targets, according to a person familiar with the matter who was not authorized to speak publicly.

Congress has already approved \$13.6 billion in military and humanitarian aid for Ukraine, and the newly announced security aid will come from that allotment, which is part of a broader

bill that Biden signed into law Tuesday. {eoa}

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