

The US should embrace its role as the world's armory against aggression
Michael Makovsky (opinion contributor) - The Hill



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Arming Ukraine enjoys overwhelming bipartisan support in Washington. But the United States should not stop there. Instead, President Biden and Congress should transform their Ukraine policy into a global strategy — America should become an armory against aggression.

Last Thursday, President Joe Biden proposed [\\$33 billion](#) in military and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine. That same day, the House of Representatives joined the Senate in [updating a World War II-era law](#) to enable quickly arming Ukraine. The original legislation — the Lend-Lease Act — was inspired by President Franklin Roosevelt's vision of America as an arsenal of democracy.

In December 1940, 16 months into World War II and one year before the U.S. became a combatant, [Roosevelt told Americans](#) that to avoid military engagement while protecting national interests the United States needed to “support the nations defending themselves against attack by the Axis.”

He continued, referring primarily to Britain, “The people of Europe who are defending themselves do not ask us to do their fighting. They ask us for the implements of war, the planes, the tanks, the guns, the freighters, which will enable them to fight for their liberty and our security.”

He insisted America “must be the great arsenal of democracy.... We must apply ourselves to our task with the same resolution, the same sense of urgency, the same spirit of patriotism and sacrifice, as we would show were we at war.”

The global situation today is not as dire as it was then, and America is a superpower, but similarities are growing. The Axis of 1940 — Germany, Italy, and Japan — was

in Roosevelt's words, "an unholy alliance of power and pelf to dominate and enslave the human race." Today, China, Russia and Iran comprise the anti-American, anti-Western "Axis," with far-reaching ambitions for influence and domination.

*The United States is again wary of military confrontation; it has recently **eschewed retaliating** for Iranian-backed attacks on U.S. soldiers and **facilitating the transfer** of Polish MiG-29 Fulcrum fighter jets to Ukraine out of fear of escalation.*

*American leaders seem to be, as Winston Churchill **said** of Britain in 1931, "suffering from a disease of the will....the victims of a nervous collapse."*

Faced with global challenges but blessed with capable partners, President Biden should adopt Roosevelt's vision. The United States should become a robust supplier of weapons to front-line partners willing to fight against today's "Axis" powers.

That coalition should include moderate non-democratic allies who stand with the United States and the West against aggression. This would involve, as it did in 1940, an intense expansion of our military industrial capacity after years of decline.

Three countries — Ukraine, Israel and Taiwan — illustrate the implications. The United States is finally beginning to transfer tanks, artillery and air defense batteries that would help Ukraine to hold off further Russian advances. The aim should be for Ukraine to prevail.

It should do the same in the Middle East. Iran's rising aggression imperils America's regional position. Its advance toward the nuclear threshold threatens the very existence of U.S. regional allies and, eventually, the American homeland.

Yet, America's "disease of the will" is most prevalent here; no one reasonably believes the U.S. is now prepared to fulfill, militarily, three decades of commitments to prevent a nuclear Iran. That responsibility will soon fall on Israel, with only the timing dependent upon whether or not there's a new nuclear agreement.

The Biden administration should embrace Israeli determination to survive, as it has now embraced Ukraine's, and expedite delivery of KC-46 aerial refueling planes, F-15I fighter jets, precision-guided munitions and other weapons Israel needs to prevent a nuclear Iran.

China poses the greatest threat to U.S. interests in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, with Taiwan on the immediate front line. Vice Admiral (ret.) John Bird, former commander of the 7th Fleet and co-chair of the Jewish Institute for National Security of America's (JINSA) Israel-China Policy Project, told me the United States should not expect, as in Ukraine, to resupply Taiwan once a Chinese invasion starts.

Instead, we should intensify supplying Taiwan capabilities in air defense (Patriots, THAAD), air denial (Stingers), anti-ship cruise (Harpoons) and anti-tank missiles (Javelins), while also partnering in indigenous production of advanced weaponry, and boosting U.S. naval and air capabilities to help deter and stave off an attack.

Arming its partners can help the United States avoid unnecessary military engagements while keeping its adversaries at bay. Still, it is not an alternative to strengthening U.S. military capabilities and possessing the will to use them when necessary.

Roosevelt's vision for America marked critical progress over isolationism, albeit a stopgap until he led the country into war one year later following Pearl Harbor. So, too, for the Biden administration — vigorously embracing a policy of “armory against aggression” would inject dynamism and coherence into his foreign policy and mark a critical advance in U.S. national security.

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