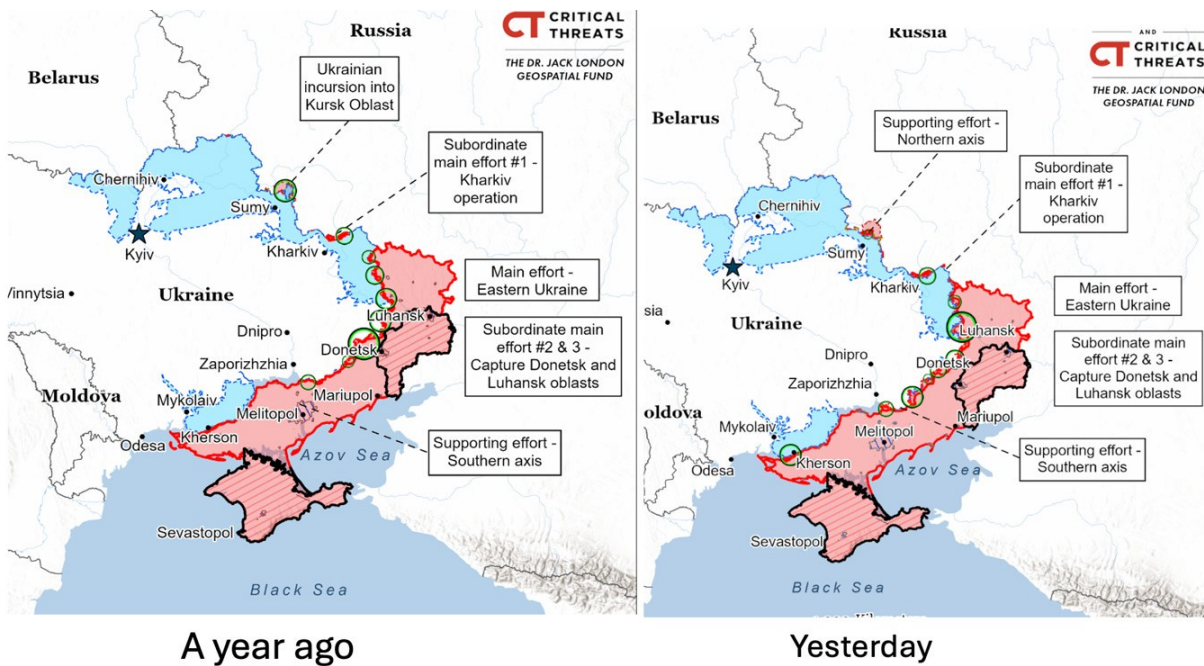


## Day 1461 of Putin’s Three-Day War

*di Paul Krugman*



Source: Institute for the Study of War

Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Putin expected a quick Russian triumph — reports are that he expected the Ukrainians to fold in days. He never said “three days,” but this meme has become shorthand for his belief that it would be a walkover. Western military analysts who had bought into propaganda about Russia’s military strength shared his assessment.

U.S. right-wingers were especially enthralled with what they perceived as the toughness, masculinity, and anti-wokeness of Russian soldiers.

But Putin's dream of a short, victorious war has turned — as such dreams usually do — into a long nightmare of blood, destruction and humiliation. Ukrainian courage and Russian incompetence — combined with the effectiveness of British and American man-portable weapons — ensured that the attempt to seize Kyiv became an epic debacle. The three-day war is about to enter its fifth year.

I am not a military expert. But I pay attention to those who are — especially [Phillips O'Brien](#), who has been far more right about this war than anyone else I know. Furthermore, the future of the war will depend greatly on an issue I *do* know something about, Europe's ability to provide Ukraine with the support it needs. So I thought I would use the fourth anniversary of the beginning of the war to talk about where we are right now.

First, about the military situation. The maps at the top of this post show how the area of Ukraine under Russian control — shaded pink — has changed over the past year. You may ask, *what* change? Exactly. The Ukraine war isn't like World War II, in which breakthroughs could be exploited by armored columns sweeping into the enemy's rear. It's a war in which the battlefield is swarming with drones, where there isn't even a well-defined front line, and the “[kill zone](#)” within which even armored vehicles are basically death traps is many kilometers wide.

Some observers still don't understand how the reality of war has changed. Thus there have been breathless reports about the danger Ukraine would face after Russia seized the “strategic city” of Pokrovsk since [July 2024](#). Russian forces finally entered Pokrovsk late last year and may now occupy most of the rubble. But it made no difference.

This reality shows how idiotic it is for the U.S. Department of Defense — sorry, Department of War — to decide that its mission is to embrace a “[warrior ethos](#).” Bulging biceps and macho posturing won't help you prevail in modern war, while bombastic stupidity is a good way to get many soldiers killed.

So if modern technology has turned war on the ground into a bloody stalemate — much bloodier for Russia than for Ukraine, but still indecisive — what will determine victory and defeat? The answer, which has been true in most wars, is that it will come down to resources and logistics.

If this were purely a conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Ukrainians, for all their heroism, would be doomed. Russia, after all, has four times Ukraine's population and ten times its GDP.

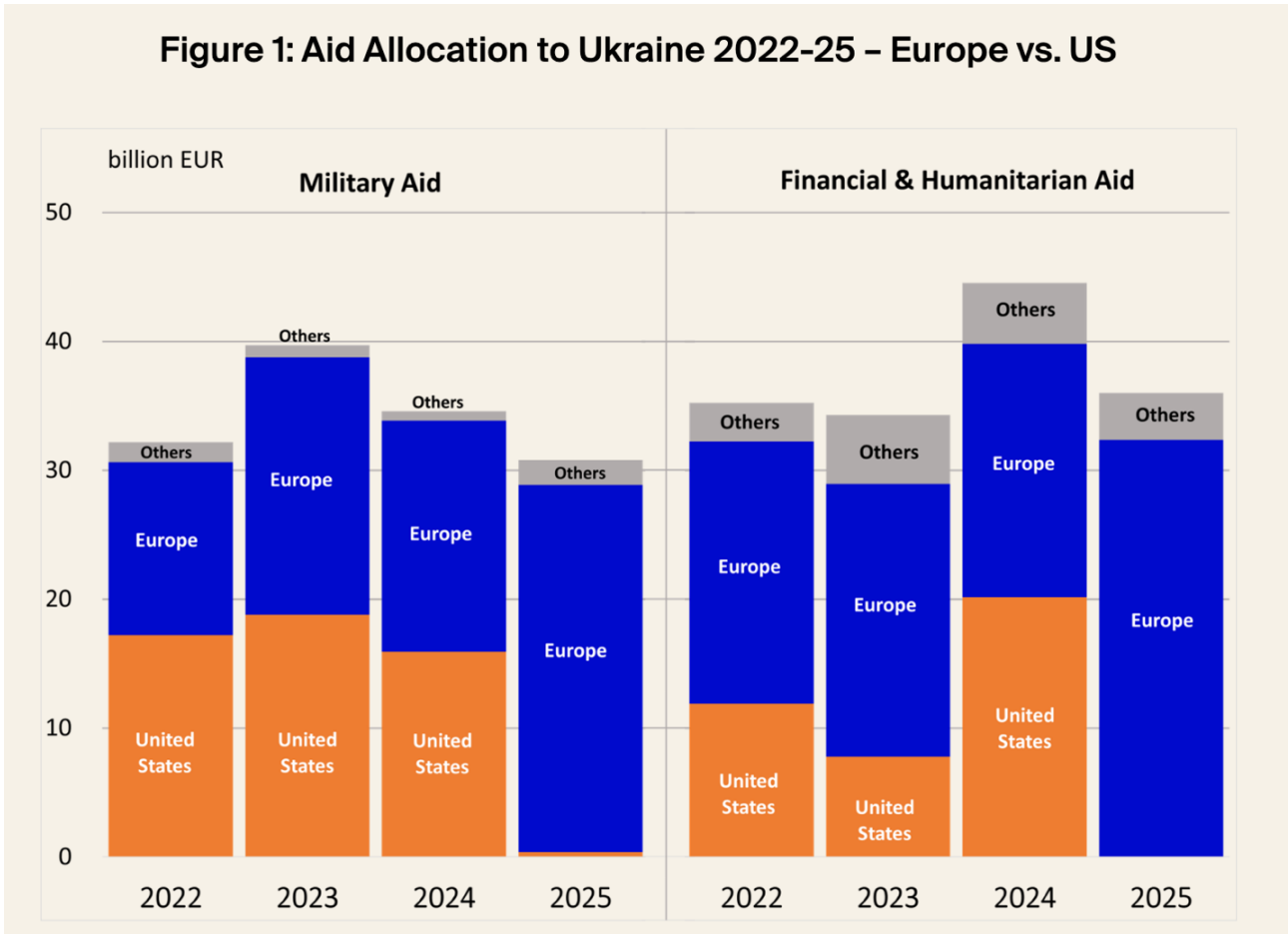
But Ukraine has powerful friends.

For the first three years of the war, the United States was the most important of these friends. Indeed, Ukraine wouldn't have been able to resist Russia without U.S. aid.

Unfortunately, top Biden officials were too cautious. They didn't want Putin to win, but they clearly lost their nerve at the prospect of outright Russian defeat. So they slow-walked aid and kept putting restrictions on the use of U.S. weapons. Without those restrictions, Ukraine would have been able to hammer Russian rear areas, and this war might well have ended in its first year.

As it was, Ukraine was able to hang on but not triumph. And now we have a U.S. president who clearly wants to see a Russian victory. He's unwilling or unable to openly throw America's weight behind Putin, but he has effectively cut off all U.S. aid to Ukraine. That's not hyperbole. Here are the numbers:

**Figure 1: Aid Allocation to Ukraine 2022-25 – Europe vs. US**



Source: [Kiel Institute](#)

This is a betrayal of everything America used to stand for. We’re witnessing a war between freedom and tyranny, between an imperfect but decent government and a monstrous mass murderer — and the U.S. government is de facto backing the tyrannical monster.

Yet despite Trump’s pro-Putin policy, Ukraine is still standing, while Russia’s year-long offensive has been a bloody failure. While Trump may have thought that he could discreetly hand Ukraine over to Putin, it turns out that he didn’t have the cards.

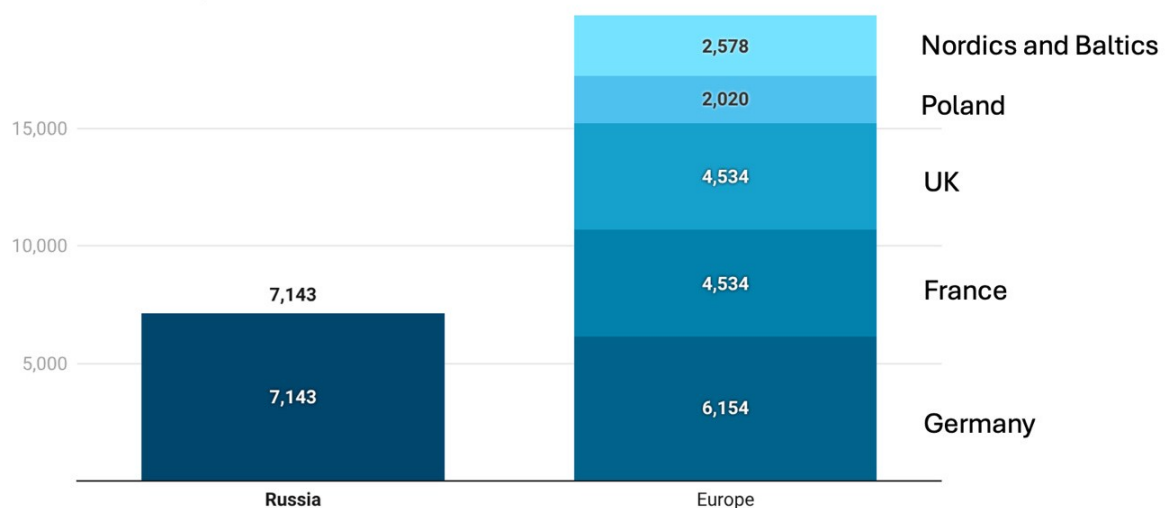
Crucially, as you can see from the chart above, Europe has for the most part stepped up to the plate, replacing most of the lost aid from the United States. True, some of the military aid takes the form of U.S. weapons purchased by European nations and transferred to Ukraine. In particular, there is still no good alternative to Patriot air

defense systems. And the Trump administration has been stalling some military deliveries even though Europe is paying.

But European — and, increasingly, Ukrainian — arms production has been ramping up. One indicator of European potential for arms manufacturing is that U.S. officials have [gone ballistic](#) over proposed buy-European provisions in Europe’s ongoing military buildup and threatened retaliation. This is quite rich: America in effect reserves the right to use its control over weapon systems to hobble other countries’ military efforts — on behalf of dictators the president likes — but is furious at any attempt to reduce dependence on those systems.

But does Europe have the resources to ensure Ukrainian victory without the United States? Mark Rutte, a Dutch politician who is currently secretary-general of NATO, made waves last month when he told people who believe that Europe can defend itself against Russia without the United States to “[keep on dreaming](#).” One sees similar declarations of helplessness from some other Europeans. But it’s really difficult to see where this defeatism is coming from. Combined, the economies of the European nations that have strongly supported Ukraine are vastly larger than Russia’s:

### GDP in 2025, \$billion at PPP



Created with Datawrapper

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Source: International Monetary Fund

It's true that Europe has in the past had great difficulty acting like the superpower it is. But that may be changing.

So, how will this war end? Russia's strategy now appears to be to terror-bomb Ukraine into submission, but as far as I know that has never worked. The more likely outcome is that European aid and Ukraine's own growing prowess in arms production will gradually shift the military balance in Ukraine's favor, and that Russia's war effort will eventually collapse.

I hope that's how it turns out. But even if it does, shame on America, for betraying a valiant ally.