

October 22, 2024

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Antony Blinken
United States Secretary of State
The State Department
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear President Biden, Secretary Blinken, and Secretary Austin,

We the 13 undersigned organizations, representing faith-based, humanitarian, human rights, think tank and open government organizations write to you to urge the immediate release of President Biden's congressionally mandated strategy on the war in Ukraine. As the war in Ukraine grinds on, it is becoming increasingly clear that a diplomatic resolution to the conflict is the best way to secure a sovereign and prosperous future for Ukraine. Military aid alone will not achieve this goal. Without a strategy driving U.S. engagement that includes robust diplomatic engagement, clear objectives, and realistic plans, the United States risks unnecessarily lengthening a bloody war at the cost of Ukrainian lives, homes, and livelihoods. As such, we are deeply concerned by the Biden Administration's failure to release an unclassified version of their Ukraine strategy, as required by law.

Over two and half years into Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine – and after more than ten years of Russian occupation of Crimea and fighting in the east – both the suffering and the resilience of the Ukrainian people have been marked. UNHCR data shows that more than six million people have been forced to flee Ukraine since February 24, 2022, while at least ten thousand civilians have been killed¹. Women and girls have been disproportionately affected by sexual violence², horrifically weaponized as a tool of terror and control; civilians living in occupied territory are subject to torture, execution, and the suppression of civil liberties³. Mines

¹ "Ukraine: Report Reveals War's Long-Term Impact Which Will Be Felt 'for Generations,'" United Nations, February 22, 2024, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2024/02/1146842>.

² "Rapid Gender Analysis of Ukraine," UN Women, 2022, <https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-05/Rapid-Gender-Analysis-of-Ukraine-en.pdf>.

³ "'Two Year Update' Protection of Civilians: Impact of Hostilities on Civilians since 24 February 2022," OHCHR, 2024, <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/2024-02/two-year-update-protection-civilians-impact-hostilities-civilians-24.pdf>.

and explosive remnants of war have killed hundreds of civilians⁴, especially men and boys, and will have generational environmental and safety consequences. Other environmental impacts of the war include pollution caused by the bombing of weapons and fuel depots⁵, and the intentional destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in 2023⁶. There has also been enormous damage to civilian infrastructure. The UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine records that, since the beginning of the war, hostilities damaged or destroyed more than one thousand educational facilities and more than four hundred medical facilities⁷. We are deeply concerned by the human suffering caused by this war. As long as the war is ongoing, Ukrainians will continue to bear these costs, and it will remain impossible to end the suffering or to rebuild.

Section 504 of the FY2024 National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act (P.L. 118-50) enacted in April, required the Biden Administration to prepare a strategy for engagement in Ukraine, which would “be submitted in unclassified form but may include a classified annex.” The report was to be submitted to the Foreign Affairs/Foreign Relations, Armed Services, and Appropriations Committees in each chamber, and include “specific and achievable objectives, define and prioritize United States national security interests, and include the metrics to be used to measure progress in achieving such objectives.”⁸

While the Biden Administration did submit a report to these committees after the mandated deadline, it was entirely classified.⁹ Therefore this report has neither fulfilled the congressional mandate nor enabled the public to review or comment on the strategy. Committee chairs in the House have since called for the Administration to release the unclassified version, arguing that, “all of Congress and the American people deserve to understand how their hard-earned tax dollars are being spent.”¹⁰

We add our collective voices to this call for transparency and accountability through the release of an unclassified strategy, and hope that the strategy submitted includes plans for robust diplomatic engagement.

We are devastated by the continued loss of life in the region, as minimal progress is made towards a negotiated resolution that would allow for Ukraine to recover, rebuild and look to a

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ “The Environmental Impact of the Conflict in Ukraine,” United Nations Environment Programme, 2022, https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/40746/environmental_impact_Ukraine_conflict.pdf.

⁶ James Glanz et al., “Why the Evidence Suggests Russia Blew up the Kakhovka Dam,” The New York Times, June 16, 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/06/16/world/europe/ukraine-kakhovka-dam-collapse.html>.

⁷ *Ibid*

⁸ “Making emergency supplemental appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2024, and for other purposes” P.L. 118-50, (2023), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/house-bill/815/>.

⁹ Patricia Zengerle, “Biden Administration Sends Congress Long-Awaited Ukraine Strategy Report, Sources Say” Reuters, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/biden-administration-sends-congress-long-awaited-ukraine-strategy-report-sources-2024-09-09/>.

¹⁰ “McCaul, Rogers, Turner, Cole, Calvert, Díaz-Balart Demand Biden-Harris Admin Release Unclassified Ukraine Strategy,” House Committee on Foreign Affairs, September 25, 2024, <https://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press-release/mccaul-rogers-turner-cole-calvert-diaz-balart-demand-biden-harris-admin-release-unclassified-ukraine-strategy/>.

free, democratic and prosperous future. We are deeply concerned by the lack of transparency and democratic accountability the United States government has shown in this matter.

As Congress rightly determined in the FY2024 National Security Supplemental Appropriations Act, the Administration's strategy for Ukraine should be submitted in unclassified form, so that the public can understand their government's engagement in Ukraine. In a conflict framed by President Biden as a "battle between democracy and autocracy, between liberty and repression, between a rules-based order and one governed by brute force"¹¹, the United States should be setting the example of democratic accountability, not obscuring information from its citizens. We call on the Biden Administration to expeditiously release the unclassified version of the Ukraine strategy report as required by law.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security
Church of the Brethren, Office of Peacebuilding Policy
Demand Progress Education Fund
Friends Committee on National Legislation
Just Foreign Policy
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
Pax Christi USA
Peace Action
Presbyterian Church (USA), Office of Public Witness
Project On Government Oversight
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
The United Church of Christ

¹¹ "Remarks by President Biden on the United Efforts of the Free World to Support the People of Ukraine," The White House, March 26, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/03/26/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-united-efforts-of-the-free-world-to-support-the-people-of-ukraine/>.