Russian War on Ukraine Churns American Politics

written by Dan La Botz | March 9, 2022

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The Russian war on Ukraine has completely roiled American politics. Ultimately it could determine the future of President Joseph Biden and former president Donald Trump, both of whom may be candidates for president in 2024. Both parties find the war has complicated their possibilities in the November 2022 mid-term elections. Biden can take credit for bringing Democrats and Republicans together, uniting the country in support of Ukraine and in opposition to Russian president Vladimir Putin. He has also claimed success in reuniting NATO around a strategy of sanctions. Nevertheless, rival plans in both parties about what to do next swirl through Congress and the political elite. Republicans work to discipline their party and put down its pro-Putin elements, while Democrats deal with differences over sanctions.

In the Republican Party, former vice-president Mike Pence, also a presidential contender, announced, there "is no room in this party for apologists for Putin," aiming a blow at his old boss, former president Donald Trump. Trump first expressed admiration for Putin's genius then sympathy for Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky. Trump still leads the party, but some Republicans believe that his ambivalent-at-best position on Putin could harm their chances in the mid-terms.

Republican Senator of South Carolina, Lindsey Graham, is not at all ambivalent. He has called for someone in Russia to kill Vladimir Putin or to organize a coup to overthrow him, a position repudiated by Biden and by Republicans. Meanwhile, rightwing congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, attended a white nationalist political meeting where people cheered for Putin. Still, most Republicans now line up behind Ukraine and oppose Putin.

Republicans hope to make Biden's handling of the war and the impact of sanctions major campaign issues in the November midterm. They argue that Biden's failure to place stronger energy sanctions on Russia means that the U.S. oil purchases are helping to finance Putin's war while raising the price of gasoline. A Republican governors' statement says, "People in our states cannot afford another spike at the gas pump, and our allies cannot afford to be held hostage by Putin's tyranny and aggression." Other Republicans demand Biden reverse his environmental positions that have limited oil and gas leases and pipelines and make the United States energy independent.

Democrats are divided on sanctions. So far, Biden is opposed to banning Russian oil and gas imports, but Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi says, "I'm all for it, ban them." Democratic Senator

Joe Manchin of West Virginia, who represents the coal industry, and Senator Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, an oil rich state, are proposing a new bill with stronger sanctions on Russian oil

Biden has been trying to avoid actions that might provoke a full-scale European confrontation that could lead to nuclear war. But Tom Malinowski, Democratic congressman from New Jersey, suggests that the United States should plan for an airlift to save Kyiv like the 1948-49 Berlin airlift. Any such operation, however, would almost surely lead to an immediate military conflict with Russia.

So far, the Ukraine war has helped Biden. His State of the Union address on March 1, brought him standing ovations from both sides of aisle for his support for Ukraine. He also takes credit for strong gains in employment, with 678,000 jobs created in February. His overall approval rating rose 8 points to 47 percent in a recent poll. This improves Democrats' chances in November, but it is still likely that they will lose control of Congress.

There have been popular demonstrations against the Russian war and in support of Ukraine, mostly by Ukrainian-Americans. Some have called for a greater U.S. and NATO role in the conflict. The U.S. left has been slow to respond, though it is now beginning to organize demonstration against Russia's invasion, though nowhere as large as Europe's