

War in Ukraine

US to return diplomats to Ukraine and seeks a 'weakened' Russia

Blinken and Austin meet Zelensky in Kyiv as Washington steps up support



US secretary of state Antony Blinken, right, and defence secretary Lloyd Austin became the highest ranking US officials to visit Ukraine since Russia invaded 2 months ago © Ukrainian Presidential Press Office/AP

James Politi in Washington and **Felicia Schwartz** in New York 6 MINUTES AGO

Stay across the latest Ukraine coverage

 **Get instant email alerts**



The US has pledged to resume diplomatic operations in Ukraine and said it wanted to see Russia “weakened” by its ongoing war after a stealth trip to Kyiv by secretary of state Antony Blinken and defence secretary Lloyd Austin.

Blinken and Austin met Volodymyr Zelensky, the country’s president, in the Ukrainian capital on Sunday, disclosing the visit only after they left the country early on Monday for security reasons.

They are the highest-ranking US officials to travel to Ukraine since Russia’s invasion began in late February. The trip came after a string of senior European officials and [heads of government](#) made the same journey in recent weeks.

Blinken told officials in Kyiv that the US would restart its diplomatic presence in the country, beginning this week with day trips to the western city of Lviv and offered the country more than \$322mn in new military funding.

“We’ll seek to have our diplomats return to our embassy in Kyiv as soon as possible,” a senior state department official said, according to a note disseminated to reporters.

As the war enters a new phase, Austin said Washington ultimately wants to see Russia unable to repeat its Ukrainian offensive in the future.

“We want to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can’t do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine,” he said.

Austin said in a briefing in Poland that the meeting with Zelensky had been “very productive”.

Blinken said: “In terms of Russia’s war aims, Russia has already failed and Ukraine has already succeeded.”

The visit by Blinken and Austin came after the US [intensified its provision of heavy weaponry](#) to Ukraine to help it defend itself from Russia’s offensive. Moscow has shifted its focus to the eastern and southern parts of the country after failing in its original intent to quickly seize significant Ukrainian cities and decapitate the government.

According to a senior defence official who briefed reporters, the US is also offering more than \$322mn to Ukraine in additional funding for its military operations, part of a broader aid package of more than \$713mn destined for other central and eastern European countries, as well as the sale of \$165mn worth of ex-Soviet ammunition the Ukrainians are accustomed to using.

Austin also briefed Ukrainian officials on howitzer artillery units the US was providing Kyiv and on related training it was holding in an unidentified third country. The US defence secretary will on Tuesday visit Ramstein, Germany, to discuss the state of the war with several of his counterparts as well as Nato secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg.

In addition, US president Joe Biden is set to nominate Bridget Brink to be the next ambassador to Ukraine, a position that has been vacant throughout his administration. Brink is a career diplomat currently serving as US ambassador to Slovakia.

Austin and Blinken travelled into Kyiv via train from south-east Poland but officials travelling with them declined to name the town, citing security concerns.

Despite some speculation that Biden might visit Kyiv, the White House had consistently ruled out such a trip. The senior defence official told reporters that “the President of the United States is somewhat singular, in terms of what travel would require. It goes well beyond what a cabinet secretary would or what virtually any

require. It goes well beyond what a cabinet secretary would or what virtually any other world leader would require.”

Austin and Blinken travelled on separate planes, leaving Washington on Saturday and stopping over in eastern Poland along the way. Zelensky said he was [expecting their visit](#), before the US had disclosed it, but a senior defence official suggested this did not spoil the trip.

“It’s his country,” the official said. “It didn’t change anything about our commitment to go there today and to share what we have to say.”

[Copyright](#) The Financial Times Limited 2022. All rights reserved.
