

**US foreign policy**

## US government shutdown fight puts new Israel and Ukraine aid in doubt

With days to go, Congress is still without a deal to boost funding for allies at war



Politicians on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC, at a vigil last week commemorating Hamas's October 7 attacks on Israel © Drew Angerer/Getty Images

**Alex Rogers** and **James Politi** in Washington NOVEMBER 11 2023

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The US Congress is far from a deal to avoid a looming government shutdown and pass President Joe Biden's \$106bn request for security aid to Ukraine and Israel, as another budgetary stand-off in Washington's threatens to undercut the White House's foreign policy goals.

With less than a week to go before a Friday deadline to pass a spending bill or shutter federal offices and operations, [Republicans and Democrats](#) have no clear path to a compromise, amid deep divisions on international aid, funding for border security, and the direction of fiscal policy.

The prospect of a looming shutdown with no aid approved for Ukraine and Israel threatens to overshadow the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation ([Apec](#)) [summit](#) Biden is hosting in San Francisco next week, including his planned meeting with China's President Xi Jinping.

The Pentagon warned this week it was being forced to "meter out" its support for Kyiv, after 95 per cent of its funds for Ukraine had been exhausted.

"We're going to continue to roll out packages, they just are getting smaller," Sabrina Singh, the defence department's deputy press secretary, told reporters on Thursday.

“So we really implore Congress to pass the supplemental request that the president sent up so that we can continue to meet [Ukraine’s battlefield needs](#),” she added.

The stand-off over the federal budget also poses the first leadership test for new Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson, who was elected to the position last month after far-right dissidents ousted Kevin McCarthy from the post for striking a deal with Democrats to avoid the last shutdown threat, just six weeks ago.

Given the big gap between Biden’s request for Ukraine and Israel and what Republicans are prepared to pass, lawmakers have been discussing whether they can pass a new stop-gap funding measure to give more time for negotiations until mid-December. But it is unclear whether such a so-called “continuing resolution” has enough support in both chambers of Congress.

Republicans have grown increasingly wary of further aid to Ukraine and are pushing for policies to prevent the flow of migrants coming over the US-Mexico border in exchange for their support. Although the White House and Democrats have their own plans to tighten border security, they are not as aggressive, so no agreement is in sight.

There is broader bipartisan support in Congress to pass additional aid to Israel, but House Republicans have tied it to an unrelated measure gutting the Internal Revenue Service’s ability to audit wealthy Americans and big business, making it unpalatable to Democrats.

Some Democrats are also pushing back against unconditional aid to Israel. Chris Van Hollen of Maryland and other Democratic senators wrote to the administration this week, asking to “ensure that any US-provided equipment is used in a [manner consistent with US law](#)”.

With a [shutdown looming](#), on November 17, Johnson unveiled a proposal on Saturday that would shutter different parts of the government by different deadlines in order to raise pressure for a deal. The idea has baffled even Republican allies — and the new speaker, a little known ally of former president Donald Trump from northwestern Louisiana, is facing criticism for wasting precious time.

“I still have reservations about that approach because it means we would have to confront the possibility of a government shutdown more than once,” said Susan Collins, a Republican senator from Maine. “That just seems to me to be taking an unnecessary risk.”

Senator Dick Durbin, who has served in Congress for 40 years, said other veterans of the Senate “chuckled” when they heard of Johnson’s idea. “Most of us are sceptical,” the Illinois Democrat told the Financial Times.

“I haven’t figured out why we would want to do that,” said Democrat Tim Kaine, a Virginia senator.

Asked about the path forward for Ukraine and Israel aid, Senator Mitt Romney said simply, “that’s a big topic”. Congressman Chuck Fleischmann, a Tennessee Republican, said “candidly” he was “unsure”.

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