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# Biden in Kyiv - what are the effects of a personal example?



Since World War II, US presidents have visited combat zones around the world about 30 times. They mostly visited US units, and sometimes held important talks with the allies during World War II.

President Joe Biden's surprise visit to Kyiv on Monday has been the first trip by a US commander-in-chief to a combat zone where no US troops have been deployed.

A strong gesture of solidarity since The White House announced that President Biden would visit Poland on February 20, on the eve of the anniversary of the beginning of the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Even the Polish media speculated that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky might also visit Poland on that occasion, in order to continue talks with Biden.

No one could predict the arrival of Biden in Kyiv, which could not be officially announced due to the high security risk.

In March last year, only a month after the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, Biden was in Europe and he talked with allies, but at that time he excluded a visit to Kyiv.

What has changed in the meantime? Security risks have certainly not changed. They are just as bad as they were a year ago.

## A message to Russia, allies and adversaries in the US

So far, almost all Western leaders have visited Kyiv. Former and current UK Prime Minister, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, and presidents or prime ministers of almost all other NATO and EU members.

In order to demonstrate full unity, the visit of the US president has been awaited as the most significant so far, given the unquestionable leadership of the US in terms of political,

military and economic support of the West for Ukraine.

Biden's announced arrival in Poland at the time of the anniversary of the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine has already been a rather strong blow to Moscow, as proof that even after a year, the US is not giving up on Ukraine as its political and security priority.

By coming to Kyiv, Biden reinforced that symbolic message many times over. He visited Kyiv at a time when Russian missile attacks have been intensifying and their new offensive has been looming.

This has rather discouraged Russia's constant expectations of a decline in Western attention to the Ukrainian war, and particularly its hopes for a decline in sending military aid to Kyiv.

"When Putin launched his invasion nearly one year ago, he thought Ukraine was weak and the West was divided. He thought he could outlast us. But he was dead wrong", Biden said in Kyiv.

Biden also came to Ukraine to collect "profits" from the domestic front in the US, since he has been working hard to secure agreement in Congress regarding the continuation of large monetary and military aid to Ukraine. He indirectly admitted this during the conversation with Zelensky:

"For all the disagreement we have in our Congress on some issues, there is significant agreement on support for Ukraine."

There was also a strong element of personal example, where his arrival in Kyiv, at a time when Russian military activity has been intensifying, would be perceived as a gesture of undeniable personal courage and determination to achieve the goal.

## Cancellation of soft tones from the Munich conference

Biden's sudden arrival in Kyiv would also bring

balance to a whole series of rather moderate messages that Western leaders sent from the Munich Security Conference.

The impression from the Munich Conference was that the Western leaders celebrated the preservation of their internal unity during the past year of the Ukrainian crisis far more than dealing with the matters important to Kyiv.

Primarily, speeding up and increasing the amount of military aid, necessary for the defence against Russian aggression.

Also, in some of the most anticipated performances at the Munich conference, messages related to the period after the end of Russian aggression prevailed, and not how to get to that day in general.

US Vice President Kamala Harris, for example, brought as the main message for the Conference, the established responsibility of Russia for “widespread and systematic attack” against Ukraine’s civilian population, committing war crimes and illegal acts against non-combatants.

French President Macron said that he wanted Russia to be defeated in Ukraine, but not for Russia to be crushed.

In this respect, and particularly from the point of view of Ukrainian expectations, Biden's arrival in Kyiv just one day after the Munich conference cancelled out a certain defeatism that prevailed in Munich.

With Biden's visit, Zelensky and Ukraine received a demonstration of the "speed" they so persistently demand from the West, as the most important factor in this phase of defence against aggression.

While the speeches in Munich did not particularly promise to speed up the delivery of weapons and training of Ukrainian soldiers, Biden's arrival in Kyiv was undoubtedly the answer that Ukraine expected.

In Kyiv, Biden announced a new \$500 million in support for Ukraine, including more military

equipment, artillery ammunition, rocket launchers and howitzers.

His interlocutor, President Zelensky, added to that list “long range weapons and the weapons that may still be supplied to Ukraine even though it wasn’t supplied before.”