

Putin to Exploit U.S. Economic Pain to Bring Biden Midterms Misery

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Russia retaliated again this week to U.S. sanctions with its latest blacklist of Americans, **which included Joe Biden's family**. Experts warn **Moscow could try to harm Biden more directly in the midterm elections** by raising questions about the cost of the Ukraine war. The intelligence community has already raised concerns that Vladimir Putin will draw on the playbook of cyber attacks and propaganda which evidence shows impacted the 2016 and 2020 U.S. elections. **But costly U.S. support for Ukraine as Americans battle soaring inflation**, which Biden blames on Putin, as well as **a possible recession**, could **give the Kremlin ample opportunity to exploit division as voters go to the polls in November**.

*"Anything Putin can do to sow doubt in Americans' minds about the **moral necessity, economic cost and practical impact** of our support for Ukraine's sovereignty, he surely will attempt,"* Stephen Hanson, vice provost for academic and international affairs at Virginia's College of William & Mary told Newsweek.

The concerns come as former U.S. intelligence officials have warned that **Putin will try to get Americans to question their support for Ukraine and promote politicians who can reverse sanctions**. Homeland and national security officials told **CNN** that Russia might be considering staging hacks of local election authorities, with the deliberate purpose of being noticed. They could then use that to promote more conspiracies about the integrity of American elections, which could be amplified on **Facebook** and **Twitter**. A declassified report by the **Department of Homeland Security's** (DHS) Office of Intelligence and Analysis warned that Russia would likely depress voting and undermine the midterms in revenge for the U.S.-led response to the invasion of Ukraine.

The DHS report, which also described **threats coming from China and Iran**, said that Moscow would view this as an "equitable response" to U.S. actions over Ukraine. These include tough sanctions on Russia as well as **Washington providing \$1.4 billion in a security aid package to Kyiv** that included High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS.

But with inflation in the U.S. at 11 percent and Biden repeatedly connecting Putin's name with the economic turmoil they are feeling right now, **Americans might balk in the coming months at their support for Ukraine**, which the Kremlin could tap into.

"They can exploit a number of existing realities. One of those realities is the economic toll that the war is taking on the United States, especially as we see in inflation and gas prices. That creates an enormous political vulnerability, a political opportunity," said Ken Osgood, humanities professor at Colorado School of Mines. **"People will start asking 'is this war really worth all the economic pain or suffering?'** and Russia will almost certainly exacerbate those concerns," he told Newsweek. *"It has a tremendous power of amplifying messages,"* he said, *"It can take the voices that are already out there and add more, make them louder, through Twitter feeds and bots and things of that nature."*

Osgood said Moscow does not need to push a linear argument that the war is directly causing inflation but instead exploit how people "see the connections between parallel arguments." He said conservative outlets like **Fox News** might pin inflation on Biden, noting the war in Ukraine, while hosts like **Tucker Carlson** might **"put out the message**, raising doubts about our framing of Russia, and 'is Putin really all that bad?'"

*"Russia doesn't necessarily need to connect the dots. **It just needs to put those fears out there. And then other people connect the dots and then those voices get amplified,**"* Osgood said.