

US sends more troops to Russia's borders, weighs sending anti-aircraft systems

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Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has ordered the deployment of an additional 500 troops to Eastern Europe, amid mounting demands in the US media for a more direct military intervention by the United States against Russia.

The announcement, made public by the Pentagon on Monday, brings the total number of US troops deployed to NATO countries in Eastern Europe to 14,500, spread from Estonia and Latvia on Russia's border, through Romania in Southern Europe.

A senior defense official said that the move was "supportive of our efforts to be able to defend NATO airspace if needed."

The Pentagon revealed that Mark Milley, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, last week went to, in the words of CNN, an "undisclosed airfield near the Ukrainian border that has become a hub for shipping weapons," to supervise firsthand the running of weapons into the country.

In addition, the United States "is considering supplying critical air defense systems to NATO allies in eastern Europe as anxiety mounts that the Russians could consider launching missiles or aircraft against the alliance's eastern flank," CNN reported Monday.

CNN wrote that "the idea centers around the concern that Russian missiles or aircraft might deliberately attack targets inside NATO territory at some point if Russian President Vladimir Putin decides those nations are a risk to his invasion because of their support for Ukraine."

The report added, "The most likely systems that could be deployed by the US are likely to be the Patriot and the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) system."

The announcement that the Pentagon is "considering" stationing these anti-aircraft systems in NATO

territories adjacent to Ukraine comes as demands grow from figures within both US parties and the military for the imposition of a no-fly zone over Ukraine, which would be an effective declaration of war with Russia.

The figures calling for this action include Democrats Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Vindman and former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta, Republican Congressman Adam Kinzinger, Republican Senator Roger Wicker, and four-star US Air Force Gen. Philip Breedlove.

Over the weekend, they were joined by West Virginia Democratic Senator Joe Manchin, as well as Evelyn Farkas, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Russia and also a Democrat, who condemned to the *Hill* the Biden administration's refusal to support a no-fly zone.

"I don't want to telegraph to Putin ahead of time what we want to do, especially because we know he's capable of practically anything and we are trying to deter him from further horrific action, from cutting off future options for Ukraine, assistance to Ukraine or our defense of NATO," she said.

Despite these demands, the White House has for now resisted calls to directly engage Russian aircraft, preferring to funnel a torrent of weapons to Ukraine and wage scorched-earth economic warfare against Russia.

Politico reported that "There is growing support on both sides of the aisle for a ban on oil imports from Moscow, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday indicated that the U.S. was working on the prospect with European allies."

The US and NATO have up to this point sent Ukraine 17,000 anti-tank missiles and 2,000 stinger anti-aircraft missiles, CNN said it was told by a US official.

The staggering pace of US weapons transfers to

Ukraine was spelled out in a report in the *New York Times* Monday morning, “when the president approved \$350 million in military aid on Feb. 26... 70 percent of it was delivered in five days.”

The rapidity of the deployments makes clear that the gun-running operation was prepared well in advance of the Russian invasion.

As the *Times* wrote, “The military was able to push those shipments forward quickly by tapping into pre-positioned military stockpiles ready to roll onto Air Force C-17 transport planes and other cargo aircraft, and flying them to about half a dozen staging bases in neighboring countries, chiefly in Poland and Romania.”

The article expresses significant unease about the scale of the weapons transfers into Ukraine, warning, “So far, Russian forces have been so preoccupied in other parts of the country that they have not targeted the arms supply lines, but few think that can last.”

The *Times* notes that the US has made an effort to avoid being seen as “a ‘co-combatant’ in the war,’ engaged in a ‘direct conflict with a nuclear-armed Russia.’”

But the *Times* warns that “as the weapons flow in and if efforts to interfere in Russian communications and computer networks escalate, some US national security officials say they have a foreboding that such conflict is increasingly likely.”

The article concludes, ominously, “In the case of Ukraine, a senior American official said, the question resonating around the White House is more like: ‘Tell me how we don’t get sucked into a superpower conflict.’”

Meanwhile, the war is already being seized upon as the pretense for massively expanding US military spending, coupled with attacks on bedrock social programs.

“NATO Needs More Guns and Less Butter,” blared an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal*, demanding that Social Security and Medicare be gutted by means-testing them.

In an accompanying editorial, the *Journal* demands, “Any conflict would require enormous amounts of munitions, and on current plans US forces could run out of some of the most lethal and important stuff in weeks. The Pentagon needs to ramp up planned purchases of long-range anti-ship and joint air-to-surface standoff missiles—now.”



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