

US ramps up “financial war” on Russia as retired generals call for no-fly zone

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The United States and European Union ramped up their “financial war” against Russia on Tuesday, announcing major measures to restrict Russian oil and gas imports.

US President Joe Biden announced the immediate ban of all oil and natural gas imports from Russia, while the UK announced a plan to end all oil and gas imports by the end of 2023.

The European Union separately announced a plan to slash oil and gas imports by two-thirds this year.

The announcement had an immediate impact on markets, with crude oil surging 7 percent, to \$128 per barrel. Russia is the world’s largest exporter of petroleum products, including crude oil and natural gas.

Biden made clear that the measures targeting the Russian population would have disastrous consequences for the US population. “This is a step that we’re taking to inflict further pain on Putin, but there will be costs as well here in the United States.”

Biden volunteered the American population to bear the costs of surging energy prices. “I said I would level with the American people from the beginning, and when I first spoke to this, I said defending freedom is going to cost us as well in the United States.”

These actions are part of what Julia Friedlander, a former member of the National Security Council, called a “financial war” against Russia, aiming to “change military strategy in a war that is already happening.”

It also threatens, however, to trigger a major recession in the United States and Europe. The *Financial Times* (FT) quoted Mohammed Barkindo, secretary-general of OPEC, warning that there is no way to counterbalance the effects of cutting Russia out of the global oil market. “There is no capacity in the world at the moment that can replace 7mn barrels of exports,” he said.

The FT warned, “The rise in oil and gas prices triggered by the Ukraine conflict and western moves to punish Moscow has raised the threat of the worst stagflationary shock to hit energy importing economies since the 1970s.”

Responding to the actions by the US and EU, Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed his Cabinet to produce a list of items that Russia would stop importing and exporting until the end of 2022. Russia also threatened to cut off gas exports to Europe via the Nord Stream 1 pipeline.

The rapidly accelerating economic war came amid growing demands within the US military and foreign policy establishment for the United States to set up a no-fly zone, a move that both the White House and the Kremlin have made clear would lead to war between the United States and NATO.

On Tuesday, *Politico* published an open letter by a group of retired military officers, diplomats and national security officials to “impose a limited No-Fly Zone over Ukraine starting with protection for humanitarian corridors.”

The signatories included retired Lieutenant General Ben Hodges, the former commanding general, United States Army Europe, as well as retired General Philip Breedlove, former supreme allied commander Europe for NATO.

Among the signatories were many of the leading witnesses in the first impeachment of Donald Trump, which was centered on claims that the former president withheld weapons from Ukraine.

The signatories also included Kurt Volker, former U.S. ambassador to NATO and special representative for Ukraine negotiations, and the first witness to testify against Trump in the impeachment hearings.

He was joined by William Taylor, former U.S.

ambassador to Ukraine, who declared that Ukraine was “on the front line of the conflict with a newly aggressive Russia.”

Another key impeachment witness, Colonel Alexander Vindman, has stated his support for a no-fly zone, but was not among the official signatories.

Other defense officials included Ian Brzezinski, former deputy assistant secretary of defense and the son of Zbigniew Brzezinski, Paula Dobriansky, former under secretary of state for global affairs, and Eric Edelman, former under secretary of defense.

Responding to the letter, the White House was clear about what the signatories were demanding. “A limited no-fly zone would still require implementation of a no-fly zone, even if it’s a smaller geography, which would still require shooting down Russian planes if they fly into your no-fly zone,” said White House spokesperson Jen Psaki. “So that would still have—we would still have concerns about that being an escalatory action that could lead us into a war with Russia, which is not something the president intends to do.”

Despite the White House’s insistence that it does not intend to fight a “war with Russia,” the conflict is escalating at a breathtaking pace.

On Tuesday, Poland announced a plan to transfer all of its Soviet-era MiG-29 aircraft to the United States and fly them to Germany, from where they would be flown into Ukrainian airspace to engage Russian aircraft.

“The authorities of the Republic of Poland... are ready to deploy—immediately and free of charge—all their MIG-29 jets to the Ramstein Air Base and place them at the disposal of the Government of the United States of America,” Poland’s foreign ministry said.

In a tersely worded statement, Pentagon spokesperson John Kirby said, “We do not believe Poland’s proposal is a tenable one.”

He added that “departing from a U.S./NATO base in Germany to fly into airspace that is contested with Russia over Ukraine raises serious concerns for the entire NATO alliance.”

The *Washington Post* noted: “The move by Poland appeared intended to shift the responsibility for delivering the aircraft — and risking a potential Russian military retaliation — to the United States. It occurred as the No. 3 official at the State Department, Victoria Nuland, testified before the Senate Foreign Relations

Committee.”

The response by the US came despite the statement by Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday that NATO countries had a “green light” to send aircraft to Ukraine.

Despite the US response to the proposal from Poland, the US effort to funnel arms to Ukraine is staggering in scope. The *Wall Street Journal* wrote that the US is carrying out “one of the largest and fastest arms transfers in history.”

The *Journal* noted: “In Poland, the provincial airport of Rzeszow, located about 60 miles from the Ukrainian border, has been so crowded with military cargo jets that on Saturday some flights were briefly diverted until airfield space became available. On the country’s highways, police vehicles are escorting military transport trucks to the border, with other convoys slipping into Ukraine via snow-covered back roads through the mountains.”

The *Wall Street Journal* added that “The race to deliver arms to Ukraine is emerging as a supply operation with few historical parallels.”

Much of this weaponry is finding its ways to neo-Nazi militia, such as the Azov Battalion, a neo-Nazi organization which over 40 members of the US Congress sought unsuccessfully to designate as a foreign terrorist organization.

On Monday, Nexta, a media outlet affiliated with the Belarusian opposition, published photos of NATO instructors training members of the Azov Battalion, who were wearing neo-Nazi insignia, on how to operate a shipment of NLAW anti-tank missiles.



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