

The US arming of Ukraine and the preparations for war

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On Wednesday, President Joe Biden gave a speech announcing the deployment of \$1 billion in weapons to Ukraine, including combat drones and long-range anti-aircraft systems, for use in Ukraine's war with Russia.

Making no mention of ongoing efforts to find a diplomatic settlement to the war, Biden warned that the United States should be prepared for "a long and difficult battle."

Biden announced that Ukraine would receive 9,000 anti-armor systems, 800 anti-aircraft systems, 7,000 small arms and 20 million rounds in ammunition. US officials subsequently clarified that they would provide Ukraine with offensive drones and Soviet-era long-range anti-aircraft missiles.

But the most significant aspect of the speech was Biden's statement regarding the background of the war, which exposes the extent to which the US had systematically prepared Ukraine for the conflict with Russia.

Biden presented a narrative of a years-long proxy conflict, in which the United States has been pumping billions of dollars in weapons into Ukraine. "In fact, we started our assistance to Ukraine before this war began," Biden said.

We sent Ukraine more security assistance last year—\$650 million in weapons, including anti-air and anti-armor equipment before the invasion—more than we had ever provided before. So when the invasion began, they already had in their hands the kinds of weapons they needed to counter Russian advances.

And once the war started, we immediately rushed \$350 million in additional aid to further address their needs: hundreds of anti-air

systems, thousands of anti-tank weapons, transport helicopters, armed patrol boats, and other high-mobility vehicles, radar systems that help track incoming artillery and unmanned drones, secure communications equipment and tactical gear, satellite imagery and—and analysis capacity. And it's clearly helped Ukraine inflict dramatic losses on Russian forces.

These statements refute the media's presentation of Ukraine as a small and hapless nation suddenly set upon by a ruthless larger power.

The Ukrainian military, assisted by US advisers working within the country, was ready for war, which the Biden administration instigated. Ukrainian civilians caught in the crossfire were written off as the expendable losses of US imperialism's anti-Russia strategy. The very fact that Ukraine is not a member of NATO has allowed it to be used as a proxy, armed to the teeth and used to bait the Russian government into its disastrous and deadly invasion.

Understanding the background of the war is not the same as condoning the Russian invasion, which is as strategically imbecilic as it is politically reactionary. It was the desperate response of the bankrupt regime that emerged from the dissolution of the USSR.

But it is necessary to refute the lying narrative within which this war—which has cost thousands of lives and can still escalate into a nuclear war—has been framed by the propaganda organs of the US and NATO powers.

In 2013, then-Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs Victoria Nuland reported that the United States had spent \$5 billion to help Ukraine "achieve its European aspirations and other goals."

The outcome of this influx of cash and more direct forms of intervention by the imperialist powers was the 2014 US-backed coup, led by fascist forces like Svoboda and the Right Sector.

Within months, the Ukrainian parliament renounced its country's non-aligned status and announced plans to deepen its cooperation with NATO "in order to achieve the criteria which are required for membership in the alliance."

The 2014 coup triggered the secession of Donetsk and Lugansk in Eastern Ukraine, as well as Russia's annexation of Crimea, a mostly Russian-speaking region, following a referendum.

In an effort to contain the war raging in Eastern Ukraine, the Donetsk and Lugansk republics signed a ceasefire known as the Minsk agreements, which have been systematically under siege in subsequent years.

Despite the ceasefire, the United States continued to pump billions of dollars in weapons into Ukraine and to actively train its military.

A critical inflection point in this process was the first impeachment of Donald Trump, which centered around allegations that Trump predicated the disbursement of US weapons to Ukraine on Zelensky ordering an investigation of Biden's son, Hunter, who received approximately \$1 million per year for sitting on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian energy company.

During the impeachment, it became clear just how central Ukraine was to US geopolitical strategy. In her testimony, former Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch declared that Ukraine, "with an enormous land mass and a large population, has the potential to be a significant... force multiplier on the security side... And now Ukraine is a battleground for great power competition with a hot war for the control of territory and a hybrid war to control Ukraine's leadership."

As the impeachment was taking place, the United States was withdrawing from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty and developing medium-range nuclear weapons that could reach Russia's borders from Eastern Europe or even Ukraine. The withdrawal from the INF treaty was a critical element of the US preparations for "great-power competition," which the 2018 national security strategy document deemed the "primary concern in US national security."

Biden's comments clearly indicate that last year saw a major escalation in military assistance to Ukraine,

with the US giving Ukraine, according to Biden, more military aid "than we had ever provided before."

A key turning point that year was the US-Ukraine Strategic Partnership, announced on September 1, 2021, which declared that the US would "never recognize Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea" and "intends to support Ukraine's effort to counter armed aggression." The strategic partnership effectively endorsed the doctrine, codified in a Ukrainian state strategy document in March 2021, for Ukraine to "recover" Crimea and the Donbas, by force if necessary.

In announcing the "strategic partnership," the White House noted that "The United States has committed \$2.5 billion in support of Ukraine's forces since 2014, including more than \$400 million this year alone."

As the US continued pumping billions of dollars in arms sales into Ukraine, Russia published a set of demands for security guarantees last December, including that Ukraine would not become a member of NATO. In subsequent interviews, Russian President Vladimir Putin explained that Ukraine's admission to NATO would make war inevitable.

The Biden administration refused to accept Russia's demands for security guarantees, goading Russia to take this action. As Biden declared in December, "I don't accept anybody's red lines."

This antecedent history explains the confidence with which the White House predicted Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As Biden put it on January 20, "My guess is he will move in. He has to do something." If Biden was able to predict this situation so directly, it was because his administration worked to bring about this outcome.



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