

US seeks “turning point” in Ukraine after Russian strikes

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The seven-month-old war between NATO and Russia in Ukraine escalated Monday, after Russia carried out a series of attacks against largely civilian infrastructures throughout Ukraine.

Some 14 people were killed and 97 injured in the strikes, according to Ukrainian officials, and power was disrupted in more than half the country’s regions. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that most strikes were “hitting electricity substations and other targets outside city centers, away from civilian homes.”

On Friday, the Ukrainian Special Forces orchestrated a terrorist bombing on the Kerch Bridge, which connects Russia to Crimea. The move came after the former commanding general of the US Army in Europe, General Ben Hodges, urged Ukraine to “drop” the bridge, and current US officials publicly gave a green light to attack it.

Days after the attack, the aim of the Kerch Bridge bombing comes into sharper view. Its purpose was to provoke a military response by Russia against civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, which could then be used to justify a massive increase in US-NATO involvement in the conflict.

For months, US officials had been expressing concern that Russia had not been “provoked” into expanding the war into western Ukraine, which had been largely spared in recent months.

Last month, former US Ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor complained to *The Hill* that, despite the fact that the White House had provided “larger, more capable, longer-distance, heavier weapons to the Ukrainians,” the “Russians have not reacted.” Up to this point, Taylor said, the “Russians have kind of bluffed and blustered, but they haven’t been provoked.”

With Tuesday’s attack, Russian authorities had, in

fact, allowed themselves to be “provoked,” setting the stage for an even more massive escalation of US-NATO involvement in the war.

The attack on the Kerch Bridge was timed to take place just days before the NATO defense ministers’ meeting on October 12 and 13, which is expected to expand the level of direct NATO involvement in the conflict.

A senior Biden administration official interviewed by the *Washington Post* called the escalation of the war a “turning point.”

The attacks, in the words of the *Washington Post*, raise the question of “whether the United States and its partners may have to move beyond the concept of helping Ukraine defend itself, and instead more forcefully facilitate a Ukrainian victory.”

The *Post* wrote: “So far, the US supply effort has been deliberative and process-oriented in the kinds of weapons it provides, and the speed at which it provides them, so as not to undercut its highest priority of avoiding a direct clash between Russia and the West. That strategy is likely to be part of the agenda at Tuesday’s emergency meeting of G7 leaders and a gathering of NATO defense ministers later in the week.”

In other words, dominant sections of the US political establishment will use the attacks as a pretext to carry out a long-planned escalation of the war.

In this way, the attacks on civilian infrastructure ordered by Putin play right into the hands of the US and NATO, which had hoped that by provoking Russia, they would be given a pretext to intervene more directly in the war and ensure Russia’s military defeat.

Ahead of the meeting, US officials are demanding an expansion of arms shipments to Ukraine. “I pledge to use all means at my disposal to accelerate support for

the people of Ukraine and to starve Russia's war machine," said Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Robert Menendez.

CIA Democrat Representative Elissa Slotkin tweeted that the dispatch of more air defense systems for Ukraine was "urgent," adding, "Providing these systems is a defensive—not escalatory—step, and our European friends need to step up along with us to get the Ukrainians what they need."

The *Wall Street Journal* in an editorial demanded that the United States "provide Ukraine with more weapons, including better air defenses," declaring, "Mr. Putin won't end his war until it becomes clear the cost of continuing it is too high."

Speaking to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Monday, Biden "pledged to continue providing Ukraine with the support needed to defend itself, including advanced air defense systems," according to a summary of the call from the White House.

On Tuesday, Zelensky will address a meeting of the G7, which is likewise expected to pledge more military support to the conflict. Zelensky will, according to the *Guardian*, "emphasize anti-aircraft systems, and repeat the longstanding demand for longer-range missiles."

Ukrainian officials claimed that Russia conducted missile attacks against more than 20 cities, including the capital, Kiev. According to the Ukrainian General Staff, Russian forces launched more than 84 cruise missiles and 24 drone attacks.

The Institute for the Study of War reported that "Russian forces launched missiles from 10 strategic bombers operating in the Caspian Sea and from Nizhny Novgorod, Iskander short-range ballistic missile systems, and 6 missile carriers in the Black Sea."

In a sober assessment of the military consequences of Monday's strikes, the Institute for the Study of War wrote, "Ukrainian and Western intelligence have previously reported that Russia has spent a significant portion of its high-precision missiles, and Putin likely knows better than Medvedev or the milbloggers that he cannot sustain attacks of this intensity for very long."

It continued, "The October 10 Russian attacks wasted some of Russia's dwindling precision weapons against civilian targets, as opposed to militarily significant targets."

It added that "Ukrainian air defenses also shot down

half of the Russian drones and cruise missiles," and noted that "Russia's use of its limited supply of precision weapons in this role may deprive Putin of options to disrupt ongoing Ukrainian counter-offensives in Kherson and Luhansk Oblasts."

"Throughout the war, the Russian military has had problems with target selection and the accuracy of their missiles," Michael Kofman, director of Russia studies at CNA, told the *New York Times*. "As the war goes on, their supply of precision-guided weapons has dwindled, and they are using weapons that are not suited to land targets or that are old and unreliable."

Meanwhile, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said he had ordered troops to deploy together with Russian forces near the Ukrainian border. Lukashenko declared that "Strikes on the territory of Belarus are not just being discussed in Ukraine today, but are also being planned."

Poland urged its citizens to leave Belarus "with available commercial and private means."



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