

Ukraine fires first UK-supplied long-range missiles into Russian-held territory

Robert Stevens
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Russia confirmed Saturday that long-range air-launched Storm Shadow cruise missiles supplied by Britain struck two industrial sites in the Russian-held city of Luhansk in eastern Ukraine. The Russian Defence ministry said the missiles hit a plant producing polymers and a meat-processing factory on Friday.

Other sources, including Britain's *Telegraph* citing "local media", said the strikes "hit a Russian supply depot and a military command centre 80 miles behind the front line."

The *Telegraph* reported that at least one other missile system not previously known to be used by the Ukrainians is now operational. "Analysts also said that at least one US MALD decoy missile, which carries no explosive warhead but uses sophisticated electronics to distract defence systems, had been fired in the attacks."

Last Thursday, after media reported that Britain was ready to authorise shipment of the long-range missiles, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace told MPs, "All I can say is that, having technically cleared the hurdles, and as everyone talks about an expected counter-offence, now is the right time to gift these to Ukraine, and they are now going into or are in the country." The technical problem Wallace referred to was how—given its size and weight—the Storm Shadow could be mounted to Ukrainian war planes not designed to carry the weapon.

Wallace did not reveal the number of long-range missiles sent, but it is understood Britain has a stockpile of between 700 and 1,000.

The defence secretary took interventions from MPs on his own Conservative benches and the Labour opposition benches, all demanding that military supplies to Ukraine be stepped up.

Labour's Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey declared, "We want the UK's momentum for Ukraine to be maintained and accelerated." Wallace replied that UK Challenger battle tanks were now in Ukraine. "I know

that all our tanks have gone into the country, as well as many of our Spartans and armoured vehicles."

The supply of the missiles threatens incalculable consequences. Ukraine is now capable of striking Russian-held Crimea, where Moscow bases its Black Sea fleet. The missile's range officially exceeds 250km (155 miles) but other estimates given, including by French President Emmanuel Macron, suggest it may have a maximum range of 250, or even 350 miles.

Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy said he had spoken to Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, thanking him "for the significant enhancement of our capabilities with long-range Storm Shadow missiles and other irreplaceable military assistance. We discussed further defence cooperation and coordinated our positions on the eve of upcoming international events. In particular, we need clear signals about Ukraine's future with NATO."

Ukraine's Minister of Defence Oleksii Reznikov tweeted provocatively, just hours before the first Storm Shadow strikes, "The weather forecast is predicting a cyclone moving from the UK towards Ukraine, bringing with it Storms. It is through the Shadow of the Storm that the sunshine of our liberty will break through and shed light on our Victory."

Russia's foreign ministry responded by declaring Friday, "We see this decision as an extremely hostile step from London, aimed at further pumping weapons into Ukraine and leading to a serious escalation of the situation." A Kremlin spokesperson said, "It will demand an appropriate response from our military, who will definitely make the decisions that are required in military terms" and that Russian President Vladimir Putin had reacted "quite negatively" to the news.

Some commentators and media outlets responded to the sending of the Storm Shadows to Ukraine by arguing that it does not follow that the United States will send its far more powerful and modern long-range ATACMS

missiles.

The *Financial Times* wrote the “US has baulked at providing tactical systems such as the ATACMS”, citing John Foreman, the UK’s recent defence attaché in Moscow, who said, “Although it’s likely that the UK and US had extensive discussions about sending Storm Shadows, there is no indication yet that Washington will send its own long range missiles... If the US was about to, it would have changed its messaging in anticipation of this announcement.”

The *Telegraph* published an op-ed by Liam James headlined, “Storm Shadow missiles to Ukraine will transform the nature of battle”. He wrote, “Britain has led the way once again. We are supplying the embattled Ukrainians with our vaunted Storm Shadow missile, the longest-ranging weapon yet supplied to them. Truly, it’s a game-changing moment.”

He added of the main purpose of supplying a fairly dated missile system, which “Like any other subsonic jet aeroplane... can be shot down by ordinary air defences” that “The point is that someone has now given the Ukrainians a strike weapon with a nominal range of 186 miles, which creates pressure on other Western nations to follow suit and makes it much easier, politically and diplomatically, for them to do so.

“What the Ukrainians actually want, and have said so many times, is the US-made Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS). They already have American Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) missiles and Himars vehicles to fire them from, which can hit targets 60 miles away. Alternatively the Ukrainians can fire their new ground SDBs to 90 miles. But the Himars vehicle can also fire the ATACMS, which can reach 190 miles.”

James added that the “US might not need to deliver any of its own weapons: it could just let it be known that others are free to send theirs. The ATACMS is already in the armouries of Poland and Romania. Others including Estonia, Lithuania and Taiwan have orders in. (Taiwan has already allowed ground-launched Small Diameter Bombs it had ordered from the US to be diverted to Ukraine.)”

UK Defence Secretary Wallace stressed, “As far as the use, donation or gifting of Storm Shadow goes, the United States has been incredibly supportive of the United Kingdom’s decision to do so.”

At every stage of the war, NATO has escalated the conflict with the supply of weaponry that US President Joe Biden himself and NATO officials had previously ruled out. The *Financial Times* noted “it was the UK’s

move in January to send Challenger 2 battle tanks” that “set a precedent that was followed by a German-US agreement to send their own main battle tanks, the Leopard 2 and M1 Abrams.”

In NATO’s war against Russia, there is *no limit* on what will be supplied to ensure regime change in Moscow.

In response to Wallace, Tory MP Mark Francois said, “We have led western Europe in supplying kit to the Ukrainians... but we have not yet sent jets, despite the fact that we have a squadron of tranche 1 Typhoons sitting in a hangar and despite the fact that in Westminster Hall recently, President Zelensky very publicly called for us to do so.”

Francoise said Ukraine’s aerial capability was a mismatch against Moscow: “As such, can I ask him specifically what we are doing, first to send jets, and secondly to encourage other western allies to send MiG-29s, F-16s or even A-10s to Ukraine? It would be a tragedy, literally, if the counter-offensive ran out of momentum because it lacked air support.”

Tobias Ellwood MP, who chairs the House of Commons defence select committee, stated, “There is huge anticipation about the counter-attack that is likely to take place, but there is also a message, as I hope the Secretary of State [Wallace] will agree, that it may require a second, third, or fourth counter-offensive to take place. This is not going to end simply when the Ukrainians decide to push forward. We should expect Russia to go ugly and to use unconventional systems in response.” He asked, “Are the Americans going to match with ATACMS—the army tactical missile system? There is still a request for jets to be gifted as well.”

The Tories and Labour constitute a single party of war, with Labour reassuring the ruling class and the United States—ahead of a 2024 general election—that it is the “party of NATO”. Shadow Defence Minister Healey stated, “The Defence Secretary knows that the government have had, and will continue to have, Labour’s fullest support in providing military aid to Ukraine and in reinforcing NATO allies.”



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