

Russia downs British-supplied long-range missile as Zelensky and Sunak declare “jets coalition”

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky travelled to the UK Monday for a war summit with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, and to press for more weapons ahead of an expected spring offensive by Kiev’s NATO-armed troops.

Central to NATO’s plans to defeat Russia and force regime change in Moscow is aerial supremacy over the Ukrainian battlefield.

Before announcing his arrival in Britain, Zelensky tweeted, “Today—London. The UK is a leader when it comes to expanding our capabilities on the ground and in the air.” Speaking to reporters after the talks, he said, “Today we spoke about the jets” and “We want to create this jet coalition.” This was a “very important topic for us because we can’t control the sky”. Overcoming this was critical to Kiev’s planned counter offensive, with Zelensky telling reporters, “We really need some more time—not too much. We’ll be ready in some time.”

Zelensky met Sunak and Foreign Secretary James Cleverly for talks at the prime minister’s Chequers country residence after his tour of other European capitals—Rome, Berlin and Paris—to secure further pledges of military aid.

That the entire European continent is now a tinderbox was made clear by Russia’s announcement—while Sunak was meeting Zelensky—that it had shot down a UK-supplied Storm Shadow cruise missile. Russia’s Defence Ministry said it had also downed shorter-range, US-built HIMARS and HARM missiles.

The Sunak-Zelensky talks took place just 48 hours after Russia’s confirmation that Storm Shadow missiles supplied by Britain struck two industrial sites in the Russian-held city of Luhansk in eastern Ukraine.

Britain, in close co-ordination with the Biden administration, became the first country to supply Ukraine with long-range missiles—capable of hitting Russian-held Crimea, where Moscow bases its geopolitically critical Black Sea fleet.

Moscow declared that it would respond militarily to London’s “hostile” action. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told *Sky News* Monday that Russia took an “extremely negative view”. He added, “Great Britain aspires to stand at the forefront of those countries that continue to pump weapons to Ukraine,” before claiming, “this cannot have any significant, fundamental impact on the course of the special military operation”.

In response to the latest developments, Russian President Vladimir Putin held a Security Council meeting Monday, bringing it forward five days.

A Downing Street press release ahead of the talks said the Ukrainian “President will update the Prime Minister on his meetings with European leaders over the weekend as Ukraine prepares for an intensified period of military activity.”

Following the delivery of the Storm Shadows, Sunak would “confirm the further UK provision of hundreds of air defence missiles and further unmanned aerial systems including hundreds of new long-range attack drones with a range of over 200km [124 miles]. These will all be delivered over the coming months”. The type of drone being handed over was not specified, but the range spoken of is almost twice that of the HIMARS rocket launcher system. The press release stressed, “This equipment will support Ukraine over the coming months in their anticipated military surge to counter Russian forces.”

Sunak said that the UK supplying Ukraine with fighter jets was “not a straightforward thing” but that “Volodymyr and I have been discussing” how to “build up that fighter combat aircraft capability.” Britain’s Royal Air Force uses Typhoon jets and F-35s, while Ukraine is training on F-16 fighters, he added.

The *Guardian* noted, “Britain does not use F-16s, which are made by the US defence firm Lockheed Martin in South Carolina. Ukraine has been seeking to obtain them for some time to augment its small Soviet-standard air force because they are widely available, with about 3,000 in service in 25 countries.”

Sunak stressed that “It’s not just the provision of planes, it is also the training of pilots and all the logistics that go alongside that, and the UK can play a big part in that.” Britain would instead begin this summer “an elementary flying phase for cohorts of Ukrainian pilots to learn basic training.” The training would go “hand in hand with UK efforts to work with other countries on providing F16 jets,” said the Downing Street statement.

His central message, however, was that the UK would be heavily involved in campaigning for those with F-16s to provide them. “We are going to be a key part of the coalition of countries that provides that [jet fighter] support to Volodymyr and Ukraine.”

Downing Street emphasised, “This visit also comes ahead of the Council of Europe Summit in Iceland, which the Prime Minister will attend and President Zelenskyy will attend virtually, and the G7 Summit in Japan. The Prime Minister will use these gatherings to push for sustained international support for Ukraine, both in terms of military aid and long-term security assurances.”

Britain continues to play the role of leading anti-Moscow provocateur on NATO’s behalf, including by providing non-stop training to Ukrainian troops—beginning years before the Russia invasion. After the 2014 NATO-backed coup which overthrew Ukraine’s pro-Russian President Viktor Yanukovich, the UK launched Operation Orbital. The Downing Street press release said, “Since the outbreak of full-scale war the UK has also trained 15,000 Ukrainian troops in the UK, on top of the 22,000 troops trained in Ukraine between 2014 and 2022 under Operation Orbital.”

The day after Germany announced that it was

handing over a further £2.4 billion of military aid to Kiev, its largest package yet, and taking its total military funding to nearly \$7 billion (£6.44 billion), Downing Street boasted it would match the £2.3 billion of “military support to Ukraine in 2022—more than any country other than the US,” and would keep up that level of support.

The press release declared, “So far in 2023 the UK has provided equipment including a squadron of Challenger 2 main battle tanks, self-propelled guns, hundreds of armoured vehicles and sophisticated missiles including Starstreak and Storm Shadow. Today’s announcements are further to these previous donations.”

Across the entire political spectrum and throughout a pro-war media, there is total support for escalating war against Russia—a nuclear armed power—no matter what the consequences. In its coverage of the Sunak-Zelensky talks, the BBC commented on Ukraine’s newly secured long-range missiles, which have wrought death and destruction on the population of Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and other countries as part of the operations of British imperialism: “The Storm Shadow cruise missiles can be used to destroy Russia’s positions on occupied Ukrainian territory.

“If Ukraine can destroy Russia’s command centres, logistics hubs and ammunition depots in occupied territory, then it may prove impossible for Moscow to continue resupplying its frontline troops in places.”



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