US imperialism's relentless escalation in Ukraine

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On Friday, against the backdrop of the debacle for the Ukrainian army in Bakhmut, US President Joe Biden announced that the US has authorized members of the NATO alliance to send F-16 fighter jets to Ukraine.

In a cruel mockery of the victims of America's war crime in Hiroshima, the leaders of the world's imperialist powers grinned and grimaced as they announced a reckless escalation of a war that, just last year, Biden said threatened the world with nuclear "Armageddon."

The deployment of the F-16 and other fighter jets will create an unacceptable and untenable situation for Russia. F-16s have a range of more than 500 miles and are capable of deploying missiles with a range of over 1,200, placing Moscow and St. Petersburg within striking distance of the Ukrainian military.

Most significantly, F-16s can carry tactical nuclear weapons. This sets up an incredibly dangerous situation. With F-16s flying eastward, the Russian government will not know where they are going or what they are carrying. Russia will be compelled to escalate in return, setting the stage for an even more aggressive response by the NATO powers.

The Biden administration has rejected out of hand any ceasefire or attempt at a peaceful settlement of the war—including one proposed by China. Rather, the White House, in line with plans worked out months and years in advance, is determined to press for the military defeat of Russia.

According to official narrative, the decision to send F-16s was only made this week, with a "reluctant" Biden finally "convinced" to take the action. The *Washington Post* wrote, for example, "For more than a year, getting F-16s into the skies above Ukraine for use against Russia has been Kyiv's holy grail… Suddenly, President Biden has said yes.

"The turnaround, according to US, European and Ukrainian officials, is the result of steady pressure from allies, Congress and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who just completed visits to European capitals."

This is a lie, aiming to obscure the actual decision-making process in Washington. While the Biden administration is operating with a systematic plan to escalate the war, all of its actions are presented as semi-spontaneous, reactive responses to external "pressure."

In fact, the US has been making active preparations to send F-16 jets to Ukraine for nearly a year. In July 2022, the *World Socialist Web Site* reported that White House spokesperson John Kirby confirmed that the Pentagon was discussing "providing fighter aircraft to the Ukrainians," and Air Force Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. asserted that "discussions are ongoing" to send US-NATO fighters to Ukraine.

Three months ago, following Biden's announcement that the US would send Abrams battle tanks against Russia, the WSWS wrote that "despite Biden's categorical declaration that the United States will not send F-16 fighters to Ukraine, the decision to do so has already been made. Nothing remains but the working out of the political details within NATO and the launching of the media propaganda campaign of lies to sell the decision to a skeptical public."

And that is precisely the process that has culminated over the past week.

The charade in the media is aimed at obscuring the basic fact that, in each of his promises not to escalate the war, the president was deliberately lying to the public.

In January 2023, Biden was asked, "Will the United States provide F-16s to Ukraine?" to which he replied, "No."

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In March 2022, Biden asserted, “The idea that we’re going to send in offensive equipment and have planes and tanks and trains going in with American pilots and American crews, just understand—and don’t kid yourself, no matter what you all say—that’s called World War Three.”

One year later, at least 100 American active-duty troops are in Ukraine, alongside dozens of US tanks and hundreds of armored vehicles, and US fighter jets are on the way.

Every government in the NATO alliance knows that by providing nuclear-capable jets to Ukraine—weapons that put Russia’s major cities in range of strikes—they risk the deaths of millions of their own citizens in a nuclear war with Russia.

The fateful decision to send the jets would have been made months in advance, requiring the approval of the most powerful members of the NATO alliance. In March, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz flew to Washington on short notice and met with Biden alone, before flying directly back to Germany, with neither the American nor German public being told what they discussed.

It is in such meetings that decisions are made. They are then announced to the public at a convenient time, as a fait accompli, with the appropriate packaging.

But this raises an ominous question. If the decision to send F-16s to Ukraine was taken months ago, it was taken at a time when the US-NATO proxy forces in Ukraine were performing far better than they are now.

On Saturday, Russian forces reported that they had captured the entire strategic city of Bakhmut, under conditions in which a much vaunted Ukrainian counter-offensive has failed to materialize.

How will the United States respond to this latest debacle? How much further can Washington escalate? Can anyone doubt that, following the dispatch to Ukraine of advanced fighter jets, demands will emerge in the press for Biden to send “defensive” nuclear weapons to Ukraine, or even for NATO troops, whether in the skies or on the ground, to become directly involved in the fighting?

It is such discussions, in fact, that were held behind closed doors at the G7 meeting. The summit over the weekend served two purposes: First, to bring into line any dissidents in the cabal of imperialist conspirators, and second, to discuss the overriding question: What next?

As the WSWS warned on the occasion of the first anniversary of the war, “The Biden administration has created a situation where there can be no retreat, because to do so would irreparably undermine its prestige and credibility, and lead to the breakup of NATO. Victory in this war has become an existential question for American imperialism.”

There are no lengths to which the US and NATO powers will not go to ensure their victory in this war. This government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic has shown that it considers the lives of American citizens to be as valueless as the tens or hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians who have been killed in its war. American imperialism is preparing a new bloodbath that will make Iraq and Afghanistan pale in comparison.

The working class must respond to the escalation of war through the escalation of the class struggle. Throughout the world, workers are entering into struggle against governments that are declaring that workers’ living standards must be slashed to pay for rearmament. These struggles must be unified on the basis of the perspective of international socialism, taking up as a central demand the struggle to end the war in Ukraine.

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