

Sending cluster bombs to Ukraine, Washington makes clear it will stop at nothing

Andre Damon
8 July 2023

On Friday, the Biden administration said it would send cluster munitions—weapons that scatter unexploded bomblets across a wide area, killing and maiming civilians for decades—to Ukraine.

Facing the failure of Kiev’s military offensive, the United States is desperately seeking to use the provision of ever more destructive and indiscriminate weapons to reverse its setbacks on the battlefield.

Critically, the announcement precedes next week’s NATO summit in Vilnius, at which the United States and NATO are planning to massively expand their involvement in the war. Driven into a corner by its miscalculations, the Biden administration is compelled to take ever more drastic measures.

The aim of the decision to use cluster bombs—regardless of its long-term impact on civilians—is to kill as many Russian soldiers as possible. The reasoning that led in the past to the use of Agent Orange and Napalm—and which will be used to sanction the use of tactical nuclear weapons—is presently at work.

The US, on the eve of Vilnius, is clearly sending a message to Russian president Vladimir Putin. NATO will stop at nothing.

In a briefing Friday announcing the move, US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan justified the decision to send cluster munitions to Ukraine as a means of staving off military disaster.

“There is also a massive risk of civilian harm if Russian troops and tanks roll over Ukrainian positions and take more Ukrainian territory and subjugate more Ukrainian civilians because Ukraine does not have enough artillery,” he said.

Sullivan made this statement a little over one month after Ukraine launched its spring offensive, which the American press had touted as an “Endgame for Ukraine,” leading, in the words of retired Gen. David Petraeus, to “significant breakthroughs.”

Instead, the offensive has produced a bloody debacle. Far from inflicting a crushing defeat on Russia, the Biden administration has been driven to one escalatory move after another in an effort to shore up the Ukrainian military.

“We recognize the cluster munitions creating risk of civilian harm from unexploded ordnance,” Sullivan said. “But we had

to balance that against the risk” that Ukraine might “not have sufficient artillery ammunition.”

In other words, the Biden administration weighed the cost of killing and maiming generations of Ukrainian civilians against the benefits of killing more Russian troops. It decided that the deaths of Ukrainian children from unexploded ordnance was a sacrifice America’s oligarchy was willing to make.

Managing to outdo himself in total callousness, Sullivan added that Ukraine would have to be “de-mined regardless.”

Every line employed by the White House to justify sending these weapons of terror to Ukraine could be used to justify the deployment, or even use, of tactical nuclear weapons in the conflict. Yes, the White House would argue, nuclear fallout poses a risk to civilians, but this risk must be “balanced” against the risk of Russian military advances.

The stationing of US tactical nuclear weapons in Ukraine has already been directly raised by an American think tank. Moreover, the deployment and possible use of nuclear weapons in the conflict will no doubt be on the agenda at the upcoming summit in Vilnius.

Every official statement by the United States about its involvement in the war is justified on the basis that it is once again “saving” a country through military violence—this time Ukraine. But in sending cluster bombs and depleted uranium weapons to Ukraine, the United States has made clear that this is nothing but a hollow pretext for pursuing its aim of prevailing over Russia and China in “great power competition.”

The very words used by the United States and its allies to condemn Russia’s alleged use of cluster bombs in Ukraine now fully apply to the US decision to send this weapon to Ukraine.

In February 2022, the US envoy to the United Nations, Linda Thomas-Greenfield, accused Russia of using “cluster munitions” in Ukraine, “which are banned under the Geneva Convention” and have “no place on the battlefield.”

In March 2022, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said, “We have seen the use of cluster bombs... which will be in violation of international law.” He added, “We also have to make sure the International Criminal Court really looks into this.”

In fact, all of these denunciations of Russian actions on the part of the US and NATO were merely hypocritical pretexts for

escalating US involvement in the war.

The decision by the United States to send cluster bombs to Ukraine exposes all of the pseudo-left defenders of US involvement in the war in Ukraine, including those in the Democratic Socialists of America who condemn “preemptive hostility to US imperialism,” as shameless apologists for the US military’s war crimes.

In fact, the US-led war against Russia in Ukraine is a war for American global hegemony, in which Ukrainians are mere cannon fodder. This is entirely in line with the series of criminal wars of aggression waged by the United States over the past half-century.

During the Vietnam War, the US dropped approximately 413,130 tons of cluster bombs in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. Many of these submunitions failed to explode on impact and continue to pose a significant threat to civilian populations, leading to countless injuries and deaths decades after the end of the war.

During the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the United States regularly used cluster munitions to attack civilian areas, in what Amnesty International called “an indiscriminate attack and a grave violation of international humanitarian law.”

In Iraq, the devastation of cluster bombs was compounded by the use of depleted uranium munitions, which, according to one study, led the people of Fallujah to experience higher rates of cancer, leukemia, infant mortality and sexual mutations than those recorded among survivors in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the years after those Japanese cities were incinerated by US atomic bombs in 1945.

During the 2001 invasion of Afghanistan, cluster bombs killed and injured hundreds of civilians and littered the countryside with deadly unexploded ordnance. The United States has been implicated in the use of cluster munitions via its support for Saudi-led forces in the Yemen conflict.

Over 110 countries have ratified the Convention on Cluster Munitions (CCM), which prohibits the use, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions. The United States, which has killed more people with cluster munitions than any other country, is not a signatory.

A 2008 report by the United Nations explains the devastating impact cluster munitions have on the populations where they are used by the United States and its allies:

Over three decades after cluster munitions were used in Laos and Vietnam, they continue to cause death and injury, disrupt the economic activities of ordinary people, and hamper the implementation of development projects there. Even rapid large-scale clearance efforts, such as those that have been implemented in Kosovo and Lebanon, cannot prevent cluster munition contamination from having an impact. In Kosovo, civilian casualties from cluster munitions are still being

reported, and in Lebanon, despite clearance beginning immediately after the 2006 conflict, it could not prevent casualties among the population as they returned to their homes and livelihoods.

The report continues:

Submunitions can prevent or hinder the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and hamper humanitarian, peace-building, and development efforts. Unexploded cluster munitions also pose a physical threat to humanitarian workers and peacekeepers.

The White House claims to have discussed and deliberated the move with the utmost care. The decision-makers would have been fully briefed on these known consequences of cluster munitions, and proceeded with them regardless.

Reporting on the decision by Biden to send the weapons, the *New York Times* wrote, “Mr. Biden has come under steady pressure from President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine, who argues that the munitions—which disperse tiny, deadly bomblets—are the best way to kill Russians who are dug into trenches and blocking Ukraine’s counteroffensive to retake territory.”

The role of Zelensky in promoting a decision to send weapons that will maim Ukrainian children for generations sums up the role of his government, which serves as an instrument in enforcing the will of the NATO powers over the Ukrainian population.

This latest escalation by the United States must be seen as a warning. Washington will stop at nothing to prevent further military setbacks for its proxy force in Kiev and achieve its military goal of inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia. The same homicidal logic that justifies the deployment of depleted uranium rounds and cluster bombs will be used to justify even greater and more reckless crimes, from the direct entry of NATO into the war to the deployment and use of nuclear weapons.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)