

US to send long-range ATACMS missile to Ukraine

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Over the weekend, multiple media outlets reported that President Joe Biden told Ukrainian officials that the United States would send long-range missiles capable of striking nearly 200 miles inside Russian territory.

Amid almost daily Ukrainian strikes inside Russia, this move marks a significant escalation of direct US involvement in the Ukraine conflict, potentially setting the stage for the deployment of US and NATO forces on the battlefield.

As the Biden administration lifts all remaining restraints on its direct involvement in the Ukraine war, Washington's claim that the US is not at war with Russia is unraveling.

In May, US President Joe Biden told journalists that the US was "not going to send rocket systems to Ukraine that can strike into Russia," adding, "We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders."

The announcement followed a now-familiar script of the United States taking escalatory measures that had been publicly ruled out. This includes sending the HIMARS missile launcher, the Bradley fighting vehicle, M1 Abrams tank, F-16 fighters and now, the ATACMS missile system.

Since the start of the conflict, the Biden administration had insisted that the United States was not at war with Russia. In May 2022, White House spokesperson Jen Psaki told a news conference, "It is not a proxy war. ... This is a war between Russia and Ukraine. NATO is not involved."

But since that point, the United States has enormously increased its direct involvement in the conflict, not only sending evermore deadly, longer-range weapons but also openly justifying their use to attack targets inside Russia.

Earlier this year, the US publicly endorsed Ukrainian strikes inside Crimea. "Those are legitimate targets," Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland said. "Ukraine is hitting them. We are supporting that."

Now, this remit has been effectively expanded to all of Russia. Earlier this month, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken publicly endorsed Ukraine using NATO long-range missiles to strike inside Russia, declaring that it is "up to them to make decisions about what can be most effective when it comes to restoring their territorial integrity."

The ATACMS has a range of over 190 miles and is fired from the HIMARS missile launcher system. The United States has already provided Ukraine with the ground-launched small-diameter bombs (GLSDB) with a range of 93 miles, while the US's NATO ally, Britain, has sent Storm Shadow missiles, which can reach over 180 miles.

The Storm Shadow missile was used in two major airstrikes on Crimea this month. On September 13, the missiles were used to destroy a Russian amphibious landing ship and a submarine that were in dry dock at the port of Sevastopol. Just over a week later, on Friday, Ukraine launched a massive strike on the headquarters of the Russian Navy in Crimea.

In other words, NATO weapons are being used to carry out strikes on Russian targets, each potentially inflicting dozens of Russian military casualties.

Over the weekend, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated the obvious when he said that NATO is directly at war with Russia. "You can call this whatever you want to call this, but they are directly at war with us. We can call this a hybrid war, but that doesn't change the reality," Lavrov said. "They are effectively engaged in hostilities with us, using the Ukrainians as fodder."

Russian military doctrine allows the use of nuclear weapons to defend territory claimed by Russia, including Crimea.

In response to the failure of Ukraine's counteroffensive, the United States is expanding its direct involvement in the war, encouraging Ukraine to carry out strikes on Russia itself. But achieving the United States' aim of inflicting a strategic defeat of Russia in Ukraine would require the direct intervention in the conflict by NATO troops.

There are growing indications that the US is moving in this direction. On Saturday, the *New York Times* reported on the existence of a US military hospital in Germany, operated with funding from the US Department of Defense, which is currently treating over one dozen American citizens who are fighting in Ukraine.

The *Times* reports that "The Army has quietly started to treat wounded Americans and other fighters evacuated from Ukraine at its Landstuhl Regional Medical Center. Though the number so far is small—currently 14—it marks a notable new step in the United States' deepening involvement in the conflict."

In July, the Pentagon approved hazard pay for American troops serving in Ukraine. Hazard pay is typically approved in active combat zones, such as in the wars in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Last November, US Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder acknowledged the fact that Pentagon troops are already deployed inside Ukraine. Ryder confirmed that these troops were in fact dispersed throughout the country, "conducting some inspections of security assistance delivery at a variety of locations."

In one of the first open arguments in favor of sending more US troops to Ukraine, *Foreign Affairs* published an article Friday, entitled, "Why America Should Send Military Advisers to Ukraine."

The article, among whose authors is an active-duty American lieutenant colonel, argues, "Washington should, therefore, lift the strict restrictions on the number of U.S. government personnel allowed in Ukraine and begin stationing military advisers within the country and across its defense apparatus."

The article states that "deploying military advisers is, ultimately, one of the best ways Washington can help Kyiv win—especially given the cost. The routine deployment of a single battalion task force from a U.S.

security force assistance brigade costs about \$12 million."

A battalion consists of up to 1,000 troops.

The article then states, "Advisers will, in other words, help bring about the war's endgame: a free Ukraine integrated into the institutions at the foundation of Europe."

It continues, "US advisers could, of course, still come under attack: no one in Ukraine is truly safe from Russia. Experts might also fear that—should Washington put boots on the ground—it will invariably lead to an endless American military commitment."

In fact, there are indications that NATO forces are already engaged in combat operations. On Saturday, Russian state-owned broadcaster RIA Novosti claimed that Russian forces disabled a Leopard tank manned by German forces, who identified themselves as members of the German Army (Bundeswehr) before they succumbed to their wounds.



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