

Ukrainian attack on Kursk prompts media calls for US escalation against Russia

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Ukraine extended its offensive into the Kursk region of Russia for a fourth day Friday, continuing to advance despite claims by Russian officials that the offensive had been contained.

US and European news outlets have hailed what *The Economist* dubbed “The second battle of Kursk,” referencing the World War II battle in which Soviet forces, then allied with the United States and Britain, decisively defeated the armies of Nazi Germany. Eighty-one years later, German armored vehicles are being thrown against Russia over some of the same terrain, this time with American vehicles fighting alongside them.

Ukrainian, US and NATO officials have been largely silent on the operational details of the offensive, leaving social media footage as the only general indicator of the situation.

On Friday, footage published on social media and allegedly verified by US news outlets showed the aftermath of a Ukrainian attack on an armored infantry column of Russian reinforcements being transferred to the front. While no official figures were given, the footage showed approximately a dozen disabled vehicles and mass casualties, leading to speculation, as yet unverified, that the attack could have killed hundreds of Russian troops.

Alexei Smirnov, governor of the Kursk region, said that the Russian federal government had declared a state of emergency and told residents to “stay calm and keep up your fighting spirit, support each other, do not give in to panic and despondency.” To date, approximately 3,000 Russians were reported to have been evacuated from the region.

Separately, Ukrainian troops published a video in which they claimed to have taken full control of the town of Sudzha, about six miles inside the Russian

border, capturing a key natural gas facility.

The US media have responded to the Ukrainian incursion into Russia’s Kursk region with demands for a further loosening of the rules of engagement for targeting Russia with NATO weapons, bringing NATO and Russia closer to a direct confrontation.

“Will the US help Kyiv stay on offense?,” the *Wall Street Journal* pressed in an editorial, demanding that the Biden administration cross more of its “red lines” for direct involvement in the war against a nuclear-armed state.

The *Journal* wrote:

That the Russians were caught by surprise shows how much they thought their territory was a sanctuary. This has been one of the goals of Mr. Putin’s bluster about fighting NATO and using nuclear weapons. He wants the US and Western European governments to restrain Ukraine to fight only on its territory.

The editorial concluded by stating that “the best response is to flow even more weapons into Ukraine, including long-range missiles that target bases and supply lines in Russia, and remove limits on the use of ATACMS missiles.”

Washington Post columnist Max Boot echoed these calls for US escalation in an op-ed:

While the Biden administration has not complained about the use of US-made vehicles in this offensive, it apparently has not yet granted Ukraine permission to use American-

made ATACMS missiles to hit Russian airfields and other targets deep inside Russia. Given how Ukraine keeps erasing supposed Russian “red lines” with impunity, this is a risk President Joe Biden should be willing to run.

Both of these comments were essentially variations of the statement published Thursday on X by Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who said the result of Ukraine’s attack is that “a significant part of the global community considers [Russia] a legitimate target for any operations and types of weapons.” He added, “#Ukraine has also successfully fought historically strong pro-Russian sympathies in some regions of the world and the fear of escalation in the West.”

In May, UK Foreign Secretary David Cameron told Reuters that British-supplied long-range missiles could be used by Ukraine to strike Russian territory.

In April, the Biden administration confirmed that it had secretly sent Ukraine long-range missiles capable of striking at a distance of over 190 miles. Ukraine used these weapons to carry out a strike on an airbase in Crimea in May. The weapons were also used to attack the Port of Berdiansk on the Sea of Azov.

Confirming that the US secretly provided the weapons, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said in March, “They are now in Ukraine and have been in Ukraine for some time.”

In May 2022, Biden declared, “We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders.” And in September 2022, Biden declared, “We’re not going to send to Ukraine rocket systems that strike into Russia.”

But in July, National Security Advisor Sullivan asserted that the US is allowing Ukraine to use US-provided weapons to strike “anywhere” inside Russian territory.

To date, it does not appear that US-made long-range missiles have been used to carry out strikes deep inside Russia. However, the current media campaign over the Kursk offensive is being used to once again expand US rules of engagement for Ukraine.

The latest attack comes in the aftermath of the NATO summit in Washington, which reorganized the transfer and logistical oversight of Western support for Ukraine

under the aegis of NATO. It also put into place far-reaching plans for the reorganization of NATO’s forces to put hundreds of thousands of NATO troops on a high state of readiness for potential involvement in a full-scale war.

On Friday, the US Department of Defense announced that it was sending another \$125 million in weapons to Ukraine, including, according to the Institute for the Study of War, “HIMARS systems; 155mm and 105mm artillery ammunition; Stinger missiles; Javelin and AT-4 anti-tank systems; Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire-Guided (TOW) anti-tank guided missiles; multi-purpose radars; HMMWV multi-purpose wheeled vehicles; small arms ammunition; explosive munitions; and additional equipment and munitions.”



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