

Massive explosion at Russian arms depot leaves unanswered questions

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A sprawling, highly fortified Russian arms depot located north of Moscow exploded in a giant fireball Wednesday night, against the backdrop of an escalating media and political campaign demanding that Ukraine be allowed to strike Russia with NATO weapons.

The explosion marked one of the largest strikes on a Russian arms depot since the start of the war. The arsenal in Toropets, located 300 miles north of Ukraine and 230 miles west of Moscow, reportedly housed long-range missiles and glide bombs.

The massive blast registered on earthquake monitors, and NASA's Fire Information for Resource Management System showed the entire arsenal on fire.

The *Washington Post* reported that an official from Ukraine's security service, the SBU, took credit for the attack, declaring the arms depot was "literally wiped off the face of the Earth," and that the operation involved "more than 100 drones."

Meanwhile, the Tver regional government said in a Telegram post that "a fire started as a result of drone debris falling while air defense forces were repelling an attack."

Neither the Ukrainian explanation of a major coordinated drone strike nor the Russian explanation of drone fragments lighting a fire aligns with previous Russian statements about the arsenal's defensive capabilities.

In 2018, when the site was renovated, the Russian Ministry of Defense declared the site met the "highest international standards" and could defend against weapons from missiles and "even a small nuclear attack."

How a hardened facility built to withstand a strike by a nuclear weapon could have been completely destroyed by drones carrying, at most, a few dozen kilograms of explosives each, has not been explained.

Moreover, the town is significantly closer to Latvia, a NATO member, than it is to Ukraine, leading to speculation—as yet without evidence—that the strike could have been launched from Latvia.

The attack takes place against the backdrop of an escalating campaign by the US media and political establishment to allow Ukraine to carry out long-range strikes against Russia using NATO weapons.

Unlike Ukraine's kamikaze drones, the UK's Storm Shadow missile carries a payload of nearly 1,000 pounds and is capable of penetrating hardened targets.

Last week, the *Guardian* reported that "British government sources indicated that a decision had already been made to allow Ukraine to use Storm Shadow cruise missiles on targets inside Russia."

While an announcement about the move was expected last week at a meeting between US President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, no announcement was made at the time.

Instead, US and UK media outlets began raising the suggestion that the US could simply authorize the strikes in secret, without making any such announcement. As the *Economist* wrote at the time, "There is unlikely to be a public announcement. A decision may be quietly communicated to Kyiv, to downplay its significance and to keep it secret. It may not be until targets in Russia are struck with Western missiles that a change will be confirmed."

Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin declared, "If this decision is made, it will mean nothing less than the direct participation of NATO countries, the US and European countries, in the conflict in Ukraine." He added, "Their direct participation, of course, significantly changes the very essence, the very nature of the conflict."

Former Russian President Dimitri Medvedev added

that “formal prerequisites” exist for turning Kiev into a “giant gray melted spot,” in a threat to retaliate against attacks on Russia using nuclear weapons.

Regardless of these warnings and threats by Russian officials, the NATO military alliance is openly advocating such strikes.

Over the weekend, Admiral Rob Bauer, the chair of the NATO Military Committee, argued that NATO had the legal right to facilitate strikes against the Russian mainland. “Every nation that is attacked has the right to defend itself. And that right doesn’t stop at the border of your own nation,” Bauer said.

He continued, “You want to weaken the enemy that attacks you in order to not only fight the arrows that come your way, but also attack the archer that is, as we see, very often operating from Russia proper into Ukraine.”

He added, “So militarily, there’s a good reason to do that, to weaken the enemy, to weaken its logistic lines, fuel, ammunition that comes to the front. That is what you want to stop.”

On Tuesday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg added his name to calls for strikes on Russia in an interview with the *Times of London*. “There have been many red lines declared by him before, and he has not escalated, meaning also involving NATO allies directly in the conflict,” Stoltenberg said. “He has not done so because he realizes that NATO is the strongest military alliance in the world.”

In a separate series of remarks to the British media, Stoltenberg declared, “We have a full-scale war in Europe launched by Moscow. There are no risk-free options in the war. But I continue to believe that the biggest risk for us will be if President Putin wins in Ukraine.”

On Thursday, UN officials announced that Ukrainian President Zelensky would address the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday. Zelensky will also meet next week with US President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris at the White House to discuss a purported “victory plan” for the war against Russia.

Zelensky’s visit comes amid a series of military setbacks for the Ukrainian military in Russia’s continued offensive in the Donbas. Against the backdrop of a potential collapse of the Ukrainian military, the US-aligned media and political

establishment are agitating for an escalation of US involvement in the war as a means to turn the tide.

An op-ed published Wednesday in Politico concluded, “the Ukrainians are ceding ground in the eastern Donbas region and fighting off massive drone and missile attacks on their largest cities. They need a morale and momentum shift. Lowering the restrictions on missile use could help.”



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