

Biden Proclaims ‘America Is Back’ as the US Makes Provocations on Russia’s Borders

By [Johanna Ross](#)

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‘America is back’ hailed Joe Biden on Twitter this week. The world tried to work out exactly what that meant. For different parts of the world, of course, it means different things. As many liberal Americans breathe a sigh of relief, the people of Libya, Afghanistan and Iraq may shudder. For democratic, progressive values at home were often balanced with interventionism and destruction abroad during previous ‘normal’ administrations. There is no doubt that Russians are viewing Biden’s presidency with trepidation: the return of familiar hawks does not bode well for Russian-US relations.

Biden’s announcement curiously coincided with another incident on the very same day – the appearance of [US naval destroyer John S McCain](#) within Russian waters off the coast of Vladivostok. The incident should not be overlooked. The move seems to be a display of sheer bravado on the part of the Americans, who released a statement later on asserting that they had the right to challenge ‘Russia’s excessive maritime claims’. Moscow responded by saying the ship had been ‘warned of the unacceptability of its actions’ and (in short) it was lucky it had not been rammed by the Udaloy-class destroyer which had been tailing it. This provocative move was followed on the next day by US missiles being launched into the Black Sea from Romania. The rocket-launch tests reportedly involved more than 130 troops and 30 pieces of military hardware. It doesn’t take much imagination to work out what they could be used for: the range of these missiles is 300km, they could reach Crimea.

But don’t take my word for it. For greater insight into the US’ ambitions when it comes to Russia, one need only look to this [RAND](#) report from last year. This think-tank has close ties to the US military and therefore offers a pretty good reflection of what current US policy is. And it makes disturbing reading. Entitled ‘Extending Russia’ the document discusses all the different ways the US can undermine Russia, ideologically, geopolitically and militarily. It identifies that the US is locked in a ‘great-power’ competition with Russia (welcome back to the 19th century) and it assesses which tactics would bring about the best results at what risk. From promoting regime change in Belarus to increasing NATO exercises in Europe, every possibility is explored. With regard to the recent military exercises in Romania, and the incident with the USS John S McCain, we can see where the ground has been laid for such provocations:

‘There are several measures the US and its allies could take to encourage Russia to divert defense resources into the maritime domain, an area where the US already possesses key comparative advantages...deploying land-based or air-launched anti-ship cruise missiles on NATO’s Black Sea coast could compel Russia to strengthen defenses of its Crimean bases, limit its navy’s

ability to operate in the Black Sea, and thus diminish the utility of its Crimean conquest.'

It speaks of developing a land-based military presence on the coast, citing Romania as a country likely to comply with such plans, having concerns over the Russian 'build-up' in the Black Sea region. It suggests that installing land-based weapons systems could be preferable to increasing maritime activity, as the increased presence of NATO vessels in the Black Sea could lead to Russia bolstering its presence in the region. Which, naturally, given this increased US threat, it already has. Only this week, it was reported that the Russian army had installed advanced artillery on Crimea to defend the peninsula from any "surprise missile attack." The Deputy Head of the Public Chamber of Crimea, Alexander Formanchuk, [expressed](#) concern that these NATO exercises fit within a wider pattern of escalation, saying that "provocations against Crimea have become more frequent. Unfortunately, we are witnessing a further exacerbation of international relations and the international situation. And the topic of Crimea is a convenient reason for escalating such provocations."

The question is, does the US appreciate the danger of the path it is treading? Do these policy makers understand that if it continues on the current trajectory the chances of conflict with Russia, even being triggered accidentally, are increasing? With such demonstrations of force taking place on Russia's borders, there is a high risk of one side misinterpreting the other's actions, leading to retaliation. One has to ask if this is in fact the goal of some in the US military and security establishment. Look where this 'great power' competition led us to in the 20th century- two catastrophic world wars. And yet the rhetoric coming from US politicians and media couldn't try to incite war more if it tried. "The U.S. Army Has A Rocket Surprise For Russian Troops In Crimea" a Forbes article read this week. The US is sending 'a message' to Moscow it reads, 'The U.S. Army in Europe has restored its long-range firepower. And it wants the Russians to know'. Sounds friendly, doesn't it?

The US has never recognised Crimea's reunification with Russia; nor has it ever understood or appreciated the history of the peninsula or why Russia felt obliged to involve itself in the Ukraine conflict to protect ethnic Russians. Only this year Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that the US 'will not ever recognize' Crimea as Russian territory and that it will maintain sanctions against Russia until the peninsula returns to Ukraine. This unequivocal position, together with the somewhat fanciful hope that Crimea could return to Ukraine demonstrates just how far apart the two nations are. It has been widely acknowledged that relations between the US and Russia are worse now than during the Cold War. With Joe Biden, having already acknowledged during his recent election campaign that Russia is the 'biggest threat' the US faces, we are entering a very uncertain and potentially volatile period ahead.

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Johanna Ross is a journalist based in Edinburgh, Scotland. You can follow the author on Twitter @shottlandka

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