

With Long-range Missiles for Ukraine, US Crosses Own Red Line

The US will reportedly send ATACMS to Ukraine -- yet another advanced weapons system that the White House had previously ruled out.

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The Biden administration is reportedly close to authorizing yet another weapons system for Ukraine that it had previously ruled out. According to [ABC News](#) and the [Financial Times](#), the US will send Army Tactical Missile Systems, or ATACMS, a high priority for Kiev and its most hawkish backers. The long-range missiles, which travel up to 190 miles, would bolster Ukraine's capacity to hit Crimea and possibly mainland Russia.

The White House previously invoked that very capability to rule out the ATACMS as too dangerous an escalation. As National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan [explained in June 2022](#), President Biden was "not prepared to provide" long-range missiles, given the "key goal" of avoiding "the road towards a third world war."

Just over one year later, the road towards a third world war is no longer closed.

Helping matters is what ABC News describes as "a surprising discovery": according to two US officials, the US "has found it has more ATACMS in its inventory than originally assessed."

The "surprising discovery" for the war effort is reminiscent of another fortuitous find. In June, the Pentagon claimed that an "accounting error" had freed up more than \$6.2 billion in new funds to buy weapons for Ukraine.

It will be of no surprise to anyone who has followed the Ukraine proxy war that the Biden administration is once again crossing its own red line. From the start, the White House has publicly resisted sending major weapons systems only to later relent. The arsenal of rejected-turned-authorized weapons includes HIMARS rocket artillery, Patriot missiles,

Abrams tanks, F-16 fighter jets, cluster munitions, and depleted uranium.

The threat of world war has not changed. Instead, by supplying just enough weapons to continue the fight, the US can achieve its primary aim: not help defend Ukraine and end the war, but use Ukraine to “lock Russia in a quagmire” that will leave Moscow “weakened” or even regime changed.

As Edward Stringer, ex-head of operations for the UK Defense Staff, put it, the NATO weapons supply has been a “drip-feed” that offers “just enough for Ukraine not to lose,” and ultimately amounts to “just prolonging the war.”

At the NATO summit in Lithuania this past June, Western officials admitted that their policies fuel an endless fight. According to the New York Times, “several American and European officials acknowledged” that their “commitments” to Ukraine “make it all the more difficult to begin any real cease-fire or armistice negotiations.” Additionally, US-led “promises of Ukraine’s eventual accession to NATO — after the war is over — create a strong incentive for Moscow to hang onto any Ukrainian territory it can and to keep the conflict alive.”

To keep the conflict alive, the Biden administration is also backtracking on its prior vow to limit Ukrainian attacks inside Russia. Back in June 2022 – the same month as his colleague Sullivan ruled out ATACMS — Secretary of State Antony Blinken declared that Ukraine has “given us assurances that they will not use” US multiple-launch rocket systems “against targets on Russian territory.” Fast forward to today, and Blinken is shrugging off the possibility that the even more powerful ATACMS will hit those very targets. “It’s their decision, not ours,” Blinken told CNN.

Even Blinken’s tepid deferral was quickly contradicted. Speaking remotely to a conference in Kiev, Victoria Nuland, the Acting Deputy Secretary of State, said that one “axis” of current US strategy is to help Ukraine “have what it needs to be able to put some of Russia’s most precious assets at risk” – an apparent green-light for striking assets deep inside of Russia.

Blinken’s claim is additionally contradicted by established battlefield protocol. When Ukrainian forces use advanced US-provided rocket systems, the Washington Post reported in February, they “require coordinates provided or confirmed by the United States and its allies for the vast majority of strikes.” Accordingly, Ukraine “usually chooses not to strike without U.S. confirmation.”

To complement their plans to strike “Russia’s most precious assets”, the White House is claiming that Ukraine’s faltering counteroffensive is in fact a growing success. The Ukrainian military, Blinken claims, has made “real progress in recent weeks.” And overall, he asserts, “Ukraine has taken back more than 50 percent of the territory that Russia seized from it since February 2022.”

It is unclear where Blinken is seeing this “real progress” and seismic territorial reconquest. As one senior Western official told the New York Times, Ukraine’s most successful advances of late, “while noteworthy, do not yet represent a major operational breakthrough.” And according to the Washington Post, Russia has gone from controlling a high of 51,000 square miles of Ukrainian territory in March 2022, to 41,000 square miles today – a Ukrainian recapture rate of about 20 percent.

To continue the Ukraine war, therefore, the Biden administration is sending weapons

systems that it had previously ruled out; ignoring its own stated pledge to restrict their targets; and offering a deceptively optimistic assessment of Ukraine's progress to date.

Perhaps, as always, the prevailing strategy will bear fruit, and Ukraine will expel Russian forces without having to make any agreement with Moscow or allied Donbas rebels. Alternatively, Ukraine will continue to sacrifice countless lives as it draws yet another dangerous infusion from Washington's war-prolonging drip-feed.

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Featured image: An ATACMS missile being launched from an M270 MLRS (Licensed under the Public Domain)

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