

Biden Is Openly Pursuing A Policy Of Escalation In Ukraine

What are we to make of a comment Monday from Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin that the Biden administration's goal in Ukraine is "to see Russia weakened to the degree that it can't do the kinds of things that it has done in invading Ukraine"?

Austin made the remark in a press conference with Secretary of State Antony Blinken after the pair met with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv, in what was the highest level visit by U.S. officials since Russia invaded Ukraine in late February.

One obvious conclusion we can draw from Austin's comment is that the Biden administration has now committed openly to a policy of escalation in Ukraine. The White House intends to keep the war in Ukraine alive, with the stated goal of weakening Moscow by continuing to pour new and more advanced weaponry into the war-ravaged country.

Indeed, Austin and Blinken announced a new round of military aid to Ukraine, bringing the total amount of U.S. assistance to about \$3.7 billion since the invasion began. After resisting pressure early in the conflict to supply Ukraine with advanced weapons systems, the Biden administration has changed course. It is now preparing to send heavy artillery, helicopters, armored personnel carriers, anti-aircraft radar systems, advanced attack drones and other weapons.

Austin told members of the press that the Defense Department won't just send weapons, but "will expand military training for Ukrainian

service members in the region on certain weapons systems being provided."

Delivering all this aid is of course itself an escalation of U.S. involvement in the war. A Wall Street Journal [report](#) about the meeting in Kyiv included this detail, buried near the end of the story: "Senior U.S. military officers at a facility in Poland described an accelerating logistical network for supplying weapons and materiel to Ukraine, as well as a regional effort to increase troop levels and exercises with NATO members along the alliance's eastern flank.

"Seven 155-mm artillery pieces, along with their tow vehicles, are being processed through the facility, adding to the 18 howitzers the U.S. has already provided to Ukraine, a senior defense official said. Six dozen U.S. howitzers are being sent to Ukraine under a new aid package, and rounds of 155-mm artillery were visible on pallets at the Polish facility."

These weapons and munitions are getting into Ukraine for the most part via railway, which is probably why Russia [carried out missile strikes](#) on least five railway stations across central and western Ukraine early Monday, just hours after Austin and Blinken met with Zelensky.

How did Austin and Blinken get to that meeting? By railway. Politico [reported](#) that "Austin and Blinken traveled to and from Kyiv by train and crossed into Poland shortly before Russian missiles struck several railway lines — including one in the city of Lviv in western Ukraine, near the Polish border."

If you're wondering what is the significance of this deepening U.S. involvement in the Russo-Ukrainian war, or how it might lead to a direct military confrontation between the United States and Russia, consider

that the U.S. secretaries of defense and state might have just narrowly missed being struck by a Russian missile as they traveled to and from Kyiv by rail on Monday.

As the Biden administration escalates, the chances that something very much like that will happen are going to increase exponentially. Perhaps a crew of U.S. servicemen quietly sent into the country to train Ukrainian troops on the use of a new U.S.-provided weapons systems will get hit by a Russian missile strike. Perhaps U.S. diplomats, whom Blinken said are returning to Ukraine this week, first to Lviv and eventually to Kyiv, will be killed or injured or otherwise caught in the crossfire.

We can't know what will happen exactly, only that if the United States continues down this path — sending Ukraine increasingly advanced weapons systems, training Ukrainian troops, underwriting Ukraine's defense — it will lead, *as it has already led*, to ever-increasing U.S. involvement in the war.

At some point, it won't matter that back in March President Biden said he wouldn't send U.S. troops to Ukraine. The logic of U.S. escalation is already at work, moving us toward direct engagement.

After all, the Pentagon [said in early March](#) that a U.S.-facilitated transfer of Polish MiG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine was not "tenable," yet last week the United States and its allies took a step in that direction, [providing Ukraine with aircraft parts](#) it needed to get 20 grounded planes operational. Even now, Slovakia is in talks with its NATO allies about [providing MiG-29 warplanes to Ukraine](#) if the United States will replace them with F-16s.

Beyond the logic of escalation, there is a strategic dead-end looming for the Biden administration. Early on in the war, Blinken articulated the hoped-for end state in Ukraine: "We have to sustain this until it stops, until the war is over, Russian forces leave, the Ukrainian people regain their independence, their sovereignty, their territorial integrity. We're committed to doing that."

The best way to understand that is as a maximalist policy vis-à-vis Moscow: a total defeat of Moscow and a complete humiliation of the Russian armed forces. Since Blinken said that in early March, versions of it have been repeated in the corporate press and among unreconstructed foreign policy neocons.

A [recent column](#) by Daniel Henninger in the Wall Street Journal is representative of this view. The time has come, he says, for the West to declare its intention to "win" in Ukraine. After all, America's "credibility" is at stake. "The moment has arrived in this war for Mr. Biden to clear something up with one presidential assertion: 'We're in this thing to win.'"

So goes the thinking among establishment types inside the Beltway. As far as they are concerned, the United States is "in this thing." And if we're in, then we'd better win. The assumption underlying this analysis is that Russian President Vladimir Putin, faced with U.S. escalation, will back down and accept defeat. An unmitigated Ukrainian victory is, according to these people, somehow a realistic outcome of this conflict.

But history, especially the [unique history of Russo-Ukrainian relations](#), suggests otherwise. Indeed it suggests that Moscow will never allow for the kind of Ukrainian victory that Blinken and the White House are

working towards. To the extent U.S. policymakers are relying on, say, historical comparisons to the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan as a guide for the creation of U.S. policy in Ukraine, then we're in trouble.

Put another way, [this is not a peripheral conflict for Russia](#). As far as the Kremlin is concerned, the fate of Ukraine is inextricably tied to Russia's core strategic national interests. The chances that Putin will accept total defeat in Ukraine without escalation that involves the use of nuclear weapons, or that involves widening the war, are probably lower than most Americans are comfortable with.

To bring it back to Defense Secretary Austin's remark about the U.S. wanting to see Russia "weakened" to the point it cannot field a military capable of invading a much smaller country, one has to ask: how does Russia, a country with the largest nuclear arsenal in the world, get weakened to that point? Do Austin and his generals really think that a U.S.-backed Ukraine is going to be able to do that? Or do they have something else in mind? The evidence suggests they have something else in mind, and that something else is direct U.S. and NATO involvement.

Instead of barreling toward a clash between Russia and the West, a wiser course of action for the Biden administration would be to ensure the United States doesn't get drawn into the war at all, and takes the lead in urging both sides to come to a negotiated political settlement that puts an end to the fighting.

But with each passing week, that wiser course of action becomes more remote and less possible, while a far more dangerous and increasingly inexorable course of events, for the United States and Russia and the entire world, draws ever closer.