

Russia warns U.S. to stop arming Ukraine

The formal diplomatic note from Moscow, a copy of which was reviewed by The Washington Post, came as President Biden approved a dramatic expansion in the scope of weapons being provided to the government in Kyiv

[Karen DeYoung](#) 8:03 p.m. EDT



Ukrainian service members unpack antitank missiles, delivered by plane as part of the U.S. military support package, at the Boryspil International Airport outside Kyiv on Feb. 10. (Valentyn Ogirenko/Reuters)

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Russia this week sent a formal diplomatic note to the United States warning that U.S. and NATO shipments of the “most sensitive” weapons systems to Ukraine were “adding fuel” to the conflict there and could bring “unpredictable consequences.”

The diplomatic démarche, a copy of which was reviewed by The Washington Post, came as President Biden approved a dramatic expansion in the scope of weapons being provided to Ukraine, an \$800 million package including 155 mm howitzers — a serious upgrade in long-range artillery to match Russian systems — coastal defense drones and armored vehicles, as well as additional portable anti-aircraft and anti-tank weapons and millions of rounds of ammunition.

[Pentagon will bolster military aid, weapons training for Ukrainians](#)

The United States has also facilitated the shipment to Ukraine of long-range air defense systems, including Slovakia’s shipment of Russian-manufactured Soviet-era S-300 launchers on which Ukrainian forces have already been trained. In exchange, the administration announced last week, the United States is deploying a [Patriot missile system](#) to Slovakia and consulting with Slovakia on a long-term replacement.

On Friday, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova confirmed the diplomatic note, and said that similar démarches on arms shipments to Ukraine were sent to “all countries,” including the United States, Russia’s Interfax news agency reported.

Shipment of the U.S. weapons, the first wave of which U.S. officials said

would arrive in Ukraine within days, follows an urgent appeal to Biden from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, as Russian forces were said to be mobilizing for a major assault on eastern Ukraine's Donbas region and along the coastal strip connecting it with Russian-occupied Crimea in the south. Russian troops have [largely withdrawn](#) from much of the northern part of the country, including around the capital, Kyiv, following humiliating defeats by the Ukrainian military and local resistance forces.

"What the Russians are telling us privately is precisely what we've been telling the world publicly — that the massive amount of assistance that we've been providing our Ukrainian partners is proving extraordinarily effective," said a senior administration official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity about the sensitive diplomatic document.

The State Department declined to comment on the contents of the two-page diplomatic note or any U.S. response.

President Biden said he told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on April 13 that he is authorizing \$800 million more in security assistance. (Video: Reuters)

Russia experts suggested that Moscow, which has labeled weapons convoys coming into the country as legitimate military targets but has not thus far attacked them, may be preparing to do so.

"They have targeted supply depots in Ukraine itself, where some of these supplies have been stored," said George Beebe, former director of Russia analysis at the CIA and Russia adviser to former vice president Dick Cheney. "The real question is do they go beyond attempting to target [the weapons] on Ukrainian territory, try to hit the

supply convoys themselves and perhaps the NATO countries on the Ukrainian periphery" that serve as transfer points for the U.S. supplies.

If Russian forces stumble in the next phase of the war as they did in the first, "then I think the chances that Russia targets NATO supplies on NATO territory go up considerably," Beebe said. "There has been an assumption on the part of a lot of us in the West that we could supply the Ukrainians really without limits and not bear significant risk of retaliation from Russia," he said. "I think the Russians want to send a message here that that's not true."

The diplomatic note was dated Tuesday, as word first leaked of the [new arms package](#) that brought the total amount of U.S. military aid provided to Ukraine since the Feb. 24 invasion to \$3.2 billion, according to Pentagon spokesman John Kirby. In a public announcement Wednesday, [Biden said](#) it would include "new capabilities tailored to the wider assault we expect Russia to launch in eastern Ukraine."

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The document, titled "On Russia's concerns in the context of massive supplies of weapons and military equipment to the Kiev regime," written in Russian with a translation provided, was forwarded to the State Department by the Russian Embassy in Washington.

The Russian Embassy did not respond to requests for comment.

Among the items Russia identified as "most sensitive" were "multiple launch rocket systems," although the United States and its NATO allies are not believed to have supplied those weapons to Ukraine. Russia accused the allies of violating "rigorous principles" governing the transfer of weapons to conflict zones, and of being oblivious to "the

threat of high-precision weapons falling into the hands of radical nationalists, extremists and bandit forces in Ukraine."

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It accused NATO of trying to pressure Ukraine to "abandon" sputtering, and so far unsuccessful, negotiations with Russia "in order to continue the bloodshed." Washington, it said, was pressuring other countries to stop any military and technical cooperation with Russia, and those with Soviet-era weapons to transfer them to Ukraine.

"We call on the United States and its allies to stop the irresponsible militarization of Ukraine, which implies unpredictable consequences for regional and international security," the note said.

[*Putin says peace talks with Ukraine are at an 'impasse'*](#)

Andrew Weiss, a former National Security Council director for Russian, Ukrainian and Eurasian affairs, and now vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, recalled that Russian President Vladimir Putin, in a speech on the February morning that the invasion began, warned that Western nations would face "consequences greater than any you have faced in history" if they became involved in the conflict.

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Attention at the time focused on Putin's reminder that Russia possesses a powerful nuclear arsenal, Weiss said, but it was also "a very explicit warning about not sending weapons into a conflict zone." Having drawn a red line, he asked, are the Russians "now inclined to back that up?"

Such an attack would be “a very important escalatory move, first and foremost because it represents a threat to the West if they aren’t able to keep supplies flowing into Ukraine, which by extension might diminish Ukraine’s capacity for self-defense.” That risk “shouldn’t be downplayed,” he said, noting the added risk that an attempt to strike a convoy inside Ukraine could go awry over the border into NATO territory.

Senior U.S. defense officials remain concerned about the possibility of such attacks. “We don’t take any movement of weapons and systems going into Ukraine for granted,” Kirby said Thursday. “Not on any given day.”

Kirby said Ukrainian troops bring the weapons into Ukraine after the United States brings them into the region, and “the less we say about that, the better.”