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[www.afgazad.com](http://www.afgazad.com)

[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

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Clara Weiss

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## ***US approves further attacks on Crimea, provides \$775 million in weapons for Ukrainian offensive***

Days after the latest major Ukrainian attack on a Russian military base on the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea, the US is seeking to further escalate the war with Russia by providing \$775 million in weapons and ammunition for Ukraine's offensive.

Speaking with POLITICO earlier this week, a senior Biden Administration openly endorsed the strikes and encouraged further attacks on Crimea. The peninsula was annexed by Russia in March 2014, following a US-orchestrated coup in Kiev that ousted a pro-Russian government. The official stated that the US supports strikes by Kiev on Crimea and reiterated that the US considered Crimea part of Ukraine.

So far, two major attacks have taken place on Russian military bases on Crimea, on August 9 and August 16. The first attack on the Saki airbase caused the biggest loss of Russian aviation in a single day since World War II, destroying at least seven fighter jets, each worth over \$24 million. A Western official told POLITICO on Friday that "more than half" of Russia's Black Sea fighting aviation fleet had been destroyed in the assault. A Ukrainian official claimed last week that 60 people had been killed and 100 wounded in the attack.

The second attack on Tuesday caused an hour-long fire at a major ammunition depot and damaged railroads critical for the supply of Russian troops. The *Wall Street Journal* reported on Friday that the strikes on the ammunition depots, in particular, had had a visible effect on the course of the war in eastern and southern Ukraine. The two

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[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

attacks damaged a total of at least 130 residential buildings and led to the evacuation of over 3,250 of civilians.

Another series of explosions were reported in the night to Friday, including again on Crimea as well as at an ammunition depot in the Russian Belgorod region, where two villages had to be evacuated. Russian officials also reported that drones were destroyed by Russian air defense systems and a military warship in Crimea in the area of Sevastopol Bay, where the home base of Russia's Black Sea fleet is located.

While Russia has so far been markedly restrained in its response to the enormously provocative strikes by Ukraine, Russian officials have repeatedly threatened that they would retaliate in response to strikes on Crimea, including potentially by using nuclear weapons.

It has become increasingly clear that the attacks on Russian military bases in Crimea are part of a beginning counter-offensive by the Ukrainian military that has been prepared and funded through massive weapons deliveries by the NATO powers, first and foremost by the United States.

In recent weeks, in addition to the attacks on the military bases in the Black Sea, Ukrainian forces have used the US-supplied long-range HIMARS rocket systems to disrupt Russian supply routes across the Dnipro and Inhulets rivers by attacking Russian-held bridges. Ukrainian troops have now also amassed near Kherson for an attempt to retake the strategic port city in southern Ukraine, which was the first major city to be taken by Russian forces after the February 24 invasion.

On Friday, the Pentagon announced another \$775 million in weapons and ammunitions supplies to facilitate the beginning Ukrainian offensive. This brings the total of direct military aid by the Pentagon to Ukraine since February 24 to \$10 billion, an amount that does not include the \$40 billion aid package passed by Congress in May.

According to POLITICO, the US will now for the first time be sending 15 ScanEagle surveillance drones "to help the Ukrainians spot and correct the precision artillery and rocket strikes that have taken a toll on Russian forces in recent weeks. The small drones

can be moved around the battlefield relatively easily and would be invaluable in the expected push to retake the city of Kherson in the south.”

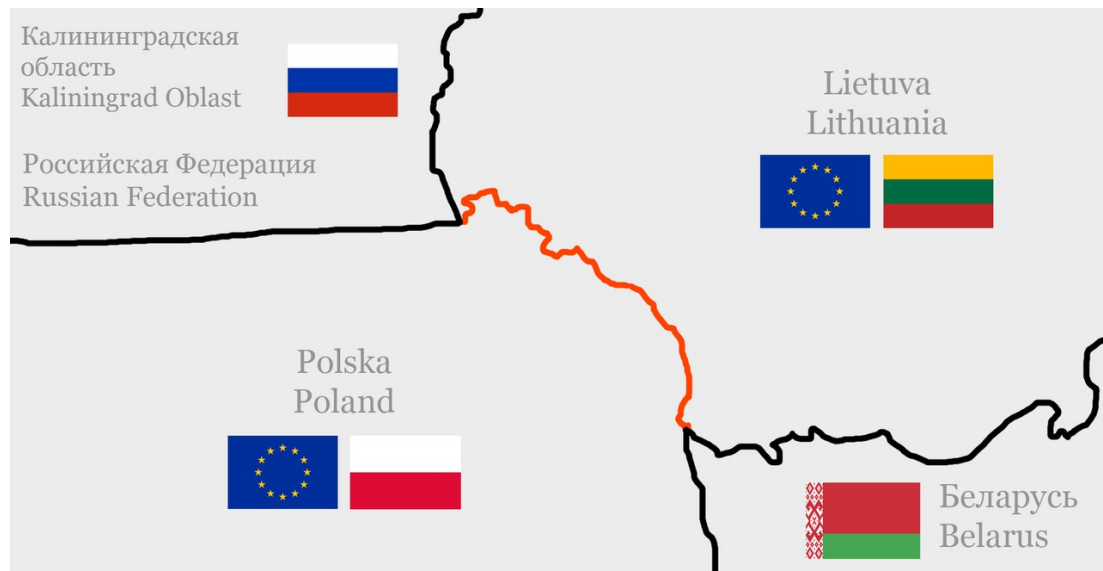
The deliveries will also include 40 heavily armored MaxxPro mine-resistant vehicles, which were originally developed for the US occupation forces in Iraq. In addition, the Pentagon will provide fighter-launched High-speed Anti-Radiation Missiles that have targeted Russian radar systems, as well as TOW guided anti-tank missile systems, sixteen 105mm howitzers and 36,000 rounds, and 2,000 rounds for the Carl Gustav recoilless rifle. POLITICO explained that the Carl Gustav is a “small anti-armor weapon used by U.S. special operations forces...which can be carried easily and is designed to work in close quarters with an enemy, is an indication that the Ukrainians expect close-in fighting in the coming weeks.”

A source told POLITICO that the US is planning to send Excalibur precision-guided artillery munitions in another tranche in the near future.

The deliberate escalation of the war with Russia by the imperialist powers comes even as tens of thousands of soldiers are believed to have died on both sides; over a quarter of the country’s pre-war population of under 40 million has been forced to flee; and over 5,300 civilians have been killed. There are also significant concerns that fighting around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, the largest in Europe, could lead to a nuclear disaster. After weeks in which Ukraine and Russia traded accusations of shelling the plant, Russian President Vladimir Putin and French President Emmanuel Macron agreed on Friday to arrange a mission by officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency to visit the plant in the coming days.

The developments of the past two weeks have shown beyond any doubt the true character of this war: the imperialist powers are waging a war against Russia, using Ukrainian territory as the staging ground, its troops as their proxy and the civilian population as their hostage. The Russian invasion was provoked to provide a pretext for the implementation of war plans that had long been in the making. It is now used to further a massive escalation of the rearmament of all the imperialist powers who are positioning themselves for a new imperialist redivision of the world.

While Ukraine is currently the main battlefield of the war, NATO has aggressively pushed to broaden its frontiers. Particularly dangerous are the explosive tensions around the Suwałki gap, a less than 100-kilometers-long stretch of land, which passes along the borders of NATO member states Poland and Lithuania and connects Belarus, a Kremlin ally, with Kaliningrad, an enclave on the Baltic Sea that forms part of the Russian Federation.



Close-up of the Suwałki gap. Jakub Łuczak, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

In June, Lithuania deliberately sought to provoke a clash with Russia by blocking the transport of Russian goods from Belarus over the Suwałki gap to Kaliningrad. According to a report by the *Wall Street Journal*, Lithuanian helicopters are now accompanying many Russian freight trains crossing the Suwałki gap to Kaliningrad.

This week, the far-right Polish government of the Law and Justice Party, which has delivered more weapons to Ukraine than any country apart from the US and the UK, announced that it is planning to close its part of the Suwałki gap. Both Poland and Lithuania announced this week that they will cease to issue passports to Russian citizens (with the sole exception of diplomats). The moves have prompted angry comments in the Russian press, suggesting that the main goal of the new visa restrictions is to prevent Russian citizens from entering Kaliningrad through the Suwałki gap. Some commentators are insisting that Russia had to assert its “right to the Suwałki gap.”

In an indication that the Kremlin is preparing for a potential broadening of the conflict with NATO, Russia has reportedly increased its troops deployments and missiles in Belarus. On Thursday, the Russian Defense Ministry reported that it had sent three MiG-31E warplanes equipped with Kinzhal hypersonic missiles to Kaliningrad.

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