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Ukraine's Zelensky visits London, Paris to push for NATO fighter planes

President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelensky made a surprise visits to the UK and France Wednesday, in his third trip abroad since the start of the war with Russia. He will meet European Union leaders and address the European Parliament Thursday.

Meetings with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, King Charles III, President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Olaf Scholz, and a speech before the UK Parliament were used to promote NATO's continuing escalation toward a Third World War.



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky meet Ukrainian troops being trained to command Challenger 2 tanks at a military facility in Lulworth, Dorset, England, Wednesday Feb. 8, 2023 [AP Photo/Andrew Matthews]

There was only one theme to Zelensky's remarks: demands for the delivery of advanced fighter jets to the Ukrainian armed forces.

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In an elaborate piece of political theatre staged in Britain's Westminster Hall, he told the assembled House of Commons and Lords of his scheduled audience with Charles: "In Britain, the king is an air force pilot. In Ukraine today, every air force pilot is a king." He then presented the Speaker of the House with the signed helmet of a Ukrainian pilot, emblazoned with the words, "We have freedom, give us wings to protect it."

Zelensky concluded his speech, "Leaving the British parliament two years ago, I thanked you for delicious English tea, and I will be leaving the parliament today thanking all of you in advance for powerful English planes."

As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote February 2, "A familiar script is playing out." The decision to send fighter jets has already been taken. But it must be packaged in an initial "reluctance" to act, followed by insistent demands from NATO's proxy government in Ukraine, amplified in all the Western media, and then a relatively rapid "reversal" and official green light from Washington and the European capitals.

Zelensky's speech was intended to generate support for this move among the upper middle-class layers supporting war and to put pressure on European powers, particularly Germany, which have been less willing to front the costs of a war with Russia whose main benefits will be reaped by the United States.

Britain was chosen for the venue as the most pro-war of Washington's allies, with the Ukrainian President saying, "London has stood with Kiev since day one" and saying of former Prime Minister Boris Johnson in the audience, "You got others united when it seemed absolutely, absolutely impossible."

In a series of statements, Sunak's office announced before Zelensky's arrival that "the Prime Minister will offer to bolster the UK's training offer for Ukrainian troops, including expanding it to fighter jet pilots to ensure Ukraine can defend its skies well into the future. "The training will ensure pilots are able to fly sophisticated NATO-standard fighter jets in the future... The Prime Minister will also offer to provide Ukraine with longer range capabilities"—that is, missiles capable of striking deep into Russian territory.

After Zelensky had spoken it was revealed that "the prime minister has tasked the defence secretary with investigating what jets we might be able to give...

"We think this is right to provide both short-term equipment like Challenger tanks, additional guns, longer-range capabilities that can help win the war now, but also look to the medium-to-long term to ensure Ukraine has every possible capability it requires."

Speaking at a joint press conference with Zelensky in the evening, Sunak said in response to a question about jets, “Nothing is off the table... When it comes to fighter combat air force, of course they are part of the conversation.”

None of the servile journalists assembled asked what the prime minister expected the consequences of such a decision would be. The truthful answer is that the dispatch of fighter jets would mark the start of direct shooting war between the NATO alliance and nuclear-armed Russia.

Speaking to the *i* newspaper last Tuesday, King’s College London defence expert Dr Marina Miron explained, “Logistics and training aside, it would be politically impossible for NATO to send those fighter jets to Ukraine without getting involved directly. Tanks are already kind of borderline. But fighter jets...

“You have to have a lot of trust to give Ukraine fighter jets because if they strike Russia, it’s going to be hell. It will escalate immediately.”

She added that “giving them fighter jets and long-range missiles is probably out of the question.” Both are now on the table.

In an interview with CNN Monday, Ukrainian national security official Oleksiy Danilov was confidently predicting that it was “only a matter of time” before combat aircraft were sent to Ukraine. He continued, “Regarding Russian territory, nobody prohibits us to destroy targets with weapons produced in Ukraine. Do we have such weapons? Yes, we do.”

The imperialist powers and Washington’s proxy Ukrainian forces do not intend to minimise the risks of the conflict but to prosecute it through to the collapse of the Russian state. They have dispatched tens of billions of pounds worth of increasingly advanced, NATO-standard weaponry and reconnaissance systems, plus special forces, to Ukraine in the last year, preparing the ground for the large-scale intervention of NATO forces.

Britain has helped to lead the charge, being among the first to provide anti-tank and artillery weapons systems and the first to announce the sending of heavy tanks—14 Challenger IIs. Ukrainian soldiers began training on the vehicles in the UK this week and Sunak announced in Wednesday’s press conference with Zelensky that the tanks “will be on the battlefield in a matter of weeks.”

As well as fighter pilot and tank crew training, the UK announced this week that it would also “offer to begin an immediate training programme for marines.”

This would be “in addition to the recruit training programme already running in the UK, which has seen 10,000 Ukrainian troops brought to battle readiness in the last six months,

and which will upskill a further 20,000 Ukrainian soldiers this year. The UK will continue to work with the Ukrainian Armed Forces and international community to scale the programme up in 2023.”

Any pretence that this is not a NATO war against Russia in Ukraine is being shredded. Speaking last week, Tory MP and former Chair of the Defence Select Committee Tobias Ellwood said bluntly, “It is up to the Treasury and Number 10 to recognise the world is changing. We are now at war in Europe. We need to move to a war footing. We are involved in that.”

Ellwood complained that the British military was not up to the task and needed vastly more resources, to be paid for through massive cuts to social spending: “The army is in a dire state. Our army is simply too small, we have cut down by 10,000 troops.” He was lent support from within the US and UK military, with government sources reporting that a serving US general had told UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace the British Army was no longer regarded as a “tier one force.” They added, according to Sky News, “Rishi Sunak risked failing in his role as ‘wartime prime minister’ unless he took urgent action.”

The Labour Party has made itself the main political spokesperson for these warmongers. On Tuesday, Shadow Defence Secretary John Healey told the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) military think tank that the upcoming Integrated Review of defence and foreign policy must “outline the contribution the UK will make to NATO as it focusses on future Russian aggression,” accusing Tory governments of having “hollowed out and underfunded” the armed forces. Securing Britain “as NATO’s leading European nation” would be “a Labour mission in government.”

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