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## **Caitlin Johnstone: Escalating Brinkmanship**

The U.S. and NATO are playing chicken with Russia over Ukraine and nobody's got a foot anywhere near the brake pedal. They're not even looking at it.



U.S. President Joe Biden arriving at the Kyiv train station on Feb. 20, 2023, for a surprise meeting with President Volodymyr Zelensky. (White House, Adam Schultz)

It's damn near impossible to keep up with all the warmongering of the Western empire these days.

In response to the frightening steps that NATO has been taking to allow Western-supplied weapons to be used by Ukraine to strike Russian territory, Vladimir Putin warned last week that these escalations can lead to “serious consequences.”

“This constant escalation can lead to serious consequences,” the Russian president said. “If these serious consequences occur in Europe, how will the U.S. behave, bearing in mind our parity in the field of strategic weapons? Hard to say. Do they want global conflict?”

[A senior Ukrainian official hinted that Kyiv may have begun using Western weapons to hit targets inside Russia, various news outlets reported Tuesday, after President Joe Biden secretly gave Ukraine permission to use U.S. weapons in Kharkiv, which *Politico* reported on May 30. ]

We can get a more concrete idea of what Putin was talking about from the blatant threat Moscow formally made to the U.K. last month, saying that Ukraine using any British weapons to attack Russian territory could result in direct Russian attacks on British military targets in Ukraine “and beyond,” which would place Russia in a profoundly dangerous state of hot warfare with NATO forces.

On Friday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg dismissed Putin’s warnings, saying, “This is nothing new. It has ... been the case for a long time that every time NATO allies are providing support to Ukraine, President Putin is trying to threaten us to not do that.”

The cavalier attitude toward nuclear brinkmanship that empire managers have been demonstrating lately was addressed on Monday by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov, who said the U.S. is close to making a “fatal” miscalculation.

“I would like to caution American officials against miscalculations which may have fatal consequences. For some unknown reason, they underestimate the seriousness of the rebuff they may receive,” Ryabkov reportedly said.

“I am urging these officials who seemingly are not bothered by anything, to take some time away from playing computer games, which is apparently what they are doing, given their light-hearted approach to serious issues, and take a closer look at what Putin said,” Ryabkov added.

American officials appear to be doing the exact opposite of what the deputy foreign minister recommends, with White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby telling the press on Monday that the Biden administration is open to discussions about expanding the use of U.S.-made weapons further into Russian territory.



Kirby at press briefing in October 2023. (White House, Oliver Contreras)

Asked about Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky's complaint that U.S. permissions to conduct limited strikes on Russian territory weren't enough and comments from U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken suggesting a greater range of Russian territory may soon be authorized, Kirby said it shouldn't surprise anyone that Zelensky wants more, and that the U.S. will keep talking to Ukraine about the possibility of U.S.-backed strikes deeper into the Russian mainland.

"And so we'll have those talks, we'll have those conversations with the Ukrainians," Kirby said.

"Absolutely, we will. And whether it leads to any additional policy changes, I can't say at this point, but we're not going to turn our back on what Ukraine needs. And we're going to continue to try to, again, evolve our support to them as the battlefield evolves as well."

I wrote just the other day that Biden's authorization for limited strikes on Russian territory with U.S. weapons would immediately be followed by a push for even more escalations with strikes deeper into Russia, and here we are. Every time the warmongers get one escalation, they immediately start pushing for another.

There is a limit to how many escalations Russia will tolerate before taking drastic action against NATO to re-establish deterrence credibility, and nobody really knows exactly where that limit is. NATO seems bound and determined to find it however, and when they do we may already be on an irreversible free fall toward nuclear Armageddon.

This all comes as the Dutch foreign minister publicly gives the green light for Ukraine to use F-16s to attack Russian territory. As *Antiwar's* Kyle Anzalone notes of this news, F-16s are nuclear-capable warplanes.



Dutch Foreign Minister Hanke Bruins Slot with with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in November 2023. (NATO, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

It's important to push back against brinkmanship with Russia well before we go over the brink into nuclear war, because obviously by then it's too late for anyone to do anything — and indeed a full-scale nuclear war between NATO and the Russian Federation could mean that nobody will ever do anything ever again.

Nuclear Armageddon is the one foreign policy mistake that you can't course-correct after you make it, so it's extremely urgent to course-correct long before we get there.

The biggest risk for nuclear war isn't that either side will knowingly choose to enter into one, but that one will be set off by miscalculation, miscommunication or technical malfunction in the chaos and confusion of soaring tensions, as nearly happened numerous times during the last Cold War. The higher tensions get, the more likely such an incident becomes, and the more hair-trigger everyone's nuclear systems will be.

[See: *US Presidents Who Gamble With Nuclear Armageddon*]

It's a lot like a standoff where people are pointing guns at each other, like the end scene of *Reservoir Dogs*. The more guns there are and the more tense the situation becomes, the more likely it is that someone will make a move that sets the whole thing off and gets everyone killed.

And that's why it's very disturbing that these tensions are being ramped up so casually by the empire with no resistance from anybody — not from Western governments, not from the media, and not even from ordinary people in any meaningful numbers.

These freaks are playing chicken with Armageddon weapons, and nobody seems to have a foot anywhere near the brake pedal. They're not even looking at it. They don't even seem to be thinking about it.

At the very least we've got to find some way to get people thinking about this. This would be such a damn stupid way for humanity to annihilate itself.

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