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By Joe Lauria

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LOOK BACK:

The Pentagon Staved Off War With Russia

In March 2022 the Pentagon leaked stories to counter propaganda intended to drag NATO into the conflict, wrote Joe Lauria. The story has since changed.



The Pentagon. (Joe Lauria)

A month after Russia entered the civil war in Ukraine in February 2022, both President Joe Biden and the Pentagon were pushing back against aggressive, neocon voices in

Congress and the State Dept. who were itching for direct military confrontation with Moscow. Biden and the brass were realists, warning that conflict with Russia could lead to a Third World War.

As a Caitlin Johnstone column published earlier today on *Consortium News* indicates, that caution has been dangerously tossed to the wind as the West widely acknowledges Ukraine is losing the war. It is an unacceptable outcome politically ruinous for European and American leaders. By allowing their Ukrainian proxies to use Western weapons to strike Russian territory Western politicians are threatening us all merely to save their political careers.

It “draws Biden even deeper into a war in which Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly raised the prospect of a nuclear strike,” said *The Washington Post*.

CN Editor-in-Chief Joe Lauria wrote the following piece in March 2022 explaining how the White House and the Pentagon were previously restraining recklessness in Washington. That was then and this is now. It shows how unthinkably far we’ve come in this conflict.

The Pentagon has been engaged in a consequential battle with the U.S. State Department and the Congress to prevent a direct military confrontation with Russia, which could unleash the most unimaginable horror of war.

President Joe Biden is caught in the middle of the fray. So far he is siding with the Defense Department, saying there cannot be any kind of NATO no-fly zone over Ukraine fighting Russian aircraft because “that’s called World War III, okay? Let’s get it straight here, guys. We will not fight the third world war in Ukraine.”

“President Biden’s been clear that U.S. troops won’t fight Russia in Ukraine, and if you establish a no-fly zone, certainly in order to enforce that no-fly zone, you’ll have to engage Russian aircraft. And again, that would put us at war with Russia,” said U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin earlier this month. (The administration plan is to bring down the Russian government through a ground insurgency and economic war, not a direct military one.)

But pressure on the White House from some members of Congress and especially the press corps is unrelenting to recklessly bring NATO directly into the war.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken who initially said NATO had given a “green light” to send planes from Poland to Ukraine had to back down and now opposes any no-fly zone involving NATO.

U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer also supported the Polish planes scheme, which was shot down by the Pentagon because it “could result in significant Russian reaction that might increase the prospects of a military escalation with NATO,” according to Pentagon spokesman John Kirby.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, hailed as a virtual superhero in Western media, has vacillated between openness to negotiating a peace settlement with Russia and calling for NATO, again on Friday, to “close the skies” above Ukraine. To save his country he appears willing to risk endangering the entire world.

Meanwhile, Western corporate media, depending almost exclusively on Ukrainian sources, report that Russia is losing the war, with its military offensive “stalled,” and in frustration has deliberately targeted civilians and flattened cities.

Biden has bought into this part of the story, calling Russian President Vladimir Putin a “war criminal.” He has also said that Russia is planning a “false flag” chemical attack to pin on Ukraine.

But on Tuesday, the Pentagon took the bold step of leaking two stories to reporters that contradict those tales. “Russia’s conduct in the brutal war tells a different story than the widely accepted view that Vladimir Putin is intent on demolishing Ukraine and inflicting maximum civilian damage—and it reveals the Russian leader’s strategic balancing act,” reported *Newsweek* in an article entitled, “Putin’s Bombers Could Devastate Ukraine But He’s Holding Back. Here’s Why.”

The piece quotes an unnamed analyst at the Pentagon’s Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) saying, “The heart of Kyiv has barely been touched. And almost all of the long-range strikes have been aimed at military targets.”

A retired U.S. Air Force officer now working as an analyst for a Pentagon contractor, added: “We need to understand Russia’s actual conduct. If we merely convince ourselves that Russia is bombing indiscriminately, or [that] it is failing to inflict more harm because its personnel are not up to the task or because it is technically inept, then we are not seeing the real conflict.”

The article says:

“As of the past weekend, in 24 days of conflict, Russia has flown some 1,400 strike sorties and delivered almost 1,000 missiles (by contrast, the United States flew more sorties and delivered more weapons in the first day of the 2003 Iraq war). ...

A proportion of those strikes have damaged and destroyed civilian structures and killed and injured innocent civilians, but the level of death and destruction is low compared to Russia's capacity.

'I know it's hard ... to swallow that the carnage and destruction could be much worse than it is,' says the DIA analyst. 'But that's what the facts show. This suggests to me, at least, that Putin is not intentionally attacking civilians, that perhaps he is mindful that he needs to limit damage in order to leave an out for negotiations.'"

A second retired U.S. Air Force officer says:

"I'm frustrated by the current narrative—that Russia is intentionally targeting civilians, that it is demolishing cities, and that Putin doesn't care. Such a distorted view stands in the way of finding an end before true disaster hits or the war spreads to the rest of Europe. I know that the news keeps repeating that Putin is targeting civilians, but there is no evidence that Russia is intentionally doing so. In fact, I'd say that Russian could be killing thousands more civilians if it wanted to."

These Pentagon sources confirm what Putin and the Russian Ministry of Defense have been saying all along: that instead of being "stalled," Russia is executing a methodical war plan to encircle cities, opening humanitarian corridors for civilians, leaving civilian infrastructure like water, electricity, telephony and internet intact, and trying to avoid as many civilian casualties as possible.

Until these Pentagon leaks it was difficult to confirm that Russia was entirely telling the truth and that corporate media were publishing fables cooked up by Ukraine's publicity machine.

No Evidence of Chemicals

The Pentagon's mettle will be tested if there is a chemical weapons attack in Ukraine. Biden has said Russia would pay a "severe price" but who the perpetrator would be might be murky. Whoever might be behind such an attack, the calls for direct military action are sure to increase in the U.S. media, the Congress and perhaps internally at the State Dept.

The second mainstream article directly undermines Biden's dramatic warning. Reuters reported: "The United States has not yet seen any concrete indications of an imminent Russian chemical or biological weapons attack in Ukraine but is closely monitoring streams of intelligence for them, a senior U.S. defense official said."

It quoted the Pentagon official as saying, "There's no indication that there's something imminent in that regard right now." Neither *The New York Times* nor *The Washington Post* published the Reuters article, which appeared in the more obscure *U.S. News and World Report*.

Never let the facts get in the way of a good story — even if it could lead to the most devastating consequences in history.

UPDATED to add details of Blinken and Pelosi's support for NATO jets from Poland entering the war and the Pentagon's move to stop it; additional quotes from a second retired Air Force officer in the Newsweek story and the challenge to the Pentagon to keep NATO out of the war if there is a chemical weapons attack.

Joe Lauria is editor-in-chief of *Consortium News* and a former U.N. correspondent for *The Wall Street Journal*, *Boston Globe*, and numerous other newspapers, including *The Montreal Gazette* and *The Star* of Johannesburg. He was an investigative reporter for the *Sunday Times* of London, a financial reporter for *Bloomberg News* and began his professional work as a 19-year old stringer for *The New York Times*. He can be reached at joelauria@consortiumnews.com and followed on Twitter [@unjoe](https://twitter.com/unjoe)

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