Stop Worrying and Love the Missile

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Soeren Petersen



Following Russia's attack on Ukraine, Germany's chancellor Olaf Scholz initially responded hesitantly to Ukrainian requests to send military aid. At the outset of the conflict, Berlin first pledged to send non-lethal aid in the form of helmets and bulletproof vests, a move widely ridiculed particularly in the face of smaller countries like the Baltics sending significant resources early.

The reason for this persistent hesitancy is largely Russian threats of escalating the war, should weapons be delivered to Ukraine. There is a fear that strikes on Russian soil with Western equipment by Ukrainian forces

could be interpreted as direct acts of war by NATO against Russia. This debate is best illustrated in regard to long-range cruise missile deliveries, a class of weapon long excluded from aid lists for fear of Ukraine utilising its capabilities to strike the Russian heartland.

The spell was partially broken when the UK and France delivered the Storm Shadow/SCALP-EG cruise missile system. Its range, however, was reduced from 500km to 250km to address the aforementioned fears. Both the Americans and the Germans have so far refused to provide their long-range missile systems, ATACMS and Taurus, respectively.

Taurus, a cousin of Storm Shadow, has a range of 500km and is launched from the air. Rather than artillery systems vulnerable to counter-battery fire and costly to replace or close-range air strikes, this missile can be fired from the relative safety of standoff distance. This system would make the destruction of the Kerch bridge possible. Crucially, it would enable critical support of Ukraine's ongoing counteroffensive in the south through its ability to increase the pressure on Russian lines of communication by striking ammunition dumps, railway infrastructure, roads and runways behind the front.

Is the pervasive fear of the German government that Taurus could be used to conduct such strikes on Russian soil and not just in the Ukrainian theatre of war substantiated? Ukraine is already striking targets on Russian soil, including high-level military personnel. It has not yet, however, used Western equipment for this. Storm Shadow/SCALP-EG, a similar system, is far too costly to utilise for the kind of low-cost, high-frequency drone attacks Ukraine is conducting. Ukraine has also not struck suitable targets like Rostov-on-Don's southern military district HQ with its new cruise missiles, despite it being at least theoretically even in the reduced range of that system. If Ukraine were to violate the pledge to not strike targets on Russian soil with Western equipment, its Western military support would cease, which would make such a strike a poor calculation.

Moreover, the logic of nuclear deterrence makes a military escalation between Russia and Germany (and therefore NATO) an impossibility. The only use Russia's nuclear weapons have in the Ukraine war is to use them as leverage in vague threats meant to inspire fear in the hearts of the citizens of NATO countries. To give in to these threats is to validate them. Of course, Olaf Scholz's job is to protect his constituents from any threat, be it ever so faint. The good news is, though, that Germany is already protected from nuclear threats through the deterrence NATO provides. He can use this assurance now to strike a double blow against Russia.

Strengthening Ukraine's warfighting capabilities and successfully calling Putin's bluff. Ukraine must win the war and Taurus can help with this goal. Olaf Scholz must give up his tentativeness and authorise the delivery of Taurus.