

# Did US Weakness Provoke a Russian Nuclear Threat?



by Lee Smith

According to President Joe Biden, the “prospect of armageddon” is higher than it has been since 1962. That’s when Washington and Moscow stared each other down over the Cuban missile crisis. Sixty years later, Biden says, the two powers may again be on the verge of starting World War III.

Vladimir Putin’s invasion of [Ukraine](#) has destabilized Europe and the aftershocks have left global markets reeling. As for Biden, since taking office in January 2021, his actions have illustrated the maxim that weakness invites aggression. The world is a dangerous place because of hard men like Putin, and

men like Biden make it more dangerous.

In the Oct. 4 episode of "[Over the Target](#)," Brendon Fallon and I discuss the possible U.S. responses in the event Putin does deploy tactical [nuclear weapons](#), and how Biden raised the stakes in Ukraine.

Retired four-star Gen. [David Petraeus says](#) that if [Russia](#) uses nuclear weapons against Ukraine, the United States "would take out every Russian conventional force that we can see and identify on the battlefield in Ukraine and also in Crimea and every ship in the Black Sea."

That's possible. The billions the Biden administration has spent on Ukraine's defense is evidence that Washington sees Kyiv as a U.S. proxy, and it may feel moved to act in the event of a weapon of mass destruction attack. But Petraeus's threat should be seen in a broader context: The Biden White House has yet to respond to a massive attack on the U.S. homeland that, it says, killed more than a million Americans and sickened dozens of millions more.

COVID-19 also was a weapon of mass destruction. Whether or not the Chinese Communist Party released it intentionally is irrelevant. The fact that Beijing lied about its origins and threatened retaliation if the U.S. government investigated them makes COVID-19 an instrument of the regime's doctrine of unrestricted warfare. And Biden hasn't done anything to deter China from trying it again.

Biden's short-sightedness raises several important questions: First, did the White House fail to anticipate the possible consequences of sending arms to Russia's border? U.S. policymakers have long known that Russia might use nuclear weapons, if only in a limited manner—Moscow's military doctrine provides for the deployment of tactical nuclear weapons.

Moscow and Washington's nuclear doctrines diverged soon after

the Cuban missile crisis. At the time, the United States had a superior nuclear arsenal and, according to the late military strategist Angelo Codevilla, “could have devastated the Soviet Union’s few, highly vulnerable missile-launching pads, as well as much of its long-range aviation.”

That changed after the crisis when Moscow put its missiles in underground silos. As Codevilla explains in his 2006 book “War: Ends and Means,” the United States would either have to increase the capacity and yield of its missiles as a counterforce against the Soviets’ arsenal, or change strategy. It chose the latter.

Henceforth, U.S. planners targeted what they could see plainly on the map: Soviet cities. The Kennedy administration reasoned that “major war,” Codevilla writes, “could be exorcised forever by the threat of mutual suicide.”

Thus was born the doctrine of “mutually assured destruction,” or MAD. The fear that the two superpowers were inching toward armageddon gave rise to a style of thinking that shaped Cold War American films and books. As Biden’s warning indicates, it still informs U.S. military strategy.

And here we come to the second question regarding Biden’s failure to look ahead: Why didn’t he see what was likely to happen by dropping sanctions on Nord Stream 2?

The pipeline carrying Russian natural gas to Germany has been in the news after an explosion led to speculation that it might have been sabotaged. Some think the Biden administration did it; others say it was the Russians themselves. As evidence for the former, some have pointed to a video of the president threatening to stop Nord Stream 2. But that, too, needs to be understood in context.

Nord Stream 2 was built to circumvent Ukraine. As long as the pipeline wasn’t complete, Putin couldn’t be sure he had a way to move energy to Europe. In 2019, sanctions were imposed on

Nord Stream 2 and construction was stopped. Capitol Hill sources tell me this helped deter Putin from moving against Ukraine.

When Biden came to office, he undid those sanctions despite warnings. The White House was eager to repay and reward a friend, Angela Merkel.

The former German chancellor was one of the leading anti-Trump voices on the international stage, and Nord Stream 2 represented a major political win for her and a vital strategic play for Germany.

The Nord Stream 2 pipeline goes directly from Russia to the easternmost deep-water port in Germany, Mukran. The port is located in Sassnitz, a city in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, the state Merkel represented when she was in the German Parliament. Turning Sassnitz into a corridor for European energy was good for Merkel's political patrons and clients.

It also gives Germany an advantage over the rest of the European Union. By charging tariffs on natural gas leaving Germany, Berlin makes energy more expensive for European industrial competitors.

So Biden waived the Nord Stream 2 sanctions. With Russian troops massing on Ukraine's border, Biden was asked why he'd given away the one instrument that might stop Putin from attacking his neighbor. All he could muster was tough talk.

"If Russia invades," Biden said, "then there will be no longer a Nord Stream 2, we will bring an end to it."

Senior State Department official Victoria Nuland echoed her boss's threats, saying, "If Russia invades Ukraine, one way or another, Nord Stream 2 will not move forward."

But as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had warned, applying Nord Stream 2 sanctions after a Russian invasion

would make them meaningless. With Biden forecasting a possible nuclear holocaust, it's important to keep in mind how his short-sightedness helped to lead us to this threshold.

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