

United States Senate

September 3, 2024

The Honorable James C. O'Brien
Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs
U.S. Department of State
2201 C Street, NW
Washington DC, 20520

Dear Assistant Secretary O'Brien,

I write to express my profound frustration regarding the clear disconnect across the Biden administration concerning its continued prohibition on Ukraine's ability to strike military targets deep into Russian territory with U.S.-provided weaponry.

On July 30, you testified before the Senate Europe and Regional Security Cooperation Subcommittee on "The Future of Europe." At the hearing, you agreed that the Biden administration's decision to deploy future long-range missiles in Germany capable of threatening military targets deep into Russia strengthens NATO's defense posture by complicating Russian planning efforts. However, when I asked how the administration can defend this decision while simultaneously limiting Ukraine's ability to use ATACMS for the same purpose, you explained the discrepancy comes down to ensuring Ukraine utilizes weapons efficiently. You were clear that the administration's current limitation on Ukrainian long-range strikes has nothing to do with a fear of Russian escalation, despite President Biden's comments at the NATO summit indicating otherwise. In fact, you said, "I know some people talk about escalation ladder concern. I have got to say, inside the government, the conversation is about where can these things be effective."

It has become clear this is not the case. At a press briefing on August 15, Deputy Pentagon Press Secretary Sabrina Singh was similarly asked about the reasoning for the administration's restrictive policy. However, in her response, while initially echoing your answer regarding effectiveness, she also said, "And of course, we're worried about escalation. So just because Russia hasn't responded to something doesn't mean that they can't or won't in the future. And that's something that the administration is always weighing." Similarly, on August 23, White House National Security Communications Advisor John Kirby, when asked whether Ukraine's incursion into Kursk has changed considerations about escalation risks or so-called Russian red lines, responded, "We've been watching escalation risks since the beginning of this conflict, and that ain't gonna change."

Escalation fears should not form the foundation of our efforts to defend our allies and partners; neither should the false hope of normalizing future relations with autocratic dictators who have proven they will never share our values or act responsibly. Yet, from Russia, to Iran, to the People's Republic of China, fear and appeasement have defined this administration's policy. Since Russia's full-scale, illegal invasion, time and again, the Biden administration has argued

against providing Ukraine some weapon or capability only to change course after months of public and congressional pressure. Even today, we have seen no dramatic escalation by Russia despite the Ukrainian military's ongoing operation inside Russian territory.

Still, this administration seems committed to repeating instead of learning from its mistakes over the past two and half years. It appears determined to let fear of escalation preserve the status quo instead of allowing Ukraine the best path to victory. And, as its decision to send long-range missiles to Germany hypocritically illustrates, it expects Ukraine to fight this war in a manner that both the United States and our NATO allies would deem ineffective.

I encourage you to urgently discuss reversing this short-sighted policy with your colleagues in the White House and across the interagency. Let's stop slow rolling this decision and give Ukraine the best opportunity to win.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pete Ricketts". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Pete" and last name "Ricketts" clearly legible.

Pete Ricketts
Ranking Member
Senate Subcommittee on Europe and Regional Security
Cooperation

CC: Secretary Antony Blinken
Department of State