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U.S. Eyes Giving Ukraine Patriot Missile Defense Systems

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin could sign off on the plan as soon as this week



A Patriot antimissile defense launcher near Rzeszow, Poland, in March.

PHOTO: SEAN GALLUP/GETTY IMAGES

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WASHINGTON—The U.S. is finalizing plans to give Ukraine its most coveted missile defense system, the Patriot, the most sophisticated weapon the U.S. would provide Ukraine since its war with Russia began, U.S. officials said.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin could sign the directive providing the Patriot as early as this week, the officials said. President Biden would then have to approve the request.

Ukraine has long called for the West to supply Patriot missile batteries, most recently since Russia began attacking Ukraine electricity and other infrastructure. But up until late last month, U.S. defense officials would only say it was a weapon system that remained “on the table.”

On Monday, Ukraine Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal reportedly told French broadcaster LCI that his nation needs Patriots to defend its infrastructure and

stop Russia's bid to overwhelm Europe with Ukrainian refugees escaping electricity shortages.

It couldn't be determined how many launchers the Pentagon would send or from where it would source them. Patriots are a cornerstone of the Pentagon's fast-deployable air defense capabilities. They have been in heavy demand, particularly in the Middle East, for years.

But on Capitol Hill, there were already concerns about the cost to U.S. national security of providing Kyiv the Patriots, particularly while China is modernizing its military and stepping up its military posture in the Taiwan straits.

"Everybody wants to help Ukraine defend itself against ballistic and cruise missiles," a congressional official said. "But this is the first system where we are going to really hash this out because we don't have enough for ourselves."

The Patriot surface-to-air system, produced by Raytheon Technologies Corp., can target ballistic and surface missiles from miles away. U.S. commanders across the world have sought them for their accuracy and long-range defensive capabilities.

Throughout the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, many of the systems were in the Middle East. In the spring 2020, the U.S. pulled two Patriot missile batteries from Saudi Arabia and two others from the Middle East, signally waning concerns about Iran's military escalation. The systems, along with dozens of military personnel, had been deployed to the region a year earlier following a series of attacks on the Saudi oil facilities.

At Riyadh's urging, the Biden administration earlier this year transferred a significant number of Patriot interceptors to Saudi Arabia.

A Pentagon spokesman on Tuesday declined to discuss the prospective deal. But last month, a U.S. defense official told reporters "all capabilities are on the table," when asked whether the administration was considering sending Patriot batteries to Ukraine.

"Patriot is one of the air defense capabilities that is being considered along with all others," the defense official said last month.

—*Gordon Lubold contributed to this article.*

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