

From [Democracy Now](#) | Original Article

A U.S. drone crashed in international waters Tuesday after being intercepted by Russian fighter jets over the Black Sea. According to U.S. officials, one of the Russian warplanes collided with the MQ-9 Reaper drone and damaged its propeller, but Russia denies the aircraft made contact. The incident occurred about 75 miles southwest of Crimea and marks another blow to relations between the two nuclear-armed powers. Jeremy Scahill, senior correspondent for The Intercept, describes the drone encounter as “an incendiary development” in the U.S. proxy war against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine. “This is a vehicle of war, and it doesn’t have to have missiles on it to be part of a system that makes the U.S. a combatant in this war,” says Scahill.

AMY GOODMAN: We begin today’s show looking at increasing tensions between the United States and Russia. On Tuesday, a U.S. MQ-9 Reaper drone crashed into the Black Sea, about 75 miles off the coast of Crimea. The Biden administration says two Russian fighter jets intercepted the drone, and then one of the jets clipped the drone’s propeller, forcing the U.S. to down the damaged drone. Russia admitted its jets intercepted the drone, but said there was no direct contact and that the drone crashed on its own after making a sharp turn. Pentagon Press Secretary Brigadier General Pat Ryder spoke at a news conference Tuesday.

BRIG. GEN. PATRICK RYDER: What we saw, again, were fighter aircraft dumping fuel in front of this UAV and then getting so close to the aircraft that it actually damaged the propeller on the MQ-9. We assess that it likely caused some damage to the Russian aircraft, as well. To our knowledge — well, we know that the aircraft, the Russian aircraft, did land. I’m not going to go into where they landed. But again, it’s just demonstrative of very unprofessional, unsafe airmanship on the part of these pilots.

AMY GOODMAN: Russia’s Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Antonov accused the United States of attempting to provoke Russia by flying a drone with its transponder turned off near a military zone.

ANATOLY ANTONOV: [translated] The aircraft was flying with its transponders turned off. It

had entered the area where it had been determined that the special military operation would take place. We, Russia, warned everybody about this, using international communications channels. I think it was a real provocation. They were provoking us to take certain actions, after which they could accuse the Russian military of some sort of lack of professionalism.

AMY GOODMAN: Ambassador Antonov was called to the State Department. When he came out, he said, “What would the United States do if there was a Russian drone outside of San Francisco, off the coast?”

To talk about the drone incident and much more, we’re joined by Jeremy Scahill, senior reporter and correspondent at *The Intercept*, his latest [piece](#) headlined “Conflicting Reports Thicken Nord Stream Bombing Plot.”

We’re going to get to that in a minute, but first, Jeremy, if you can talk about the latest on the drone and the significance of it going down in the Black Sea? The U.S. says it hasn’t been able to retrieve it in any way yet, though it is able to zero out all that it possibly has been surveilling inside automatically.

JEREMY SCAHILL: Well, you know, I think this is an indication of the real risks at play in this proxy war. I mean, the U.S. tries to deny that it’s engaged in a proxy war, and yet we know for a fact that Moscow is correct in its assessment that it’s not just fighting the Armed Forces of Ukraine and militias that are fighting on the side of Ukraine, but actually against the weapons infrastructure of NATO countries.

And what I think is relevant about this particular incident is that the United States — and this doesn’t get much attention — but the United States, in particular, has been providing Ukraine with actionable intelligence from satellite imagery, from drone imagery, that Ukraine is using to strike at Russian forces. And so, from Russia’s perspective, this is a provocation on the part of the United States. It’s not simply, as the Pentagon portrays it, you know, the U.S. was innocently flying its Reaper drone over the area to just sort of look at topography. I mean, this is a vehicle of war, and it doesn’t have to have missiles on it to be part of a system that makes the U.S. a combatant in this war. So, from Russia’s perspective, you can understand why they would have scrambled and why they would consider this a kind of hostile act. Now, that’s not defending Russia going and dumping fuel and trying to force the drone to the ground, but it’s important sometimes to understand what motivates other actors on the other side of the barrel of the U.S. gun, or, in this case, the cameras of a U.S. drone.

But I think it dramatizes just how close we are coming to the potential for an overt conflict with the United States. Republican Senator Lindsey Graham, soon after this took place, went on Fox News and suggested that the United States should be starting to shoot down Russian aircraft and that the Biden administration should threaten Russia, that if any incident like this happens again, that the U.S. is going to begin shooting down Russian planes. So, it's an incendiary development, and I think it portends real dangers at play as the United States continues this proxy war.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Jeremy, about this drone, it seems to me, first of all, that, clearly, we've heard that often — that this war in Ukraine is one of the first where drones have played such an enormous role in terms of — not just of surveillance, but of actually being involved in attacks. And, of course, the reality is that if it's an American drone, the Russians would have to figure out, well, who's actually operating it. Is it Ukraine? Is it the Ukrainian military? Or is it the U.S.? Could you talk about drone warfare in this particular conflict?

JEREMY SCAHILL: Yeah. And, in fact, Juan, you know, Ukraine does have some upper-tier-level drones, but the United States, to date, has — not that we know of, has not transferred one of its top-tier drones, although there is an increasing number of U.S. senators and other lawmakers, and certainly the drone and defense war industry in the United States, has been pressuring the White House to sell Ukraine Gray Eagle drones, which have a very long range, can carry a very heavy weapons payload, have the potential to strike deep within Russia. But the most powerful drones that Ukraine has right now are Turkish-manufactured drones.

And, in fact, Russia itself really has not kept up or kept pace with the United States and China, for example, in terms of developing advanced technology drones. And that's part of why you've seen Russia using what are called swarm attacks, where they're purchasing much smaller kamikaze drones, that are single-use drones that carry explosives. And, essentially, it's like a higher-end remote-control missile. And what Russia has been using as a tactic is to send a bunch of these at the same time to strike at targets. Ukraine has also been doing this. And the United States has authorized a number of private contracts from American corporations to sell Ukraine single-use explosive suicide drones. And, in fact, they've been escalating the supply chain to get more and more of these to Ukraine.

But, Juan, I think, you know, the question is a very good one. And we have to remember the United States set this trend in motion, that using weaponized, remotely piloted aircraft is now a

standard part of warfare. And, in fact, a couple of months ago, China unveiled a drone that is on par with many of the upper-tier U.S. drones. And it's a matter of time before — Russia does have some much more powerful drones that have not been used widely yet in Ukraine. That could well happen.

But, to me, what we're seeing here is Russia starting to confront what we know to be true and what Russia also has been alleging, and that is that the United States is not simply providing its ally, although non-NATO ally, Ukraine, with a lot of weaponry, but is also actively providing Ukraine with intelligence that is allowing it to attack Russian forces. And I think that's what we're seeing, that Russia is starting to say, "OK, we're fed up with this, and we're going to start escalating from our end." It's very, very dangerous.

And just one point I want to make, though, regardless of anything we talk about today, there's one person who could end this tomorrow, and that's Vladimir Putin. And so, I think it is important to state that this is a war of aggression filled with war crimes. Vladimir Putin made the decision to invade Ukraine. None of that justifies U.S. politicking or the U.S. position, but Vladimir Putin should really squarely be held responsible for starting this bloodbath that's now extended beyond a year in Ukraine.