

# [***Joe Biden Unexpectedly Gifts Rockets To Ukraine. The Last Time This Happened, A Lot Of Russian Helicopters Got Wrecked.***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BJ6-0RW1-JBCM-F4YM-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Highlight:** The last time Ukraine got M39s, last fall, it promptly fired all 20 and wreaked havoc with Russian air-defenses and helicopters.

**Body**

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A U.S. Army M270 fires an ATACMS.

Wikimedia Commons

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The administration of U.S. president Joe Biden on Tuesday unexpectedly announced $300 million in additional military aid to Ukraine.

Critically, the surprise consignment of ammunition reportedly includes a second batch of M39 Army Tactical Missile System ballistic missiles, or ATACMS.**Politico** s Lara Seligman, Alexander Ward and Paul McLearyfirst reportedthe provision.

The last time Ukraine got M39s, last fall, it promptly fired all 20 or so of the munitions from its wheeled High-Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems or tracked M270 launchers and wreaked havoc with Russian air-defenses and helicopters.

The M39 is a two-ton, 13-foot ballistic missile with a solid rocket motor and a warhead containing 950 M74 submunitions. Fired singly by a HIMARS or two-at-a-time by an M270 Ukraine has around three dozen of the former and around two dozen of the latter the 1990s-vintage missile ranges as far as 100 miles under inertial guidance.

An M39 usually should strike within 50 yards or so of its aim-point. This isn t super-accurate by modern standards, but it s accurate**enough** considering that the M39 is an**area** weapon.

As the missile plummets toward its target, it spins and pops open, scattering 950 steel-and-tungsten bomblets across an area of potentially tens of thousands of square feet. Each M74 submunition has the explosive power of a hand grenade.

The M39 is a powerful weapon for attacks on soft, spread-out targets. Which is why Ukraine so far has aimed the munitions at delicate long-range air-defense systems and equally fragile helicopters at their front-line bases.

The damage from Ukraine sfirst-ever strikewith M39s, on Oct. 17, targeted a pair of helicopter bases in Russian-occupied southern and eastern Ukraine. At least three of the rockets struck airfields outside Berdyansk in southern Ukraine as well as in Luhansk Oblast in the east.

The thousands of submunitions destroyed or badly damaged 21 helicopters, according toan analysisof commercial satellite imagery by GeoConfirmed, an open-source intelligence practitioner on the social-media site formerly known as Twitter. This is probably the biggest blow to the Russian air force since the beginning of the war, GeoConfirmed commented.

A second analysis, by Ukrainian analysis team Frontelligence Insight, aligned with GeoConfirmed s assessment. Their estimate is based on solid grounds, Frontelligence stated.

The second ATACMS strike, on Oct. 25, hit a Russian air force surface-to-air missile battery in Luhansk. Videos and photos depicted the detached tail sections of two M39s and also the aftermath of the purported strike: smoke curling from what Russian social-media usersidentifiedas an S-400 battery.

In the years prior to its wider war on Ukraine, the Russian air force deployed five S-400 batteries, plus attached radars, to occupied Crimea. Other S-400s eventually staged elsewhere in and around occupied Ukraine. As Ukraine acquired more and better deep-strike weapons last year, it began targeting the batteries.

Those strikes have destroyed,according to Oryx, at least six S-400 launchers plus S-400 support equipment including a command post and a radar: enough equipment for one and a half batteries.

It s unclear how many more major ATACMS strikes the Ukrainians pulled off following the first two back in October. Twenty M39s ... is not a lot of M39s. But you can t accuse the Ukrainians of wasting the powerful munitions.

And they surely won t waste the**second** batch of M39s, either. We don t know how many of the rockets are in the surprise ammo package, but look for them to rain down on Russian helicopter bases, air-defense batteries and other soft targets.

It should be a costly deep-strike campaign for the Russians but brief. Once this second batch of M39s is gone, it might be a while before the United States provides another. Generally, the White House s policy is to send weapons to Ukraine by diverting them from U.S. military stocks but only when the Pentagon already has funding to**replace** those weapons.

The money for replacement munitions seemingly ran out in December, two months after Russia-friendly Republicans in the U.S. Congress blocked Biden s proposal to spend another $61 billion on aid to Ukraine. But then the Pentagon explained it discovered $300 million in savings on a previously-executed contract for weapons for Kyiv.

Further funding could require a significant shift in U.S. ***politics***. Lawmakers from Biden s Democratic Party are attempting a rare legislative maneuver called a discharge petition that, with a minimum of Republican support, could force a vote on that $61 billion in fresh aid.

The discharge petition began collecting signatures on Tuesday. There are 219 Republicans and 213 Democrats in the U.S. House. The petition requires 218 signatures to pass.

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