

# U.S. Risks War With Russia By ‘Poking the Bear’ in Ukraine: Senator

Republican Senator Tommy Tuberville of Alabama on Tuesday said the United States could be “poking the bear” too much with its support of Ukraine and suggested doing so risks escalating America’s involvement in Russia’s war.

Tuberville made the comments during a Senate Committee on Armed Services hearing with Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines and Lieutenant General Scott Berrier, the director of the Defense Intelligence Agency. The intelligence officials appeared before the committee to provide a briefing on worldwide threats.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has tried to paint his country’s current military campaign as a broader conflict against the Western influence of NATO and the U.S. in Ukraine. During a Monday speech at Moscow’s Victory Day parade, Putin claimed Western nations and Ukraine had been planning invasions on Russia’s “historical lands,” including Crimea, before Russia attacked Ukraine on February 24.

Tuberville made mention of Russia’s claims that it was in a proxy war with the West while asking Haines if she felt Russia blamed the U.S. intelligence community for helping Ukraine shoot down a Russian plane and sink the Moskva, the flagship of Russia’s Black Sea fleet.

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“To what extent do you assess that Russia believes it is at war with the West and United States? Do you think that they believe they’re at war with us?” Tuberville asked.

“Russia has historically believed that they are in a conflict, in effect, with NATO and the United States on a variety of issues, including in cyber [warfare] and so on,” Haines said.

“So, you believe that they’re fighting us as well as they’re fighting Ukraine,

correct?" Tuberville said.

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"In a sense, their perception," Haines answered.

Berrier then fielded questions from Tuberville, who asked the lieutenant general about air defenses in Ukraine before turning his attention to recent U.S. visitors to the country like House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and first lady Jill Biden. Berrier agreed with Tuberville's assessment that "anyone in Ukraine right now is under serious threat."

"In the past two weeks, we've seen several high-profile visitors take trips to active war zones—our secretary of state, secretary of defense, speaker of the house, first lady," Tuberville said. "What is our intelligence community doing to lessen the risk of a high-ranking official—how are we protecting these people going to Ukraine?"

Haines indicated that such a question would be better suited for a closed session talk, prompting Tuberville to ask if the officials could guarantee "100 percent" that the first lady was safe during her trip to Ukraine.

"I would not say that, no," Berrier replied.

"Is it your best advice that we don't go to Ukraine right now? Any of us? Any of us in here?" Tuberville asked.

"Senator, I wouldn't say that," Berrier said. "I would say with proper planning and coordination that it's possible."

When asked again by Tuberville if U.S. officials were 100 percent safe going into a war zone, Berrier answered, "Senator, I think we can never guarantee anything."

"Right. That's kind of the point I'm making. You know, we're kind of poking the bear here....We're bragging about it. Even President Biden said today, 'Wait a minute. We got to cut back on this,'" Tuberville said.

The senator then mentioned Russian generals being killed in Ukraine, a likely reference to a report from The New York Times that U.S. intelligence was aiding

Ukrainian forces in located and killing Russian generals. (The Pentagon has since denied that the U.S. gives such details to Ukraine.)

Tuberville expressed that he agreed with supporting Ukraine, but added, “We do not want to take that step forward to where we get a lot of our men and women involved in this. It looks like to me that we’re taking way too many chances of sending people over there for a photo op, other than doing the right things, which we are doing.”

“There’s a point of no return here if we cross that line,” Tuberville added. “As Senator [Tom] Cotton said, we’re walking a tightrope here, and that’s just the only point I want to bring up.”

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