



Strategic Escalation: Biden Authorizes Ukraine to Use U.S. Weapons for Strikes Inside Russia

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In a significant and controversial policy shift, President Joe Biden has authorized Ukraine to use American-supplied weapons to target Russian military positions within Russian territory, specifically around the Kharkiv region. This decision represents a major departure from previous U.S. policy, which had strictly prohibited the use of American weapons for strikes inside Russia. The move comes in response to increasing Russian offensives near Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, and is intended to bolster Ukraine's defensive capabilities at a critical juncture in the war. This policy change has been influenced by mounting pressure from European allies, bipartisan support from U.S. lawmakers, and the dire battlefield situation faced by Ukrainian forces (Banco, Ward, and Seligman 2024; "U.S. Gives Ukraine Permission" 2024; Vanden Brook 2024).

This report will analyze President Biden's decision to authorize Ukraine to use U.S. weapons for strikes inside Russia, marking a significant policy shift. It will explore the high-level decision-making processes and the various strategic, humanitarian, and political motivations behind the move. The report will also detail the implementation and limitations of the policy, assess potential consequences and U.S. responses to any Russian retaliation, and provide historical context to understand the broader implications of this decision in the ongoing Ukraine-Russia conflict.

1. High-Level Decision-Making and Influences on U.S. Policy Shift

The decision to allow Ukraine to use U.S. weapons to strike within Russian territory was made after a series of high-level discussions within the Biden administration, involving consultations among key figures in the National Security Council, the State Department, and the Pentagon (Vanden Brook 2024). This shift was driven by several critical factors, including the deteriorating military situation in Kharkiv and

increasing pressure from international allies and domestic lawmakers. Initially, the U.S. maintained a strict policy against allowing Ukraine to use American-supplied weapons for strikes inside Russia, fearing it would escalate the conflict and draw the U.S. into a direct confrontation with Russia (Kube et al. 2024). However, as Russian forces intensified their attacks near Kharkiv, Ukrainian officials, including President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, persistently lobbied the U.S. for greater flexibility in using Western weapons for defensive operations ("Biden Administration Lifts Ban" 2024).

European allies, notably the United Kingdom and France, played a significant role in influencing this policy shift. Both countries publicly supported Ukraine's right to use Western-supplied weapons against Russian military targets (Banco, Ward, and Seligman 2024). British Foreign Minister David Cameron and French President Emmanuel Macron argued that enabling Ukraine to strike within Russia was necessary to neutralize threats and bolster Ukraine's defensive capabilities (Vanden Brook 2024).

Within the United States, there was substantial bipartisan support for lifting the restrictions. Key lawmakers from both parties voiced their approval, emphasizing the strategic necessity of allowing Ukraine to defend itself more robustly (Kube et al. 2024). House Intelligence Chair Mike Turner and other prominent figures argued that the existing limitations were undermining Ukraine's ability to effectively counter Russian offensives. The Pentagon and U.S. military officials provided assessments indicating that allowing Ukraine to use U.S. weapons for counter-fire operations could significantly enhance their defensive posture (Banco, Ward, and Seligman 2024). These assessments were crucial in convincing senior administration officials that the benefits of the policy shift outweighed the risks. These briefings highlighted the immediate need to counter Russian advances and protect key Ukrainian cities like Kharkiv from further devastation.

President Biden's final decision was influenced by a combination of these factors: the urgent requests from Ukraine, the supportive stance of European allies, bipartisan pressure, and strategic military assessments. The National Security Council and the State Department played pivotal roles in shaping and endorsing this policy change. The administration concluded that providing Ukraine with the ability to use U.S. weapons for targeted strikes within Russia was necessary to address the immediate threats and support Ukraine's defense efforts ("Biden Allows Ukraine Limited Use" 2024). By allowing this policy shift, the Biden administration aims to adapt to the evolving dynamics of the conflict, supporting Ukraine in its struggle against Russian aggression while carefully managing the risks of escalation.

2. Strategic, Humanitarian, and Political Motivations Behind the Policy Shift

The decision to allow Ukraine to use U.S. weapons for strikes within Russian territory is driven by several strategic, humanitarian, and political motivations. Primarily, the U.S. aims to enhance Ukraine's defensive capabilities against the increasing aggression from Russian forces, particularly around Kharkiv. This city has seen intensified attacks and military activity, making it crucial for Ukraine to have the ability to respond effectively to immediate threats. By permitting counter-fire operations, the U.S. seeks to help Ukraine protect its second-largest city and prevent further Russian advancements ("U.S. Gives Ukraine Permission" 2024).

Another critical factor is the humanitarian aspect. The ongoing conflict has led to significant civilian casualties and destruction in Ukraine. The recent escalation near Kharkiv has resulted in numerous deaths and injuries, underlining the urgent need for robust defensive measures. By enabling Ukraine to use U.S. weapons in a more flexible manner, the Biden administration hopes to mitigate these humanitarian impacts by disrupting Russian offensive capabilities and reducing the frequency and intensity of attacks on civilian areas ("Ukraine Can Use U.S. Weapons" 2024).

The geopolitical landscape also plays a significant role. European allies, including the United Kingdom and France, have advocated for lifting the restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western-supplied weapons. These allies argue that Ukraine should be empowered to defend itself comprehensively, including the ability to strike military targets within Russia that pose direct threats. Their support reflects a broader consensus among Western nations to provide Ukraine with the necessary tools to counter Russian aggression effectively. This international backing has been influential in shaping the U.S. decision, demonstrating a unified front against Russian military actions (Banco, Ward, and Seligman 2024).

Domestically, there has been considerable bipartisan pressure on the Biden administration to adopt a more aggressive stance in supporting Ukraine. Lawmakers from both parties have argued that the existing restrictions hinder Ukraine's defensive operations and prolong the conflict. The Pentagon's assessments have further supported this viewpoint, highlighting the strategic benefits of allowing Ukraine to target Russian positions that are directly involved in the conflict. This convergence of political support and military strategy has been pivotal in driving the decision to lift some of the restrictions on Ukraine's use of U.S. weapons.

Overall, the decision reflects a strategic adaptation to the evolving dynamics of the Ukraine-Russia conflict. The Biden administration aims to provide Ukraine with the necessary capabilities to defend itself while

managing the risks of escalation. By responding to the immediate military needs, humanitarian concerns, and geopolitical pressures, the U.S. seeks to support Ukraine in a manner that aligns with broader international efforts to counter Russian aggression and uphold regional stability.

3. Implementation and Limitations

The implementation of this new policy allowing Ukraine to use U.S.-supplied weapons for strikes inside Russian territory is carefully regulated to ensure it aligns with strategic objectives while minimizing the risk of escalation. The authorization is narrowly defined to permit the use of U.S. weapons specifically around the Kharkiv region, where Russian forces have intensified their operations. This geographical limitation is intended to provide Ukraine with the necessary means to defend against immediate threats posed by Russian military actions near its border ("U.S. Gives Ukraine Permission" 2024).

The U.S. has stipulated clear constraints on the types of weapons that Ukraine can use under this policy. While Ukraine is allowed to utilize U.S.-provided artillery and rocket systems for counter-fire purposes, long-range missile systems like the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) are explicitly prohibited from being used to strike deep within Russian territory ("Biden Allows Ukraine Limited Use" 2024). This restriction is aimed at preventing a significant escalation of the conflict that could arise from deep strikes into Russia, which might provoke a severe retaliatory response from Moscow.

Moreover, the policy emphasizes that U.S. weapons should be used strictly for military targets that are directly involved in the conflict. Ukraine is instructed to avoid using these weapons on civilian infrastructure or any targets not directly related to the ongoing military operations. This guideline is in place to ensure compliance with international law and to maintain the moral high ground in the conflict by minimizing civilian casualties and collateral damage ("Ukraine Can Use U.S. Weapons" 2024).

The Biden administration has put in place rigorous monitoring and verification mechanisms to ensure that Ukraine adheres to these limitations. U.S. officials are likely to closely oversee the deployment and use of these weapons, working with Ukrainian counterparts to ensure that the strikes are conducted within the agreed-upon parameters. This oversight aims to mitigate risks and ensure that the use of U.S. weapons does not lead to unintended consequences or further escalation ("U.S. Gives Ukraine Permission" 2024).

By implementing these restrictions and guidelines, the Biden administration seeks to balance the need to support Ukraine's defense efforts with the imperative to avoid a broader conflict. This careful calibration reflects the complexities of providing military assistance in a highly volatile and dynamic conflict environment. The goal is to enhance Ukraine's ability to defend itself against Russian aggression while maintaining a measured approach that limits the potential for escalation.

4. Potential Consequences and U.S. Response to Retaliation

The decision to allow Ukraine to use U.S.-supplied weapons for strikes inside Russian territory carries several potential consequences, both immediate and long-term. One of the primary concerns is the risk of escalation. By striking targets within Russia, Ukraine could provoke a significant retaliatory response from Moscow, potentially broadening the conflict and drawing in other nations. Russian officials have previously warned that any direct attacks on their territory would be met with severe consequences, raising the stakes for both Ukraine and its Western allies (Vanden Brook 2024).

Another potential consequence is the impact on international diplomatic relations. Allowing Ukraine to use U.S. weapons inside Russia could strain the already tenuous relations between the U.S. and Russia, potentially leading to a breakdown in any remaining diplomatic channels. This move might also affect U.S. relations with other countries that are wary of further escalating the conflict, particularly those in Europe who are geographically closer to the crisis and more vulnerable to its fallout. The Biden administration has likely considered these diplomatic repercussions and aims to manage them through ongoing dialogue with international partners.

In terms of military strategy, the policy shift could enhance Ukraine's defensive capabilities, potentially altering the dynamics on the battlefield. By being able to target Russian positions more effectively, Ukraine might gain a strategic advantage, disrupting Russian operations and slowing their advances. However, this also means that the conflict could become more intense and protracted, with both sides escalating their military actions in response to each other's moves. This increased intensity could lead to higher casualties and more extensive destruction, further complicating efforts for a peaceful resolution.

The U.S. has outlined a cautious approach in its response to potential Russian retaliation. While the Biden administration has committed to supporting Ukraine, it has also emphasized the need to avoid direct military confrontation with Russia. In the event of a Russian retaliatory strike, the U.S. would likely increase

its support for Ukraine through additional military aid and diplomatic measures, rather than engaging directly. This approach aims to strengthen Ukraine's position without escalating the conflict into a broader war involving NATO and other Western nations.

Furthermore, the U.S. response would involve close coordination with international allies to present a unified front. This could include joint statements condemning any Russian retaliation, increased economic sanctions on Russia, and coordinated efforts to provide humanitarian aid to affected regions in Ukraine. The Biden administration would also likely use diplomatic channels to pressure Russia to de-escalate and return to negotiations, emphasizing the importance of maintaining international stability and security. Overall, the decision to allow Ukraine to use U.S. weapons for strikes inside Russia is a calculated risk. It reflects a strategic adjustment to support Ukraine more effectively while carefully managing the potential for escalation and maintaining a strong, coordinated international response to any retaliatory actions by Russia.

5. Historical Context

The conflict between Ukraine and Russia has deep historical roots, significantly impacting the current geopolitical landscape and the recent decision by the U.S. to allow Ukraine to use American-supplied weapons for strikes inside Russia. The tensions trace back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which resulted in Ukraine gaining independence. However, Ukraine's strategic importance, particularly its location and resources, has kept it within Russia's sphere of interest.

In 2014, the conflict escalated dramatically when Russia annexed Crimea following a controversial referendum that was widely condemned by the international community as illegitimate. This annexation marked the beginning of ongoing hostilities in the Donbas region of Eastern Ukraine, where Russia has supported separatist movements. These events were a significant breach of international law and led to severe economic sanctions on Russia from Western nations, including the United States and the European Union.

The situation worsened in February 2022, when Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, aiming to overthrow the Ukrainian government and assert control over its territory. This invasion prompted a robust international response, with the U.S. and its allies providing substantial military and financial aid to Ukraine. The conflict has since resulted in extensive devastation, with thousands of casualties and

widespread displacement of civilians. The resilience of the Ukrainian military and the strong support from Western allies have played crucial roles in preventing a swift Russian victory.

The Biden administration's decision to permit Ukraine to use U.S. weapons for strikes within Russia must be viewed within this broader historical context. Previous U.S. administrations have been cautious in their military support to avoid escalating the conflict. However, the ongoing and intensifying Russian aggression, especially around strategic locations like Kharkiv, has necessitated a re-evaluation of this cautious approach. The U.S. aims to balance its support for Ukraine with the need to avoid direct confrontation with Russia, reflecting a complex interplay of historical grievances, strategic interests, and international diplomatic pressures.

Furthermore, the historical context includes the broader geopolitical struggle between Russia and the West, particularly NATO. Russia has long perceived NATO's expansion eastward as a threat to its security, while NATO and its member states view Russia's actions as aggressive and destabilizing. The conflict in Ukraine is thus not just a bilateral issue but a focal point in the larger power dynamics between Russia and the Western alliance. By understanding these historical factors, the recent decision by the Biden administration can be seen as part of a continuing effort to support Ukraine in its struggle for sovereignty and territorial integrity while navigating the delicate balance of international relations and conflict escalation.

Conclusion

President Biden's authorization for Ukraine to use American-supplied weapons against Russian military targets within Russian territory raises critical questions about the future trajectory of U.S. involvement in the Ukraine-Russia conflict. How will this policy shift impact the broader geopolitical landscape and U.S. relations with its European allies and other global powers? Can the stringent limitations and oversight effectively prevent escalation, or will this move provoke a severe retaliatory response from Russia?

Additionally, how will this decision influence the humanitarian situation on the ground in Ukraine, and will it successfully mitigate civilian casualties and destruction in conflict zones like Kharkiv? What are the long-term implications for U.S. strategic interests and international stability if this conflict continues to intensify?

As the Biden administration navigates these complex challenges, it must consider whether this policy shift achieves its intended goals or if it inadvertently escalates the conflict, risking broader and more severe consequences. The answers to these questions will be crucial in shaping the next steps for U.S. foreign policy and its role in the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war.



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