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Why Biden Allowed Ukraine to Fire US missiles into Russia

Washington's (and London's) decision to allow Ukraine to fire their missiles into Russia is a clear escalation, but the timing explains most of the puzzle underlying this decision.



It is not just Biden being reckless. It is not simply madness, either. It is politics with a touch of global geopolitics.

The Biden administration, having lost both presidential and congressional elections to the Republicans, appears to be following a scorched-earth policy. Before Trump is sworn in, and before he can move towards a negotiated resolution of the Russia-Ukraine (NATO) military conflict in 2025, the outgoing administration seems willing to make issues much more complicated – and deadly – than they currently are. At the heart of these calculated escalations is the American “deep state” unhappy with Trump’s success and the prospects of him pulling NATO back from Ukraine, thus undoing American hegemony. Trump claimed,

during his campaign, that he will end wars. The American “deep state” does not want to let him do this – at least, not easily.

NATO’s failure will create fresh openings for European states to chart their own foreign policy courses

The Timing

For a long time, the Biden administration resisted allowing Ukraine to fire US missiles into Russian territory. This firing represents a “new phase” in the ongoing conflict for Moscow. There is potentially no other way for Moscow to see things. A pro-Democrats response is that the decision was motivated by the Biden administration’s desire to strengthen Ukraine’s position vis-à-vis Russia in the wake of upcoming possible negotiations. However, if this truly was the main intention, why did the Biden administration not reach the same conclusion during the peak time of the presidency, i.e., a year earlier, for instance? The Biden administration could have done the same escalation, hoping that this would push Russia to come to the negotiating table. Except, the Biden administration did not make such a decision for one chief reason.

They understood Moscow’s response would be deadlier, which would escalate the war more than Washington and NATO could handle. A deadly escalation, the Biden administration maintained, could cost them the elections. Now that they have already lost the elections – and there is nothing they can do about it now – they are escalating the war deliberately to scuttle the Trump administration. If the war escalates, it will make it harder for the Trump administration to negotiate with Russia. It will also make it harder for the Trump administration to negotiate with US allies in Europe as well. The more complicated the issue becomes, the more time it will take to find a resolution. Overall, this will give the Democrats a political opportunity to shift the blame to the Trump administration for its failure to quickly end conflicts. For the Democrats, this could be one of the key points they could raise in the midterm elections.

A key official of the Biden administration indirectly acknowledged the politics driving the decision. Matthew Miller, State Department spokesperson, defended the decision during a press briefing saying that the “American people elected Joe Biden to a four-year term, not to a term of three years and 10 months, and we will use every day of our term to pursue the foreign policy interests that, we believe, are in the interests of the American people.” One caveat is that the only interest that matters here is that of the Democrats.

The Reactions

The Trump administration understands this politics. In a post on X, Donald Trump Jr said the change was aimed at getting “World War 3 going before my father has a chance to create peace and save lives”. Trump’s pick for national security adviser, US Representative Mike Waltz, called it “another step up the escalation ladder ... and nobody knows where this is going,” he said on Fox News. Former Trump cabinet member Richard Grenell also accused Biden of moving to “escalate the war in Ukraine during the transition period”. “This is as if he is launching a whole new war. Everything has changed now. All previous calculations are null and void,” he added.

This reaction makes sense because Ukraine has received only a few dozen of the ATACMS systems. If the Biden administration really wanted to strengthen Ukraine’s position, a first step would have been to ensure sufficient supplies of this system. If Ukraine is likely to fire up its entire stockpile too quickly to make any meaningful impact, the only sense this escalation makes is that it makes a negotiated end of the conflict much more complicated. Anymore escalation before Trump assumes control in January – and this escalation is very much possible – means the conflict will continue to rage in the months to come.

The End Game

Most people understand that the Trump administration would bring the conflict to an end. For one thing, Trump does not intend to use military conflicts to advance US foreign policy interests. Secondly, Trump has the “America First” policy at the heart of his politics. People who understand how misfit military conflicts are within the Trump camp include not only the Democrats but also Ukraine’s own president, who went on record two weeks ago to say that the conflict will end “sooner” now that Trump has won.

For the anti-Russia camp within the American “deep state”, this expectation is deeply unsettling. It would mean NATO will not be able to expand into Europe any further. NATO’s failure will create fresh openings for European states to chart their own foreign policy courses, including relations with Russia. In fact, this is already happening. When the German chancellor recently spoke with the Russian President, he did not do so to merely talk about the possibility of ending the conflict, but also to get a sense of their post-conflict bilateral relations. More importantly, Germany initiated the call. There is, thus, a possibility of Germany resuming gas supplies from Russia. Indeed, both leaders discussed the possibility of “cooperation” on energy trade.

In Washington, the fear is that this one call is going to encourage other European leaders to pick up their phones and talk to Vladimir Putin. It means Washington will lose control of the situation. These people in Washington do not want to let that happen; hence, a key

geopolitical reason to escalate the conflict is to scuttle the end gam, which is very much on the horizon already.

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