

Policy Backgrounder: 1,000 Days of War in Ukraine

November 22, 2024

Key Insights

As the world marked 1,000 days since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, several important developments pointed to both an intensification of the conflict and possibly to its halting. (It is also worth remembering that the war began in 2014 with Russia's occupation of Crimea and fighting in eastern Ukraine).

- Spurred by the escalation of the war with North Korean troops arriving to fight Ukraine, the President approved a very limited use by Ukraine of US ATACMS (Army Tactical Missile System) missiles to hit targets in the Russia's Kursk region; the UK made a similar change. However, NATO Allies such as Germany and France have yet to approve similar permissions.
- Russia has [intensified](#) its attacks on Ukraine, including energy infrastructure, as winter approaches. Ukraine is fighting back hard in the final days of the Biden Administration.
- The [G-20 Summit](#) in Rio could not reach agreement on Ukraine. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan presented a peace plan to freeze the conflict and delay Ukrainian accession to NATO while permitting Ukraine to continue its path towards membership of the EU. Russia rejected the plan but hinted it is open to discussions once the Trump Administration takes office.

One Thousand Days of War

It has been 1,000 days since Russia launched its general invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, just after the conclusion of the Olympic Winter Games in Beijing—a delay that worked to Ukraine's advantage as Russian tank columns were caught in an early thaw and unable to advance quickly on Kyiv. It is worth remembering, however, that for Ukraine, the war began in 2014 with Russia's occupation of Crimea and fighting in parts of eastern Ukraine. The US [estimated](#) in October that Russia's casualties exceed 600,000, with over 115,000 killed; other [estimates](#) are [higher](#) and suggest that there have been over 1,000,000 casualties on both sides.

Beyond this gruesome toll, over [6,700,000](#) Ukrainians have become refugees, and an additional 4,000,000 are internally displaced within Ukraine. As Ukrainian grain exports have declined under the pressure of war and Russian attacks on Black Sea shipping, this has contributed to a global food security crisis, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa and higher food price inflation. In recent days, the war has intensified on both sides as winter approaches and each side seeks military advantage in the final days of the Biden Administration as future US aid for Ukraine is uncertain.

Permitting Strikes in Russia

The President recently approved Ukraine's longstanding request to use US weapons to strike certain sites in Russia—but the approval is quite narrow. Ukraine may use ATACMS missiles, which have a range of 190 miles, to strike Russian and North Korean positions in the Kursk region. On November 19,

[reports emerged](#) that Ukraine had used the weapon to strike in Russia for the first time. The President's decision was motivated by the presence of [10,900](#) North Korean troops fighting Ukraine, which the US believes escalates the conflict significantly; the US [believes](#) that up to 100,000 North Korean troops could eventually fight in Ukraine in rotation. The UK also [permitted use](#) of shorter-range Storm Shadow missiles in Russia under similar rules; they had [earlier](#) been used in occupied Crimea, including a successful attack against Russia's Black Sea Fleet headquarters. The President also [permitted](#) Ukraine to use US anti-personnel mines to help stop Russian advances, a reversal of US policy; the US [emphasized](#) that the Russians were now leading attacks with ambulatory rather than mechanized forces, justifying the policy change, and that the mines are "non-persistent," becoming inert after a set period of time.

While European allies including Germany and France did not immediately follow the decision, perhaps fearing a change in policy with the new Administration in the US, and Germany specifically rejected a policy change, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock [called](#) the US decision "essential," saying this "intensification of what has already been delivered by other partners is so important at this moment." Germany, however, [supplied](#) Ukraine with 4,000 advanced AI-controlled strike drones. Earlier, Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke with Russian President Putin, [warning](#) that the presence of North Korean troops was a "grave escalation" of the war.

Russia [responded](#) saying that this will "add fuel to the fire and to further inflame tensions around the conflict" and was "aimed at a qualitative change, a qualitative increase in the level of involvement" of the US; Russia had said in September that the decision would place NATO "at war" with Russia and that Russia would "take the appropriate decisions based on the threats that we will face." Russia also recently [modified](#) its nuclear doctrine, stating that "a nuclear response from Russia is possible in the event of a critical threat to its sovereignty, even with conventional weapons, [an attack on Belarus], or a massive launch [of military assets] crossing the Russian border." On Thursday, Russia [launched](#) a ballistic missile at Dnipro, Ukraine, likely from a base about 500 miles inside Russia (far beyond the reach of ATACMS). If this [estimate](#) is accurate, the missile came from a base from which Russia could also launch intercontinental ballistic missiles at the US.

On Monday, a cable in the Baltic Sea connecting Finland to Germany was [severed](#), reviving [concerns](#) over acts of [sabotage](#) and [hybrid threats](#) against Western countries, including cyberattacks and recent [exploding parcels](#) at logistics depots in Europe. German Foreign Minister Baerbock said that these incidents "can't all just be coincidences; Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski [threatened](#) Russia with a diplomatic response, saying "I have closed the consulate in Poznań. If they do not stop, we will close the rest" of Russia's consulates in Poland. A Danish naval vessel is [tracking](#) the movements of a Chinese ship, which had stopped in Russia, seen in the vicinity at the time the cable was severed,

Efforts at Diplomacy

At the APEC Summit in Peru, the President [encouraged](#) China to use its influence on North Korea to encourage the country not to become further involved in Ukraine. Japan's Foreign Minister also visited Kyiv to express continued support for Ukraine in the face of the North Korean troops, [noting](#) that the security of Europe and the Indo-Pacific was "inseparable."

At the G-20 Summit, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan [presented](#) a peace plan that would freeze the current frontline, permit Western countries to supply weapons to Ukraine, and place international peacekeepers in a demilitarized zone in eastern Ukraine, while Ukraine would agree not to join NATO for ten years (apparently leaving Ukraine free to join the EU). Russia [rejected](#) the plan, saying that any freeze was "unacceptable" for Russia; instead, Ukraine would have to withdraw from all regions claimed by Russia and agree never to join NATO as a precondition for talks. Russia [hinted](#), however, that it was open to discussions on a [ceasefire](#) once the Trump Administration is inaugurated. The Turkish plan is considerably more favorable to Ukraine than a Chinese-Brazilian plan from September.

President Zelensky, too, [appeared](#) to catch this new mood, telling the European Parliament in a video address that “no one can enjoy calm waters during a storm, and we must do everything to end this war fairly and justly”—a milder statement of Ukraine’s ambitions. Consistent with this push for a peace agreement, Estonia’s Foreign Minister [stated](#) that European nations would have to put “boots on the ground” to guarantee a peace agreement if Ukraine was not permitted to join NATO, noting that “real security guarantees” of NATO membership would lead to “a just peace. But without the US it is impossible.” One proposal is [reportedly](#) for a group of countries [including](#) Poland, the UK, the Netherlands, and Nordic and Baltic states to send troops to guarantee any peace—a position French President Emmanuel Macron had hinted at over the summer.

The G-20 Summit itself had sharp divisions over Ukraine, host Brazil released a [communiqué](#) that was considerably weaker than last year and did not even mention Russia but only “human suffering and negative-added impacts of the war” on food and energy security and the global economy with vague language welcoming “all relevant and constructive initiatives that support a comprehensive, durable, and just peace” upholding the “Purposes and Principles of the UN Charter [.]”

Conclusion: Hybrid Warfare and Other Threats

The approaching end of the Biden Administration is on the minds of both belligerents as well as European leaders, with corresponding intensification on both the military and diplomatic fronts. Ukraine had long argued for US permission to strike Russia, but the US was worried about escalation; it is unclear how much effect the late decision will have on the battlefield, but Ukraine feels an urgency to stop further Russian advances in advance of a potential ceasefire.

For the West, the threat of [increased](#) Russian hybrid attacks and sabotage remains real; European nations have felt the brunt of this for some time, permitting Russian responses to Western support for Ukraine without risking a direct attack on NATO territory. The EU’s incoming High Representative for foreign policy, Kaja Kallas, has termed this a “[shadow war](#)” on the West. Western nations will need to be increasingly vigilant in areas such as cybersecurity, undersea cables, and other forms of critical infrastructure, both for military and civilian applications. It will also demand a policy response: as Kallas [asked](#), “How far do we let them go on our soil?”

Marking the anniversary of the invasion, Manfred Weber, leader of the largest group in the European Parliament, [stated](#) that “The war in Ukraine is not a simple regional dispute. The war in Ukraine is our battle line between the free world and brutal dictatorship. Drones produced in Iran, North Korean soldiers fighting against Europeans on European soil. What else do you need as proof for this geopolitical reality?” Weber concluded that in the face of this “security threat to all Europeans,” Europe needs “a long, lasting security architecture.”

That sentiment will be welcomed in Washington as the new Administration will press NATO members to increase defense spending to 3% of GDP, a target few currently meet. Meanwhile, a brutal invasion continues, and Ukraine is resisting in the face of relentless attacks and will continue to do so in a war that has the potential to change the dimensions of Western, European, and even global security. As one British commentator [noted](#), “Russia has the advantage at present. But Kyiv will not and must not give up.”

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