

Summary

President Biden's recent authorization for Ukraine to use ATACMS missiles for deep strikes into Russia and supply of anti-personnel mines enhances Ukraine's strategic options. However, it is unlikely that it will significantly change the battlefield dynamics, with Russia expected to escalate retaliatory attacks on key Ukrainian cities. Meanwhile, Putin's expansion of nuclear policy and conditional openness to a ceasefire highlight the ongoing risks and uncertainties surrounding the conflict's resolution and stability in the region.

Recent events and developments

On November 17, President Biden authorized Ukraine to use US-supplied ATACMS missiles for deeper strikes into Russian territory. This decision was met with support from several European leaders. Two days later, the US confirmed that Ukraine used these missiles to target a weapons depot in Karachev, located in Russia's Bryansk region. On November 20, Biden approved the delivery of anti-personnel landmines to Ukraine. Separately, the US Embassy in Kyiv announced a temporary closure after receiving "specific information of a potential significant air attack on November 20." As Russian forces advance in eastern Ukraine, officials warn of a possible offensive in Zaporizhia Oblast. Meanwhile, President Putin is ramping up his information war, seeking to convince the world that a Russian victory is inevitable. Simultaneously, Putin has revised Russia's nuclear policy, broadening the conditions for potential use. Western estimates indicate that Russian troop losses now surpass its ability to replenish forces through crypto-mobilization, while the depletion of Soviet-era equipment makes it harder for Russia to sustain current operations. Ukraine, in contrast, continues to bolster its military capabilities and focuses on long-term sustainability; with Zelensky presenting a 10-point "Internal Resilience Plan" to strategically prepare Ukraine for the ongoing war and its recovery. Also, there are reports suggesting Putin may be open to discussing a ceasefire, but the proposed terms must reflect the "realities" on the ground. This means Russia will retain control over occupied territories and Ukraine is barred from joining NATO.

Impact assessment

The authorization of long range ATACMS strikes, and the supply of anti-personnel mines can have a notable military impact. However, it would be illogical to assume that the authorization to use this equipment will drastically alter the battlefield dynamics. For instance, Ukraine likely received no more than 50 ATACMS, and while anti-personnel mines may enhance defensive capabilities, they are unlikely to play a decisive role in reclaiming occupied territories. That said, depending on future shipments of missiles from the US, this provision has granted Ukraine greater strategic flexibility and the ability to maintain pressure on Russia at a distance. However, the harsh reality remains that this renewed Western support for Ukraine could provoke a significant Russian response. The potential airstrike on Kyiv on November 20 serves as an example. In the short term, it is probable that Russia will escalate drone operations and intensify missile strikes on cities with major economic and/or strategic importance, such as Kyiv, Kharkiv, Dnipro, Odessa, Mykolaiv, and even Lviv. Although Russia has long employed aggressive and warmongering rhetoric, Putin's recent decision to broaden the conditions for a tactical nuclear strike; against states without nuclear arms, is worrying. Looking ahead, there have been signals of a potential ceasefire deal, mainly with the return of Trump into the White House. However, it is uncertain how the authorization of ATACMS strikes on Russian territory will influence potential peace deals in 2025, as Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has stated that recent developments represent an escalation and signal a new phase of the war.

Advice from Forth Global

- Advise staff traveling to Ukraine to undertake a several days long HEAT training prior to travel.
- Monitor local news and media to remain updated on developing events.
- Expect strikes on major Ukrainian cities, particularly Kyiv.
- Know what to do in case of an air attack; make sure you are aware of nearby shelters, enough food etc.
- Minimalize transport in- and between cities.
- Download the Air Alarm app if in Ukraine.

Customized advice

Please contact us for specific advice:

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