

# INTERNATIONAL WEEKLY

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## Topics:

- Ukraine – European Union
- Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine
- The course of the Russian-Ukrainian war


## UKRAINE - EUROPEAN UNION

*Theme Analysis:* The promising for Ukraine new composition of the EU  
European Commission\_\_\_\_\_3



## FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY OF UKRAINE

*Theme Analysis:* V. Zelensky's plan for Ukraine's victory and the likelihood of its  
realism\_\_\_\_\_7



## THE COURSE OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

Changes at the front\_\_\_\_\_12  
Military assistance\_\_\_\_\_13  
Russia: External and internal challenges\_\_\_\_\_13

## Ukraine – European Union

### *THEME ANALYSIS: The promising for Ukraine new composition of the EU European Commission*



*Photo: EPA-EFE*

On September 17, the reappointed President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, presented the new composition of the EU's executive body. As she noted, the approval of the candidates was extremely difficult due to the need to strike a balance between party affiliation, regional interests, and gender equality. “Every country wants to get one of the key economic portfolios, but the number of them is limited,” she admitted.<sup>1</sup>

Among the new positions are the European Commissioner for Defense, which will be filled by Andrius Kubilius from Lithuania, the European Commissioner for the Mediterranean, Dubravka Šuica from Croatia, and the Commissioner for Housing, Dan Jorgensen from Denmark. All of them deserve a separate mention.

In addition to traditional departments such as budget, foreign policy, and EU enlargement, positions related to competitiveness, the internal market, and industrial policy are also important. Economic issues will continue to be addressed in the context of the Green Deal, which aims to achieve climate neutrality and gradually phase out the use of fossil fuels. Dutchman Wopke Hoekstra will be responsible for this area.

One of the most controversial appointments was the granting of the portfolio of the European Commission's Executive Vice President for Regional Development, Investment and Post-Cold War Recovery to Raffaele Fitto, a representative of the Italian right-wing radical forces, who is an ally of Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni from the Fratelli d'Italia party. Fitto is the first right-wing radical to hold such a high position in the EU, and his appointment was

<sup>1</sup> Нарешті поділили портфелі - Урсула фон дер Ляєн презентувала новий склад Єврокомісії. 18.09.2024. [https://gazeta.ua/articles/politics/\\_nareshti-podilili-portfeli-ursula-fon-der-lyayen-prezentovala-novij-sklad-evrokomisiyi/1193767](https://gazeta.ua/articles/politics/_nareshti-podilili-portfeli-ursula-fon-der-lyayen-prezentovala-novij-sklad-evrokomisiyi/1193767)

likely a political compromise for Ursula von der Leyen, given the interests of the far-right and conservative coalition that rules Italy. Although Fitto is considered a relatively moderate right-winger, there are more radical right-wing groups in the European Parliament, including ***Patriots for Europe and Europe of Sovereign Nations***.

The European Commissioner for International Partnerships, **Josef Sikela from the Czech Republic**, will be responsible for supporting developing countries and managing the Global Gateway investment fund created by the EU to help the countries ***of the global south***. Austrian Markus Brunner, a financial policy specialist, was unexpectedly appointed as the current European Commission's migration officer. His task will be to facilitate the development of a new common EU asylum policy and fight against illegal migration.

The EU enlargement negotiations with the Western Balkan countries, Turkey, Ukraine and Moldova will be handled by **Marta Kos from Slovenia**. She will also be responsible for ***rebuilding Ukraine after the Russian aggression***. **Kaja Kallas from Estonia** will be in charge of the EU's relations with the rest of the world.<sup>2</sup>

Interestingly, Slovenia itself did not officially nominate Kos for the post of European Commissioner for Enlargement. Although, according to ***Euractive***, it was her candidacy that was actively supported by Ursula von der Leyen, seeking to achieve gender balance and increase the number of women in the EC. Kos's candidacy has faced resistance from her fellow countrymen from the European People's Party in the European Parliament. She has been accused of having ties to the former Yugoslavia's intelligence services and called "problematic." In response to these accusations, Kos commented in an interview with Euronews: *"These accusations first arose when I announced my candidacy for the presidency of the Republic of Slovenia in 2022, with the aim of discrediting me. (...) Before becoming ambassador to Germany and Switzerland, I was vetted by the security services of both countries and received approval without any problems. If I had ever harmed the interests of Slovenia, I would not have been able to work in the Slovenian government or be an ambassador."*

The Slovene received the portfolio that was previously promised to Latvian Valdis Dombrovskis. Now Dombrovskis will be in charge of economic issues in the EU. There is an opinion that such personnel changes were the result of excessive concentration of foreign policy in the hands of the Baltic states, in particular after the appointment of Estonian Kai Kallas as the EU's chief diplomat. As for Martha Kos' attitude to the Ukrainian issue, it is too early to say anything. When announcing her candidacy, Ursula von der Leyen noted that Kos ***"will work to support Ukraine and continue its recovery, as well as help candidate countries prepare for EU accession."***

In general, according to the official procedure, EU governments nominate one candidate for the position of European Commissioner, but, as stated in the EU's founding treaties, future commissioners do not represent the interests of their countries. This should guarantee them independence from national interests and the ability to act exclusively in the interests of the European Union. When they take office, they swear to serve European interests. It is up to the President of the European Commission to determine which candidate will receive a particular portfolio. In practice, however, this decision is made after intensive consultations with national governments. And it is clear that, realistically, countries want to maintain influence over their officials.

In total, six commissioners in the current composition have previously held positions in the European Commission, while 20 people are new, although some of them are already quite well-known government officials in their countries. As for Ursula von der Leyen herself, she

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<sup>2</sup> "Українське досє" нової команди Єврокомісії. 17.09.2024 <https://www.dw.com/uk/ukrainske-dose-novoi-komandi-evrokomisii-na-so-cekati-kievu/a-70243293>

has been in office since 2019 and will remain in office for at least five more years. This decision was made by the EU heads of state and government and approved by the European Parliament in July. She will have six deputies, and in appointing them, von der Leyen tried to ensure broad representation of the EU regions and the interests of the main party groups in European politics. However, she failed to achieve gender equality: national governments delegated 16 men and 11 women, despite von der Leyen's numerous calls for greater female representation. Where it was up to her, she tried to change the balance: four of the six vice presidents will be women.

The change in the composition of European Commissioners has virtually no impact on the work of the middle management of European employees. The European Commission employs about 32,000 officials, organized into 56 directorates general. The influence of commissioners is partly determined by the number of subordinates and directorates they head. These structures can be compared to ministries in EU countries.

All candidates for the positions of European Commissioners will be thoroughly analyzed by the European Parliament's Legal Committee, and each of them will be interviewed by the relevant parliamentary committee, which lasts approximately three hours. MEPs have the right to veto individual candidates or demand changes in the distribution of powers among the commissioners.

During the previous hearings five years ago, MEPs replaced three candidates for the European Commission. After the interviews and additional consultations, the European Parliament votes for the entire European Commission as a package. If the second composition of the Commission under the leadership of Ursula von der Leyen is *approved by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, its work will begin no later than December 1.*

The current representative of Hungary, Oliver Varghese, who is responsible for Ukraine's European integration in the current European Commission, will now deal with health and animal protection issues. Varghese wrote on the social network X: "This appointment is a recognition of the achievements of the Hungarian healthcare system, which has been among the world's best for over a century. I will work hard to earn this trust, just as I have for the past five years." Undoubtedly, this is a positive development for Ukraine.

Of all the above, it is also worth emphasizing the **Lithuanian Andrius Kubilius, who will lead one of the key areas for the EU - defense and space** - and has the most pro-Ukrainian position, as he was twice the Prime Minister of Lithuania and an active participant in the Lithuanian liberation movement. Kubilius actively supports increasing military assistance to Ukraine and its integration into the EU and NATO. Ursula von der Leyen noted that he will work on the development of the European Defense Union and strengthening the EU's investment and industrial potential in the defense sector.

The next stage in the appointment of the new European Commission depends on the vote of the European Parliament, which will take place after all the candidates have been submitted by national governments. Although it was assumed that there would be no problems, the Kos controversy has delayed the process. In addition, MEPs, like Ukrainians, may have questions about Oliver Varghese, who has already been accused of promoting policies that contradict the EU's overall vision. He may also be reminded of an unpleasant incident in February 2023, when he forgot to turn off the microphone at an EP meeting and spoke out against the deputies: "How many more idiots are there?" So time will tell whether it was a good move to keep him in leadership positions at all.

At the same time, Belgian Foreign Minister Haji Lahbib may be asked about her trip to the occupied Crimea in 2021, when she was still working as a journalist. When asked where she returned from, Lahbib replied that she needed a Russian visa to land at Sevastopol airport. She

was also at the epicenter of the 2023 visa scandal for Iranians, when officials who assisted Russia in its war against Ukraine came to the Brussels summit. Prime Minister Alexander de Kroo justified the actions of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, noting that they were forced to issue visas to avoid a diplomatic incident.<sup>3</sup>

**The position of European Commissioner for Defense and Space** was created for the first time in the European Commission, and experts believe it is in Ukraine's interest. Roger Hilton, a researcher at the Slovakian think tank GLOBSEC, notes that the introduction of the defense portfolio is the first step towards overcoming security challenges on the European continent, although it is difficult to expect significant changes. He also believes that the fact that it will be headed by Kubilius, who is Lithuanian, shows that Brussels recognizes the experience of Central and Eastern Europe in dealing with the threat from Russia. To be effective in the current crisis, Kubilius must have a broad vision of defense issues and actively cooperate with EU colleagues, as well as with NATO and G7 partners.

Hilton believes that Kubilius will benefit from the support of Kaja Kallas, **a senior EU official who shares his belief in the strategic benefits of a Ukrainian victory and a Russian defeat for European stability.** Together, they will be able to convince more skeptical members to make difficult decisions in the area of foreign security and defense.

***It is important for Ukraine, which has begun the difficult process of negotiating its accession to the EU, to establish effective communication with the new EU Commissioner for Enlargement.*** The appointment of Kos is a positive development, as Slovenia has demonstrated its support for Ukraine by signing a security cooperation agreement. Martha Kos will also be responsible for the Eastern Neighborhood Policy and the restoration of Ukraine. The expert notes that it is important to monitor the domestic political situation in Slovenia, which may affect the appointment of Kos.

However, as Kostiantyn Yelisieiev warns, the success of Ukraine's accession negotiations depends not only on the personality of the European Commissioner. He emphasizes that the accession negotiations cover a wide range of EU policies, and the position of each member of the European Commission matters. Therefore, Kyiv should maintain an active dialog with the entire European Commission. However, in general, **the new composition sends a positive signal to Ukraine, and also characterizes the progress in the EU's understanding of the need for change and prioritization of officials who are aware of the threat from Russia.**

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<sup>3</sup> Новий склад Єврокомісії: що треба знати?.17.09.2024 <https://www.dw.com/uk/novij-sklad-evrokomisii-so-treba-znati/a-70242825>



## Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine

*THEME ANALYSIS: V. Zelensky's plan for Ukraine's victory and the likelihood of its realism*



*Source: Getty Images*

Volodymyr Zelensky announced the presentation of a “Victory Plan” during his visit to the United States, which will be an important step in seeking support for Ukraine. This document, while still intriguing and secretive, is likely to contain specific proposals for military, economic, and humanitarian aid, as well as strategies for further cooperation with American partners.

Last year, at the UN General Assembly, the President already drew attention to the difficulties Ukraine is facing, including the slowdown in international assistance. Now, in the context of new challenges and an active election process in the United States, Zelensky is again seeking support, emphasizing the importance of stable relations between Ukraine and the United States.

During a meeting with President Joe Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris, and presidential candidate Donald Trump, he is expected to outline what resources and support Ukraine needs to continue fighting on the front lines and rebuild the country.

**All of this is against the backdrop of a situation that remains extremely difficult for Ukraine, especially in Donbas, where Russian troops continue their offensive, inflicting significant losses on Ukrainian forces.** According to official figures, Russia has taken control of about a thousand square kilometers of Ukrainian territory, although the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine does not publish specific figures.

However, there is some positive news: Ukrainian forces successfully conducted the Kursk operation, controlling approximately 1,200 square kilometers of Russian territory. However, the Russian army is responding by increasing its presence in these areas.

Amid the ongoing hot phase of the war, it is critical for Ukraine that its Western partners continue to provide military and financial assistance. That is why Volodymyr Zelensky

announced the **Victory Plan**, which aims to secure further support from the United States and other allies, emphasizing the need for assistance to stabilize the frontline and restore territorial integrity. Volodymyr Zelensky first spoke about the Victory Plan in late August at a press conference on Independence Day. He noted that for Ukraine, **victory means being strong and ready for active diplomacy**.<sup>4</sup>

The President's Office explained that the plan would contain *four main points*:

1. Military assistance to Ukraine - continuation and strengthening of support from Western partners.
2. Economic steps - measures to strengthen the Ukrainian economy in times of war.
3. Diplomatic pressure on the aggressor - intensification of international support and pressure on Russia.
4. "Pathetic coercion of Russia" is a strategy that provides for legal and economic sanctions against the aggressor.

It is also known that it will include specific proposals aimed at strengthening support from Western partners, especially in the context of the ongoing large-scale war. First and foremost, Zelensky hopes that this plan will help attract the attention of the international community and speed up the provision of necessary assistance.

The **"pathetic coercion of Russia"** implies that Ukraine determines its own role in the global political process and has the right to join any alliances, regardless of the opinion of third countries, which obviously refers to potential NATO membership.

The **economic incentive** is focused on increasing investment in military production in Ukraine and revising existing sanctions against the aggressor. According to media reports, the plan envisages investments from allies to expand the production of Ukrainian weapons, including drones and missiles, as well as new sanctions to weaken Russia.

**Diplomatic pressure** on Russia is aimed at strengthening relations with "neutral" countries in order to maximize influence on Moscow through the countries of the Global South, on which Russia depends for trade.

Zelensky also emphasized the importance of weapons to defend independence, diplomacy to consolidate partners, and justice to make Russia accountable for its actions in the war. Mykhailo Podolyak, advisor to the head of the OP, noted that the **military package** to be presented by the President will be clearly structured in accordance with the current situation at the front. *The document is expected to contain a detailed list of military equipment needed to fight Russia, including permission to attack its territory with long-range missiles.*

The world's media are actively trying to get the details of the plan. For example, on September 15, German Bild published information about Zelensky's "peace plan," which, according to them, contained demands for the possibility of attacking Russian territory with Western long-range weapons and Ukraine's readiness for a localized ceasefire in certain areas of the front. This provoked a strong reaction in both Ukrainian and Russian media. However, the President's Office denied this information, saying that Bild had spread a fake. Dmytro Lytvyn, presidential advisor, emphasized that none of the team involved in the preparation of the "Victory Plan" had spoken to Bild representatives.

Zelensky and his chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, have repeatedly emphasized that there will be no Minsk-3, which means **no new peace agreements with Russia**, similar to those signed under President Poroshenko. This demonstrates *the intention of the Ukrainian government*

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<sup>4</sup> План перемоги Зеленського. Що це і які матиме наслідки. 18.09.2024.  
<https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/cp8l38e4m95o>



*to avoid compromises that could lead to a freeze in the conflict without resolving key issues.* Commenting on the rumors of a possible “freezing of the war,” Dmytro Lytvyn emphasized that Ukraine would not agree to any agreements that could lead to a freeze in the conflict, as this would be in Russia's favor. He emphasized the importance of US support for the **“Victory Plan” rather than surrender.**

Representatives of the president's team assure that Zelensky is clearly aware of the danger of any agreements with Russia. He believes that any pause in the war will allow Putin to regroup his forces for new attacks. Therefore, Zelensky's new plan does not contain any intentions to stop the fighting or peace agreements that could reduce pressure on Russia. According to the BBC, the Office of the President of Ukraine prepared the “Victory Plan” in secret, involving about ten people without government involvement and experts to keep the intrigue alive.

Zelensky's team closely followed peace initiatives that emerged in the context of the US election, causing concern. In particular, Kamala Harris's rhetoric indicates continued support for Ukraine, while Donald Trump's position remains less clear. For example, J.D. Vance proposed fixing the demarcation line and securing Ukraine's neutral status, which caused Kyiv to be cautious.

In order to avoid imposing such initiatives, Zelensky decided to present his plan to American leaders. Zelensky emphasized that the implementation of the plan depends not only on the United States but also on the support of other partners, noting that Ukraine needs peace. Zelensky last met with Joe Biden in July 2024 at the NATO summit, where the issue of allowing the US to strike military targets in Russia with Ukrainian weapons was raised. This issue remains relevant, and the Ukrainian side hopes for a positive resolution during this meeting.

Negotiations are ongoing, and in early September, Ukrainian officials presented the United States with a detailed list of military facilities in Russia that could be targeted if authorized. The list includes sites important to the Russian army, such as airfields and ammunition depots. Political analyst Volodymyr Fesenko notes that Zelensky's plan is intended to show how the United States can support Ukraine in ending the war with Russia. Alyona Getmanchuk, director of the New Europe Center, adds that it is important to convince American politicians that the plan is realistic and that it will benefit not only Ukraine but also the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Government sources say that the ***Victory Plan is not a replacement for Zelensky's peace formula, but rather measures to implement it.*** Fesenko also explains that the peace formula is Ukraine's strategic position that defines the conditions for a just end to the war, while the Victory Plan focuses on short-term measures that can help Ukraine survive the war.

Meanwhile, Zelensky noted that the ***Plan is designed to be implemented from October to December this year***, so as not to delay the processes. All points have clear deadlines, and the overall goal is to push the situation towards a normal end to the war. **In case Russia continues to evade implementation, the plan includes options for action to ensure a fair end to the conflict.**

The issue of support for the Victory Plan of the Ukrainian side by American partners remains open. In particular, the plan contains a requirement to authorize strikes against Russia using long-range weapons and the possibility of inviting Ukraine to join NATO. The American side has already begun to study the document, but the final reaction has not yet been announced.

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<sup>5</sup> Політолог розкрив деталі "Плану перемоги України": з чого він складається.23.09.2024.  
<https://tsn.ua/ato/politolog-rozkriv-detali-planu-peremogi-ukrayini-z-chogo-vin-skladayetsya-2665137.html>

Zelensky's visit takes place against the backdrop of the US election campaign, which will influence the White House's decision. The Biden administration is taking a cautious approach to the issue of military support so as not to give additional reasons for critics to accuse the president of “dragging” the United States into a global conflict. At the same time, there is an awareness that success or failure in Ukraine will affect Biden's presidential legacy. Experts emphasize the importance of Ukraine managing to convince the US administration to take more decisive steps, as this could be a critical moment in the war and for shaping Biden's image as a leader capable of stopping the conflict.

The administration of US President Joe Biden has reviewed the Victory Plan developed by Volodymyr Zelensky and considers it to be quite workable. US Permanent Representative to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield noted during a press conference *that the plan lays out a strategy that can be effective*. She also emphasized that the United States has always sought to find a way to peace in Ukraine, and President Biden has been actively working on this issue for the past two years. Hopes for progress in achieving peace remain.<sup>6</sup>

When planning to present his Victory Plan to US President Joe Biden, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that if Biden does not support it, Ukraine will have to live by “**Plan B.**” According to Zelensky, Ukraine has been working on this plan for many years, and the new plan provides for the strengthening of Ukraine without the need for cooperation with Russia. Zelensky emphasized that his initiative depends on Biden's support, and that a refusal on his part could lead to *a long and exhausting war*. He acknowledges the importance of American support, while also pointing to the need for Western allies to make decisions to end the conflict. However, even among the closest allies, there is skepticism about the possibility of returning all the occupied territories, and if Ukraine does not recognize its territorial losses, the conflict could turn into an “eternal war.”

Contacts with the **countries of the Global South** are also important in the context of preparations for the second Peace Summit, where Ukraine plans to promote its interests in ending the conflict. Zelensky hopes that the plan will be implemented after important decisions are made by Western partners by the end of the year. President Zelensky's spokesman, Serhiy Nikiforov, states: “The Western media have been using different epithets: like they accepted it with coolness, they accepted it without enthusiasm, they accepted this Victory Plan with skepticism. This is not true, it was accepted with great interest, it was accepted constructively, it was put to work,” Nikiforov said.

However, there **is no final decision yet**. *The essence of Zelensky's plan can be boiled down to a simple idea: Ukraine is asking to be allowed to build up its military and to lift restrictions on the use of Western long-range weapons*. The goal is that in a few months, Ukraine could sit down with Russia to end the war. **This is something that Kyiv did not achieve during its counteroffensive in the summer of 2023. Now, Ukraine is seeking to force Putin to negotiate with missile strikes on Russian military targets, such as ammunition depots and airfields.**

On the other hand, since the invasion, Putin has also been trying to reach talks, but on his own terms, which include recognizing the annexation of Crimea and four Ukrainian regions, and Ukraine's rejection of NATO membership. Kyiv has not agreed to this, but pressure is mounting as the Russian army continues to seize more territory in the Donetsk region.

As political analyst Roman Honcharenko notes, Zelenskiy has certainly set the bar high by calling his plan a “victory plan” and increasing pressure on Biden. This is a risky move that could create inflated expectations among Ukrainians. This approach has worked before, albeit

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<sup>6</sup> Може спрацювати: в США прокоментували план перемоги України від Зеленського.18.09.2024.  
<https://informator.ua/uk/mozhe-spracyuvati-v-ssha-prokomentuvali-plan-peremogi-ukrajini-vid-zelenskogo>

not without problems, as was the case before the NATO summit in Lithuania in 2023. At that time, Ukraine's attempts to secure an invitation to NATO caused dissatisfaction in Washington, but did not bring the expected results. At the July summit in Washington, Ukrainians no longer emphasized this issue.<sup>7</sup>

Now Zelensky is returning to this goal. **One of Kyiv's conditions for negotiations with Moscow is the promise of accelerated accession to NATO after the war, even if it requires painful territorial concessions. This, in Kyiv's view, is the only acceptable option.**

Zelensky's plan has already been discussed in the United States, but it may be subject to change. The main questions remain open: how the war will develop, what Ukraine's position will be in negotiations with Moscow, and what Western support will be if Trump is elected president of the United States.

A decisive role will be played by the meeting of the Contact Group on Ukraine's Defense, which will take place on October 10 at Ramstein Air Base in Germany during Biden's farewell visit. Although there are chances that the West will allow Russia to be struck by long-range weapons, they are not great.

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<sup>7</sup> План Зеленського мало не провалився, усе вирішить "Рамштайн".27.09.2024.  
<https://www.dw.com/uk/komentar-plan-zelenskogo-malo-ne-provalivsa-ale-vse-virisit-ramstajn/a-70350974>



Source: Army FM

### *Changes at the front*

**Trend:** *the exhausted units of the Ukrainian Defense Forces are losing their ability to deter the offensive of Russian troops, whose advance through Ukrainian defensive positions is becoming a systematic phenomenon.*

The main reason for this critical situation is the inability of Ukrainian troops to resist Russian flanking attacks, which creates a threat of encirclement of Ukrainian positions, from which Ukrainian units withdraw with heavy losses.

The Russian Armed Forces advanced to the heights in Donetsk region and as a result captured a number of settlements, including Nevelske, Vodyane, Hrodivka and Novohrodivka, and Vuhledar. Kurakhove was in danger. Enemy units managed to take the towns of Novohrodivka, Karlivka and Ukrainsk, which are important for our defense, in a few days.

***In the Avdiivka-Pokrovsky direction***, the Ukrainian defense began to crack in a matter of weeks. Within two months, the enemy had advanced more than twenty kilometers, capturing Ocheretyne. There were two determining factors that played in the enemy's favor and contributed to its advance. The first is the moral and physical fatigue of the soldiers, particularly the infantry. The second is problems with coordination among the military and often incompetent decisions on the part of senior officers at the operational and tactical level.



## *Military assistance*

**USA.** the security assistance package for Ukraine includes an additional USD 2.4 billion through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI), which will provide the state with additional air defense, unmanned aerial systems and air-to-ground munitions, as well as strengthen Ukraine's defense industry.

The \$2.4 billion aid package includes:

- Ammunition and support for Ukrainian air defense systems
- Air-to-ground munitions
- Unmanned aerial vehicles and components to support Ukrainian production of UAVs
- Equipment to combat UAVs
- Unmanned surface vessels
- Secure communication equipment
- Equipment and materiel to support Ukrainian ammunition production
- Spare parts, maintenance and support, and other support equipment.

The Pentagon adds that this is the twenty-first USAI package from the Biden administration. On September 26, the White House allocated \$7.9 billion in new military aid to Ukraine. The Armed Forces will receive an additional Patriot air defense system. Earlier, the United States announced a \$375 million aid package for Ukraine. It will include a number of important weapons and equipment.<sup>8</sup>

**Lithuania.** On September 28, Lithuania announced a new military aid package for Ukraine. It includes ammunition, laptops, and other equipment.

## *Russia: External and internal challenges*

### ***Trend: V. Putin's Red Lines on Allowing Ukraine to Use Long-Range Western Weapons and the Reaction of Western Countries***

Vladimir Putin expressed the opinion that the use of long-range Western weapons by the Ukrainian army to attack Russian territory is impossible without NATO's involvement. According to him, this would mean direct intervention by NATO countries in the fighting. He also noted that although the Ukrainian Armed Forces are already conducting strikes deep into Russia, the use of long-range precision weapons is “a completely different story.”

Putin believes that the use of long-range weapons by the Ukrainian Armed Forces is possible only with the use of NATO satellite data, and that only NATO military personnel can make “flight assignments.” He characterized the authorization of the use of these weapons as “direct participation of NATO countries in the war in Ukraine,” which, according to him, indicates that the United States and European countries are actually at war with Russia. Putin threatened that if the nature of the conflict changes, Russia will take appropriate decisions regarding the threats that may arise. This situation was discussed during Volodymyr Zelensky's meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken and British Foreign Secretary David Lammy in Kyiv.<sup>9</sup>

Putin's comments came amid growing speculation that restrictions on the use of long-range Western weapons for Ukraine could be lifted. Western partners such as the United States, Britain, and France have provided Ukraine with long-range missiles, but have so far not allowed their use on Russian soil. However, more and more signals indicate that Western

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<sup>8</sup> США виділяють Україні 7,9 млрд доларів допомоги та розширюють програму підготовки пілотів. 26.09.2024. <https://www.slovoudilo.ua/2024/09/26/novyna/polityka/ssha-vydilyayut-ukrayini-79-mlrd-dolariv-dopomohy-ta-rozshyryayut-prohramu-pidhotovky-pilotiv>

<sup>9</sup> Путін зробив заяву щодо прямої участі країн НАТО у війні в Україні. 12.09.2024. <https://tsn.ua/svit/putin-zrobiv-zayavu-schodo-pryamoyi-uchasti-krayin-nato-u-viyni-v-ukrayini-2658765.html>

leaders may reconsider their position and give Ukraine permission.

In response, Putin has stepped up his territorial claims. By discussing the possibility of World War III, he is apparently trying to intimidate the West by encouraging Ukraine's allies to maintain the existing ban on strikes deep into Russia. At the same time, his attempts to make Western countries see this issue as critical are undermined by his own hesitant reactions to Ukraine's regular strikes on targets in Crimea, which Putin considers part of Russia. If the idea of Ukrainian attacks on Russian territory is indeed a red line for Moscow, why has it not reacted to previous cases?

The inconsistency of Putin's position is indicative of the realities behind his imperialistic statements during the invasion of Ukraine. Starting with the annexation of Crimea a decade ago, he initially claimed control of the peninsula. In September 2022, Putin went further, declaring that the four partially occupied Ukrainian regions had become an integral part of Russia and would remain so “forever.” Accordingly, the Russian Constitution was amended to include the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson regions of Ukraine.

Since then, **Putin has stepped up his territorial claims**, publicly boasting about Ukraine's “conquests” and comparing his invasion to Russia's expansion under Peter the Great. In June 2024, he said that for a ceasefire to be in place, Ukraine would need to fully withdraw from four partially occupied regions and hand them over to Russia. Kremlin officials also argue that Ukraine should come to terms with the new “territorial realities.”

However, judging by Putin's latest “red line,” he has not quite accepted the new territorial realities proclaimed by his propagandists. Although he insists that the five “annexed” regions have become part of Russia, he is in no hurry to provide them with the same level of protection as other regions. This reflects his hesitancy to recognize the occupation as irreversible, emphasizing that some regions in his new empire are “more Russian” than others.

This is not the first time that ***Russia has warned of the threat of war with NATO; Kremlin officials regularly portray the invasion of Ukraine as a fight against the West.*** Putin often imposes arbitrary restrictions on the actions of the Ukrainian military and Western allies without taking action when these restrictions are violated.

Since February 2022, Ukraine's partners have been gradually breaking down the red lines by expanding military aid, from helmets and anti-tank weapons to Patriot air defense systems, long-range missiles, and F-16 fighter jets. Ukraine has repeatedly called Putin's bluff, liberating the occupied territories and striking at the Russian Black Sea Fleet. **In August 2024, the Ukrainian army crossed the reddest of the Kremlin's red lines by invading Russia. Instead of following through on his threats, Putin downplayed the invasion, calling it a “provocation.”**

**It is now clear that Putin's “red lines” are a bluff** aimed at intimidating the West and isolating Ukraine. Over the past two and a half years, his attempts to impose restrictions on international adversaries have been repeatedly exposed, becoming increasingly detached from reality. We are reaching a point where Putin's latest “red lines” contradict his own propaganda. **His reliance on empty threats underscores the relative weakness of his position. If Western leaders can overcome their fear of escalation, they will find that Putin is far less formidable than he wants us to believe.**

*First*, the West is trying to avoid a situation that would lead to war between Russia and NATO. The allies are held back by an old fear that the use of long-range missiles, which Ukraine could use to strike deep into Russia, would turn NATO into a direct participant in the conflict, with unpredictable global consequences. **But Ukraine's operation in the Kursk region proved that Russia's “red lines” have no real basis.** However, Western partners have not yet been able to reach a consensus on this issue.



*Secondly*, the difficulty in agreeing to the supply of long-range systems is related to the fact that most of them are jointly developed by NATO countries, so their supply requires approval from all developers. For example, to use Storm Shadow missiles, Ukraine needs the consent of the UK, France, Germany, and the US, as these missiles are a joint Franco-British development with components from Germany and the US. London is not opposed to giving permission, but Berlin, Paris, and Washington are still opposed for fear of escalation. The same applies to ATACMS, which can be used to strike the occupied territories but not Russia.

It came as no surprise that Slovakia and Hungary, where Kremlin-friendly governments rule, refused to support allowing Ukraine to attack Russian territory. Thus, the Western establishment continues to be cautious about lifting restrictions on Ukraine's use of long-range weapons.

It is worth noting that Western leaders can change their position while maintaining warning public rhetoric. For example, on May 30, 2022, US President Joe Biden claimed that the United States would not send Ukraine missile systems that could strike Russian territory. However, on October 4, 2023, he agreed to supply Ukraine with ATACMS long-range missiles. Similarly, on September 25, 2022, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz opposed the supply of tanks in order not to provoke a conflict between Russia and NATO, and on February 5, 2023, he announced the transfer of German Leopard tanks.

Starting with Russia's full-scale invasion, it took several months before the Ukrainian Armed Forces began receiving M777s, Caesars, Panzerhaubitze 2000s, and HIMARS MLRS. It was only a year later that the IRIS-T, NASAMS, Patriot, Challenger, Abrams, and Leopard appeared in Ukraine's arsenal, and the first F-16 fighters were delivered a year and a half later. After some hesitation, the European partners finally decided to provide Ukraine with Storm Shadow/SCALP EG missiles with a range of 250-560 km, and later ATACMS with a range of 165-300 km. These weapons were provided on the condition that Ukraine would not use them against Russia, and for a long time the Ukrainian Armed Forces adhered to this prohibition. However, after the Russian offensive in the north of Kharkiv region, the situation changed, as the enemy's rear was along Russian territory. A month later, the United States allowed the use of HIMARS systems with GMLRS missiles to strike the regions of Russia bordering Kharkiv and Sumy.

The offensive actions of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the Kursk region of Russia further dispelled Western fears, as the war spread to Russian territory but did not lead to escalation. With the start of the Kursk operation, the Ukrainian government more actively called on the West to remove barriers prohibiting the use of missile weapons against Russia. The issue of allowing Ukraine to use long-range weapons has once again become more active in Western politics after massive Russian missile strikes against Ukraine.

After the most extensive shelling on August 26, EU High Representative Josep Borrell called for increased air defense supplies and the lifting of all restrictions on the use of Western weapons to strike military targets in Russia. At the August meeting of EU ministers, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba also called on the allies to provide such an opportunity. His statements were supported by diplomats from France, Sweden, Latvia, the Netherlands, and Poland, who reminded him that international law does not prohibit a country from acting in the aggressor's territory in self-defense.

Analysts believe that the United States plays a key role in the decision to authorize long-range strikes on Russian territory. This issue was likely discussed during the visit of the Ukrainian delegation to the United States and the talks on August 31, when Ukrainian officials met with American military officials and experts. Ukraine's Defense Minister Rustem Umerov presented a list of targets in Russia that the Ukrainian Armed Forces could strike. John Kirby, Strategic Communications Coordinator at the White House National Security

Council, confirmed that **the US** is in “difficult negotiations” with Ukraine, but noted that **restrictions remain in place for now**.

Ukraine has received Storm Shadow air-to-air missiles from the UK, SCALP from France, and is awaiting Taurus missiles from Germany. However, the American ATACMS surface-to-surface missiles have important advantages: they are faster (1000-1100 km/h) and more elusive to Russian air defense, although their maximum range (300 km) is shorter than their European counterparts. The Armed Forces of Ukraine already used ATACMS in 2023 to hit airfields in occupied cities.

The U.S. authorization to use ATACMS against targets in Russia is critically important for Ukraine, as it will allow it to attack military bases, airfields, and command posts at a distance of up to 300 km. Analysts estimate that there are 20 military targets in the HIMARS or MLRS coverage area in Russia, and more than 245 targets fall under ATACMS. While some of these targets are military airfields, most are complex facilities that are difficult to relocate.<sup>10</sup> Thus, if the allies continue to delay authorizing strikes on Russia, the Ukrainian Armed Forces will have to rely on their own means, such as the Palyanytsia drone missile, which can strike at a distance of up to 700 km.

When Vladimir Putin recently warned that allowing Ukraine to use Western weapons to strike Russia would lead to a conflict with NATO, the Kremlin also realized that nuclear threats were losing effect. Russian analysts say that frequent threats are causing “immunity” and do not frighten Western leaders. One Russian official believes that the nuclear scenario is “the least likely” because it could cause discontent among Russia's partners and is militarily ineffective. Putin is looking for alternatives to limit Western support for Ukraine and strengthen his “red lines.” Tatyana Stanova, a political expert, argues that he will consider nuclear weapons only in extreme cases when there is a threat to Russia. There is a growing expectation among Russian officials that even if the use of long-range weapons is authorized, Western countries will be cautious and limit their actions.

Lawrence Friedman emphasizes that Putin is trying to avoid radical actions, such as nuclear threats, but this does not mean that the situation is not serious. Sergei Markov, a Kremlin-affiliated analyst, notes that the Russian army realizes that their threats have not been implemented, and there is pressure to escalate. He suggests that possible responses could include closing the British Embassy in Moscow or strikes on air bases in Poland and Romania where Ukrainian F-16s are deployed. According to him, Russia believes that strikes on Moscow could become a reality, so it is necessary to strike first.

Although Putin's nuclear threats are not yet an immediate threat, they are still being used, for example, by Donald Trump in his election campaign. Trump and Robert F. Kennedy Jr. noted that providing Ukraine with long-range Western missiles could increase the risk of a nuclear conflict, calling for direct talks with Moscow. Markov believes that **Putin may step up his threats before the election, as an escalation would cause fear in the United States, which could help Trump win.** Friedman notes that Putin's nuclear threats are ambiguous, which increases the sense of danger because they leave room for interpretation. **However, as the effectiveness of this approach falls, Putin is looking for new options, and uncertainty is growing, as no one, not even he, knows how he will react to different situations.**

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<sup>10</sup> Що змінить дозвіл Заходу на застосування далекобійної зброї по РФ? 02.10.2024.  
<https://cpd.gov.ua/articles/shho-zminyt-dozvil-zahodu-na-zastosuvannya-dalekobijnoyi-zbroyi-po-rf/>