

Biden Secretly Gave Ukraine Permission to Strike Inside Russia with US Weapons

It's a major reversal that will help Ukraine to better defend its second-largest city.

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The Biden administration has quietly given Ukraine permission to strike inside Russia — solely near the area of Kharkiv — using U.S.-provided weapons, three U.S. officials and two other people familiar with the move said Thursday, a major reversal that will help Ukraine to better defend its second-largest city.

"The president recently directed his team to ensure that Ukraine is able to use U.S. weapons for counter-fire purposes in Kharkiv so Ukraine can hit back at Russian forces hitting them or preparing to hit them," one of the U.S. officials said, adding that the policy of not allowing long-range strikes inside Russia "has not changed."

Ukraine asked the U.S. to make this policy change only after Russia's offensive on Kharkiv began this month, the official added. All the people were granted anonymity to discuss internal decisions that haven't been announced.

In the last few days, the U.S. made the decision to allow Ukraine "flexibility" to defend itself from attacks on the border near Kharkiv, the second U.S. official said.

In effect, Ukraine can now use American-provided weapons, such as rockets and rocket launchers, to shoot down launched Russian missiles heading toward Kharkiv, at troops massing just over the Russian border near the city, or Russian bombers launching bombs toward Ukrainian territory. But the official said Ukraine cannot use those weapons to hit civilian infrastructure or launch long-range missiles, such as the Army Tactical Missile System, to hit military targets deep inside Russia.

It's a stunning shift the administration initially said would escalate the war by more directly involving the U.S. in the fight. But worsening conditions for Ukraine on the battlefield -- namely Russia's advances and improved position in Kharkiv -- led the president to change his mind.

The National Security Council did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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