

## Trump's Strategy: Escalation, More Weapons to Ukraine

### Description

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***Far from abandoning Ukraine, a second Trump administration would lift restrictions on Ukrainian military aid in order to force a peace settlement...***



**Donald Trump has vowed that in a second presidential term, he would end the war in Ukraine “[in twenty-four hours](#).”** Mainstream analysts have dismissed the president's statements as hyperbole, but there is a strong possibility that Trump will be back in the Oval Office in just over a year's time. Foreign policy experts, therefore, should take the former President's statements seriously and assess how a Trump administration might deal with the largest conflict in Europe since World War II.

Let us start by recognizing that Biden's Ukraine strategy leaves much room for improvement. His weaknesses encouraged Putin to launch the invasion in the first place. Biden's own Supreme Allied Commander in Europe [assessed](#) that Biden's botched withdrawal from Afghanistan led to Putin's decision to re-attack Ukraine. Biden's feeble attempts at “integrated deterrence,” threatening sanctions and aid to Ukraine, failed in their intended purpose of deterring Putin's aggression.

**Putin invaded Ukraine under both Obama and Biden, but he did not attack while Trump was president.** Trump has stated that the [Russia-Ukraine war](#) would “[never have happened](#)” under his watch.

Following [Putin's invasion](#), Biden pursued an overly cautious wartime strategy. Instead of clearly defining a goal of victory, Biden [vowed](#) to help Ukraine “as long as it takes.” But this only raises the question: as long as it takes to do what? Biden should have provided Ukraine with the weapons it

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needed to win quickly, but instead, he was afraid of potential Russian “escalation” and provided a cautious IV-drip of arms. Biden opposed providing many major weapons systems, like tanks, aircraft, and long-range artillery before changing his mind. The result is that Ukraine has had enough weapons to fight but not enough to win.

Biden’s revealed wartime strategy was to spend billions of dollars only to produce a bloody and inconclusive stalemate.

**In contrast, based exclusively on his public statements, one can divine a very different Trump doctrine for Ukraine.** He has argued that he would use his personal relationship with Zelenskyy and Putin to negotiate a settlement to the conflict “in one day.” The one-day timeframe may be overly ambitious as neither Putin nor Zelenskyy has expressed an interest in a negotiated settlement. Both sides appear to believe that they can still prevail on the battlefield.

But Trump’s proposed approach could change that calculation. Trump [said](#), ***“I would tell Putin, if you don’t make a deal, we’re going to give him a lot. We’re going to give [Ukraine] more than they ever got if we have to.”***

Trump’s past actions make that threat credible. While in office, Trump showed that he was willing to push boundaries, lifting Obama-era restrictions on the rules of engagement in the fight against ISIS and killing Iranian general Qassem Soleimani. If Putin refuses to negotiate, Trump might very well remove the Biden-eras constraints on arms transfers and give Ukraine the weapons it needs to win, including long-range weapons to strike within Crimea and Russia. If faced with the prospect of a costly military defeat, Putin may very well prefer negotiations.

To bring Kyiv to the table, Trump [said](#), ***“I would tell Zelenskyy, ‘no more.’ You got to make a deal.”*** Ukraine can only sustain the war effort due to large-scale Western support, and the prospect of losing aid would be a strong inducement to negotiation.

A ceasefire along the current lines and subsequent negotiations would preserve a sovereign, democratic Ukraine anchored in the West and capable of defending itself. Kyiv would maintain its internationally-recognized claims to sovereignty over all of Ukraine. A halt to hostilities would also facilitate the provision of reliable security guarantees, including possible NATO and EU membership, to deter Russia from resuming the conflict. While less satisfying than (what increasingly appears to be an unachievable) total military victory, this outcome would represent a strategic defeat for Russia and a strengthening of American national security and the Western alliance.

**Some Republicans argue that the Ukraine conflict is a European matter of no consequence to the United States. Strategically, as his public comments reinforce, Trump disagrees. He sees ending the war as a major foreign policy issue—one that he plans to accomplish on day one.**