May 29, 2024

President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We call on your Administration to review and change its policy constraining Ukraine’s use of U.S.-supplied military assistance against critical military targets within Russia. We are grateful for your leadership and commitment to support Ukraine. With Russia’s escalating attacks against Ukrainian civilians and civilian infrastructure, especially around Kharkiv, it is imperative that the U.S. Government not hamper Ukraine’s ability to fully and reasonably defend its people and its territorial integrity, consistent with international law.

The United Kingdom has already provided its express approval for Ukraine to use British-provided weapons against legitimate targets on Russian territory. As British Foreign Secretary David Cameron unambiguously stated, “Ukraine has that right.”¹ Foreign Secretary Cameron’s words underscore the imperative of resisting Putin’s attempts at intimidation and blatant disregard for international law. We call on your Administration to once again follow the UK’s lead.

Enabling Ukraine to strike key military targets on Russian soil would offer immediate protection for cities like Kharkiv. Russia aims to render Kharkiv, Ukraine’s second-largest city, uninhabitable through barbaric bombing campaigns. A city of 1.3 million residents, akin to the populations of Dallas or San Diego, Kharkiv is perilously close to the Russian border. The current U.S. policy has the implicit effect of enabling Russian forces to rain down devastation from the safety of their own territory without fear of response or interdiction by the Ukrainians. Tragically, incidents like the recent attack on Orthodox Easter Sunday, which claimed the life of one woman and injured 24 others in Kharkiv, are becoming all too common.² Yet they are entirely preventable.

From Russia’s distorted perspective, Ukraine is already using U.S. weapons inside of Russian sovereign territory. In 2014, Russia illegally annexed the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, a violation of international law, which was followed by the illegal annexation of Donetsk,

Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia Oblasts in 2022. The Kremlin has said that its nuclear umbrella extends to cover these regions. Nevertheless, despite these threats, Ukraine has not only attacked Russian forces in these occupied territories, it has returned substantial portions of these oblasts to sovereign Ukrainian control—all without triggering the threatened nuclear response. Moreover, Russian threats regarding Ukraine’s use of Western weapons to strike targets in Crimea were again proven hollow when Ukraine used British Storm Shadow missiles to strike the Black Sea Fleet’s headquarters in Sevastopol.

We must finally learn from Ukraine’s successes at calling out Russian bluster that it is not escalatory for Ukraine to defend itself. The past two years have shown that if we allow the U.S. to be held hostage to the Kremlin’s threats of escalation, Russia gains the upper hand and Ukrainian civilians pay the price.

Russia strategically employs such threats to deter Ukraine’s partners from enabling Ukraine to use Western weapons to their full potential. It is on you, Mr. President, to decide whether Russia’s demonstrably empty threats are successfully deterring the United States. At various points over the past two years, we have seen your Administration create artificial red lines for itself rather than for Putin, demonstrating to the Kremlin that its saber-rattling can deter the White House. We call on you to see through Russia’s bluster and provide Ukraine with everything it needs to pave the way for a just and lasting peace.

Respectfully,

Dora Chomiak
CEO, Razom for Ukraine

Karl Altau
Managing Director, The Joint Baltic American National Committee, Inc.

Dr. Anders Aslund
Senior Fellow, Stockholm Free World Forum
Advocacy Advisory Board Member, Razom for Ukraine

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Maryna Baydyuk
President, United Help Ukraine

Brock D. Bierman
President and CEO, Ukraine Focus

Nick Bilogorskiy
Co-Chairman, Nova Ukraine

David Bonior
Former Michigan Congressman
Ukrainian American Veteran Association

General Philip Breedlove
Former Supreme Allied Commander Europe
Advocacy Advisory Board Member, Razom for Ukraine

William Browder
Head, Global Magnitsky Justice Campaign

Ian Brzezinski
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Europe and NATO Policy

Dr. Emily Channell-Justice
Director, Temerty Contemporary Ukraine Program, Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute

David Crane
Founding Chief Prosecutor, UN Special Court for Sierra Leone, Global Accountability Network

Ambassador Kelley Currie
Former Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues

Orest Deychakiwsky
Co-Chair, Transatlantic Task Force for Ukraine

Dr. Larry Diamond
Senior Fellow Hoover Institution and Freeman Spogli Institute, Stanford University

Ambassador Paula Dobriansky
Former Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs
Mark Dubowitz
CEO, Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Eric S. Edelman

Marta Farion
President, Kyiv-Mohyla Foundation of America
Vice-President, Ukrainian World Congress

Dr. Evelyn N. Farkas
Executive Director, McCain Institute at Arizona State University

Arnie D. Fielkow
Former New Orleans City Council President
Executive Vice President, New Orleans Saints
CEO, National Basketball Retired Players Association
Advocacy Advisory Board Member, Razom for Ukraine

Dr. Francis Fukuyama
Olivier Nomellini Senior Fellow
Freeman Spogli Institute, Stanford University

Andrew Fylypovych
Director, External Affairs, Ukrainian Congress Committee of America

Colleen Graffy
Law Professor, Pepperdine Caruso Law School
Former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State

James Greene
Former Head (2004-2009), NATO Liaison Office Ukraine

Daniel Hamilton
Senior Fellow, Foreign Policy Institute, Johns Hopkins SAIS

Melinda Haring
Non-Resident Senior Fellow, Eurasia Center, Atlantic Council
Victor J. Herlinsky  
Sills Cummis & Gross  
Advocacy Advisory Board Member, Razom for Ukraine

Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges  
Former Commanding General, U.S. Army Europe  
Advocacy Advisory Board Member, Razom for Ukraine

Natalie Jaresko  
Former Minister of Finance of Ukraine (2014-2016)

Erik Jensen  
Director, Rule of Law Program, Stanford Law School

Garry Kasparov  
Chairman and Founder, Renew Democracy Initiative

Andrea Kendall-Taylor  
Senior Fellow and Director, Transatlantic Security Program, Center for a New American Security

Nadiia Khomaziuk  
Executive Director, U.S.-Ukraine Business Council

Alexander Kuzma  
Chief Development Officer, Ukrainian Catholic University Foundation

Clifford D. May  
President, Foundation for Defense of Democracies

Robert McConnell  
Co-Founder, U.S.-Ukraine Foundation

Dr. Michael McFaul  
Director, Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies  
Ken Olivier and Angela Nomellini Professor of International Studies, Department of Political Science  
Peter and Helen Bing Senior Fellow, Hoover Institution  
Stanford University
Ambassador Michael McKinley
Ambassador (ret.)

Steven Moore
Ukraine Freedom Project
Advocacy Advisory Board Member, Razom for Ukraine

Dr. Alexander Motyl
Professor, Rutgers University

James Nixey
Director, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House

Andrew Nynka
Editor-in-Chief, The Ukrainian Weekly and Svoboda

Natalie Pawlenko
President, Ukrainian National Women's League of America

Roman Petyk
Chairman Emeritus, Ukrainian Selfreliance Federal Credit Union

Andrew Piddoubny
President, Ukrainian American Bar Association

Ambassador Steven Pifer
Former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine
Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University

Daniel F. Runde
Board Member, Ukraine Moldova American Enterprise Fund

Randy Scheunemann
Strategic Counselor, Halifax International Security Forum

Liev Schreiber
Bluecheck Ukraine
David R. Shedd  
Former Acting Director, Defense Intelligence Agency  
CEO, Faith Without Borders, LLC

Marci Shore  
Professor of History, Yale University

Dr. Kathryn Stoner  
Professor and Director, Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law, Stanford University

Chad C. Sweet  
Former Chief of Staff, U.S. Department of Homeland Security

Ambassador William Taylor  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine

Ambassador Alexander Vershbow  
Former NATO Deputy Secretary General  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Russia  
Atlantic Council

Ambassador Kurt Volker  
Distinguished Fellow, Center for European Policy Analysis

Robert L. Wilkie  
Secretary of Veterans Affairs (2018-2021)  
Under Secretary of Defense (2017-2018)  
America First Policy Institute

Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch  
Former U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine

Diane Zeleny  
Advocacy Advisory Board Member, Razom for Ukraine

Affiliation provided for identification purposes only.