

Calls for UK and US to authorise Ukraine's use of long-range missiles against Russia

Robert Stevens
19 August 2024

The Ukrainian offensive into the Russian border regions of Kursk and Belgorod has prompted open discussion in British ruling circles on giving permission for the Zelensky regime to use long-range Storm Shadow missiles.

In recent days the full extent of Britain's involvement in the planning and execution of the offensive as NATO's main provocateur against Russia has been laid bare.

On August 15, Sky News revealed that British Challenger 2 main battle tanks have been deployed inside Russia as part of the Kursk invasion. Battle tanks have been handed over to Ukraine in their thousands by the United States, Britain and Germany, but the *Sky News* report was the first confirmation that these vehicles have been used inside Russia's borders. As far back as January 2023, Britain agreed to give Ukraine 14 of its Challenger 2 tanks, prompting Germany (Leopard 2), and the US (Abrams) to hand over their main battle tanks.

On August 16, *The Sun* reported that some Ukrainian troops involved in the attack on the Russian province of Kursk had been trained in Britain.

On July 8, three days after taking over at the Minister of Defence, incoming Labour government Defence Secretary John Healey had announced that 42,000 Ukrainian soldiers had completed basic training in the UK and returned to Ukraine to fight on the front lines. They were trained as part of Operation Interflex, which began in June 2022.

Since the launch of Operation Orbital in 2015, following the fascist-led coup in 2014 which overthrew the pro-Russian president of Ukraine, Britain had trained 60,000 Ukrainian troops by January this year, as confirmed by Healey's Conservative predecessor James Heapey.

The *Times*, the main newspaper through which the UK's military affairs are discussed, acknowledged the pivotal role played by the incoming Labour government in Ukraine's offensive.

In an article published in the *Sunday Times*, "Ukraine is invading with British tanks. What does it mean for us?", Chief Political Commentator Tim Shipman, notes, "When footage of British Challenger 2 battle tanks being used by

the Ukrainian army for its counterinvasion of Russia emerged on Tuesday, Downing Street and the Ministry of Defence were ready.

"For the previous 48 hours, officials and political aides working for Sir Keir Starmer and John Healey, the defence secretary, had been in talks about how far to go to confirm growing British involvement in the incursion towards Kursk.

"The stakes were high. Unseen by the world, British equipment, including drones, have played a central role in Ukraine's new offensive and British personnel have been closely advising the Ukrainian military for two years, on a scale matched by no other country."

It added, "The decision Starmer and Healey took last week was not a policy shift but a change of tone to be more open about Britain's role in a bid to persuade key allies to do more to help — and convince the public that Britain's security and economic prosperity is affected by events on the fields of Ukraine. A senior Whitehall source said: "There won't be shying away from the idea of British weapons being used in Russia as part of Ukraine's defence. We don't want any uncertainty or nervousness over Britain's support at this critical moment and a half-hearted or uncertain response might have indicated that. We should be proud that we've donated kit that is helping Ukraine in their defence."

Talk has now shifted as to when the main NATO powers, the US, UK, France and Germany, will allow Ukraine to start using Storm Shadow—and German Taurus missiles, which have a similar 155-mile range but an even more powerful warhead—against military targets well inside Russian territory.

Confirming the language employed by the *Sunday Times* of being "proud" of Ukraine's use of British weaponry, Healey wrote in the *Daily Express* a piece titled, "We must back Ukraine - if Putin wins the war he won't stop there".

Lauding "The bold incursion by Ukrainian troops into Russia in recent days", he said, "After just six weeks as Britain's Defence Secretary, I am more certain than ever that the defence of the UK – and of Europe – starts in Ukraine." Healey added, "We should be proud that British-

donated equipment, in the hands of brave Ukrainians on the frontline, is helping them to defend their country and push back Putin.”

Former Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson wrote in an August 16 *Daily Mail* column that Ukraine’s offensive meant that the green light had to be given for Ukraine to use NATO-donated long-range missiles, with Britain again taking the lead. He demanded, “for pity’s sake, can we finally cut the cackle, drop the ludicrous Putin-phobia and give the Ukrainians the tools they really need to finish the job; and by that I mean the proper permission to use the tools we have already given.”

The military offensive meant “it is time for Labour Prime Minister, Sir Keir Starmer, to stop pussyfooting around.... We are told, as ever, that we fear 'escalation'. But in truth the person who really fears escalation is Putin. He has lost hundreds of thousands of troops; he has lost huge quantities of armour; he is now severely overstretched. Now is the moment for the friends of Ukraine, led by the US and the UK, to go up a gear... show some initiative on Storm Shadow, and the rest of our friends and allies will follow suit.”

Over the weekend four former Conservative defence secretaries called on Downing Street to give Ukraine more support, with some demanding Kyiv be allowed to use Storm Shadows in the Russian offensive. Sir Ben Wallace, in office under Johnson, said, “Time and time again those that want to do nothing have used the ‘escalation’ excuse.” He added, “Storm Shadows have been making a real difference in Crimea, which Russia already believes to be sovereign Russian territory, without escalation.”

Bluster about being able to attack inside Russia without fearing retaliation was made in the same week that the *Financial Times* cited long-held Russian nuclear war planning documents, which included its navy wiping out the location of Britain’s nuclear submarine manufacturing facility and reducing all its major cities to piles of ash.

The current ban on using the long-range missiles was in fact a policy Starmer inherited from the Tories. On coming to power, he initially said that Ukraine could use Storm Shadows within Russia, but was rebuked by military figures including head of the armed forces, Sir Tony Radakin—based largely on concerns that Britain not move at a pace for which Washington is not yet prepared and which might be interpreted as critical of Britain’s far more powerful US ally.

While Starmer is the immediate target of Tory demands to sanction the use of long-range missiles inside Russia, this is also an effort to push the US and other NATO powers to do the same. The UK cannot act without US authorisation. Indeed, for Ukraine to launch the Storm Shadows over

Russia’s border, as the *Telegraph* reported, “would require the use of some US-made systems.”

The *Times* noted, “The prime minister has since publicly voiced support for extending permission to Russian territory. But since the missile is a joint project, that also requires the permission of the US and France (where the missiles are called Scalp), both of whom fear escalation with Russia.”

Another *Times* piece noted that Britain would also require permission from “a third undisclosed Nato country” to allow Ukraine to use the long-range capabilities of Storm Shadow.

Ukraine’s President Zelensky intervened on Saturday evening in a tweet stating, “It is crucial that our partners remove barriers that hinder us from weakening Russian positions in the way this war demands. Long-range capabilities are the answer to the most critical strategic questions of this war.”

Naming names he declared, “We need all partners who can truly help to step up. These are the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and others.” He identified Britain as the main culprit, because “Throughout this war, we’ve seen the UK demonstrate true leadership—in arms, politics, and support for Ukrainian society... Unfortunately, the situation has slowed down recently.”

According to the *Times* in an article published last Friday, a “UK government source” said a “request sent to Washington more than a month ago to allow the Storm Shadow missile to be fired into Russia still awaits a reply.”

The *Times* cited from several sources that the US-led ban remains in place for now, and that “One theory inside the UK military is that the US may be waiting to assess the impact or the consequences of the Ukrainian operation into Russia before making a decision, although they said they expected the matter to be quickly resolved.”

The *Telegraph* reported that Washington “denied reports that the US was blocking a request by the UK for Ukraine to use the missiles,” as no formal request had been made for their long-range use.



To contact the WSWs and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)