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Zelensky Warns Russia Exploiting Lack of 'Attention' on War

By AFP

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky lobbied his allies for more air defenses on Sunday, warning that Russia was "taking advantage" of attention shifting away from the Ukraine war to intensify its bombardment of the country.

Diplomatic efforts to end Russia's three-and-a-half year invasion of Ukraine have stalled in recent months.

Moscow has meanwhile renewed its campaign of air strikes against Ukraine's energy grid, cutting power to hundreds of thousands of people ahead of winter.

In separate calls with U.S. President Donald Trump and France's Emmanuel Macron on Sunday, Zelensky requested more missiles and help strengthening his country's "long-range capabilities."

"Russia is now taking advantage of the moment — the fact that the Middle East and domestic issues in every country are getting maximum attention," Zelensky said in a readout of his call with Macron.

Trump met Russian President Vladimir Putin for talks in August but failed to extract any kind of peace deal.

In his call with Trump on Sunday, his second in two days, Zelensky said the two countries would work to strengthen Ukraine's "defense capabilities."

"We agreed with President Trump that our teams, our military would handle everything we discussed," Zelensky said, without elaborating.

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The White House did not immediately comment on the call.

'Vile' strikes

Zelensky has in recent weeks lobbied Washington to supply Kyiv with long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles, a request that the White House says it is considering.

Russia says that supplying the missiles to Ukraine would risk rupturing its ties with the United States and cause a new round of escalation.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov renewed that warning on Sunday, warning Moscow could treat any launches of the missile as though they were carrying nuclear warheads.

"Just imagine, a long-range missile takes off and flies, and we know it could be nuclear-armed. What is the Russian Federation to think?" Peskov told a reporter from state television.

Russia launched a fresh volley of strikes on Ukraine early Sunday, killing one person and wounding more than a dozen others in at least four separate regions, according to regional officials.

In his call with Macron, Zelensky said Moscow's strikes had become "even more vile."

Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, describing it as a "special military operation" to demilitarize the country and prevent the expansion of NATO.

Kyiv and its European allies say the war is an illegal land grab that has resulted in tens of thousands of civilian and military casualties and widespread destruction.

Millions of Ukrainians have been forced to leave their homes since 2022, while Russia now occupies around one-fifth of Ukrainian territory — much of it ravaged by fighting.

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