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Trump and Zelensky to Meet as Kyiv Presses for Tomahawks

By Moscow Times Reporter

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President Donald Trump with President Volodymyr Zelensky in the White House. **Daniel Torok / The White House**

U.S. President Donald Trump is set to meet Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House on Friday, with discussions over whether Washington will supply long-range Tomahawk missiles to Kyiv expected to top the agenda.

Trump's recent ceasefire between Israel and Gaza has raised expectations that his administration will now turn its full attention to ending Russia's war in Ukraine.

Although Trump has signaled growing support for Kyiv since his summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska ended without a breakthrough, he has remained vague on whether he will provide Ukraine with the 1,000-mile (1,600-kilometer) range missiles it seeks.

And in his latest pivot on the war, Trump announced on the eve of his meeting with Zelensky that he and Putin had agreed to meet in Budapest to "see if we can bring this 'inglorious' War, between Russia and Ukraine, to an end."

He also appeared to cast doubt on whether Ukraine would receive the Tomahawks, saying Thursday that Washington could not "deplete" its own stockpiles.

Russia has repeatedly warned that supplying Tomahawk missiles to Ukraine would risk a new escalation in its nearly four-year invasion and further damage U.S.-Russian relations.

The timing of Thursday's call fit a familiar pattern for Putin, who often reaches out to Trump just as the U.S. president considers a tougher line on Russia.

"We can already see that Moscow is rushing to resume dialogue as soon as it hears about Tomahawks," Zelensky said.

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Still, Trump appears willing to pursue more aggressive tactics to end the conflict, fulfill his long-delayed campaign promise and bolster his bid for the Nobel Peace Prize.

The Financial Times reported this week that the U.S. has for months been sharing intelligence with Ukraine that enabled drone strikes on Russian oil refineries, contributing to fuel shortages and cutting into a key source of revenue for Moscow.

"For Trump, it's all about carrots and sticks. The Alaska summit was a huge carrot. He's all about sticks now," said Jim Townsend, a senior advisor at the Atlantic Council and former deputy assistant secretary of defense for European and NATO policy.

Speaking at a meeting of NATO defense ministers in Brussels this week, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth warned there would be "costs" for Russia if no peace deal could be reached.

"If there is no path to peace in the short term, then the United States, along with our allies, will take the steps necessary to impose costs on Russia for its continued aggression," Hegseth said. "If we must take this step, the U.S. War Department stands ready to do our part in ways that only the United States can do."

Hegseth is expected to be closely involved in discussions on the logistics of any potential missile transfer, including how many the United States can spare. Ukraine currently lacks the naval vessels or ground-based launchers needed to deploy Tomahawks and would require additional support to operate them.

In a Sept. 28 interview with Fox News, Vice President J.D. Vance said Zelensky had asked Washington to sell Tomahawks to European nations willing to transfer them to Ukraine. Vance said Trump would make the final decision.

The meeting with Zelensky is expected to include Vance, Hegseth and Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff.

“Witkoff has Putin’s confidence. In a world where people don’t trust each other, Witkoff is an important player,” Townsend told The Moscow Times.

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