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Trump Tells Zelensky to 'Make a Deal' as Tomahawk Plea Misfires

By Danny Kemp for AFP

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Donald Trump told Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Friday to make a deal with Russia, pouring cold water on Kyiv's push for Tomahawk missiles as the U.S. leader pursues a diplomatic solution to the war.

Trump said as recently as last month that he believed Ukraine could take back all its territory — but a day after agreeing to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin for a new summit the American had changed his tune.

After meeting with Zelensky at the White House, Trump said on social media that their talks were "very interesting, and cordial, but I told him, as I likewise strongly suggested to President Putin, that it is time to stop the killing, and make a DEAL!"

Trump also appeared to suggest both sides should accept their current front lines. "They

should stop where they are. Let both claim Victory, let History decide!" he said.

Zelensky said after the meeting that Russia was "afraid" of the U.S.-made long-range Tomahawk cruise missiles, but that he was "realistic" about receiving the weapons from Washington.

He told reporters that while he and Trump talked about long-range weapons they "decided that we don't speak about it because... the United States doesn't want escalation."

'Get the war over'

Zelensky came to Washington after weeks of calls for Tomahawks, hoping to capitalize on Trump's growing frustration with Putin after a summit in Alaska failed to produce a breakthrough.

But the Ukrainian left empty-handed as Trump eyes a fresh diplomatic breakthrough on the back of last week's Gaza peace deal.

Trump has appeared far more upbeat about the prospects of a deal since his two-and-a-half hour call with Putin on Thursday, in which they agreed to meet in Budapest.

"Hopefully we'll be able to get the war over with without thinking about Tomahawks," Trump told journalists including an AFP reporter as he hosted Zelensky at the White House.

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Trump added that he believed Putin "wants to end the war."

Zelensky, who came to the White House to push for the long-range U.S.-made weapons, said however that he would be ready to swap "thousands" of Ukrainian drones in exchange for Tomahawks.

Zelensky congratulated Trump on his recent Middle East peace deal in Gaza and said he hoped he would do the same for Ukraine. "I hope that President Trump can manage it," he said.

'Many questions'

Diplomatic talks on ending Russia's invasion have stalled since the Alaska summit.

The Kremlin said Friday that "many questions" needed resolving before Putin and Trump could meet, including who would be on each negotiating team.

But it brushed off suggestions Putin would have difficulty flying over European airspace.

Hungary said it would ensure Putin could enter and "hold successful talks" with the United States despite an International Criminal Court arrest warrant against him for alleged war crimes.

Since the start of his second term, Trump's position on the Ukraine war has shifted

dramatically back and forth.

Initially Trump and Putin reached out to each other as the U.S. leader derided Zelensky as a "dictator without elections."

Tensions came to a head in February, when Trump accused his Ukrainian counterpart of "not having the cards" in a rancorous televised meeting at the Oval Office.

Relations between the two have since warmed as Trump has expressed growing frustration with Putin.

But Trump has kept a channel of dialogue open with Putin, saying that they "get along."

The U.S. leader has repeatedly changed his position on sanctions and other steps against Moscow following calls with the Russian president.

Putin ordered a 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.

Russia now occupies around a fifth of Ukrainian territory — much of it ravaged by fighting.

On Friday the Russian Defense Ministry announced it had captured three villages in Ukraine's Dnipropetrovsk and Kharkiv regions.

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