

Zelensky's unsuccessful visit to Washington

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On 17 October, Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky held a two-and-a-half-hour meeting at the White House. During the public part of the meeting (the first 30 minutes), which took place in a cordial atmosphere, Zelensky thanked Trump for his efforts to secure peace in Ukraine and expressed hope of acquiring US Tomahawk cruise missiles (see Appendix). He also presented a cooperation offer covering drones – according to his earlier statements, the so-called Drone Deal, estimated to be worth US\$50 billion, would include the production of 50 million unmanned aerial vehicles over five years. Trump, in turn, repeatedly stated that Tomahawks are a powerful weapon needed by the United States and that the matter of their transfer would be discussed in the closed part of the meeting with Zelensky. He spoke of Vladimir Putin with respect and reiterated several times that the Russian leader wants to end the war.

According to reports in Western media, the second part of the meeting was tense. The US President reportedly shouted, used coarse language, and pressured his guest to accept Russian terms, including the surrender of the entire Donbas. He also allegedly threatened that Putin would destroy Ukraine. Trump has denied these claims.

The day before, the US President held a phone conversation with Putin about the Russia–Ukraine war and the prospects for business cooperation after its end. It was agreed that the foreign ministers of both countries would begin preparations for a meeting between the two leaders, most likely in Budapest, within the next two weeks.

Trump's refusal to clearly commit to a significant military reinforcement for Ukraine, combined with indications that he has adopted Russia's narrative, suggests that the Washington meeting should be regarded as a tactical success for the Kremlin. It limits – at least until a potential meeting in Budapest – the likelihood of increased US pressure on Russia, while also leaving open the question of the extent of further US support for Kyiv.

Commentary

- **Zelensky aimed to persuade Trump to increase pressure on Putin.** The intended means was US approval of the sale of Tomahawk cruise missiles to Ukraine – or, more likely, approval for other types of missiles capable of striking targets deep within Russia. The prospect of effective Ukrainian strikes and significant Russian losses was meant to force the Kremlin to agree to a halt in military operations along the current front line. For now, Kyiv has not achieved this objective. Zelensky's counter-offer on drones, as well as the backing and financial support from European partners, failed to sway the US President. After the meeting, Zelensky revealed that Trump had neither agreed to transfer the

Tomahawks nor refused to do so, and that both sides had agreed not to discuss the matter publicly.

- **The transfer of Tomahawks to Ukraine appears unlikely for both technical and political reasons.** There are no available land-based launchers for these systems – to date, the missiles have only been launched from surface ships and submarines. Moreover, the US stockpile (around 3,200 missiles), together with its production capacity and planned procurement of 57 units in 2026, is considered insufficient in the context of a potential confrontation with China. Meanwhile, for Ukraine to inflict serious damage on Russia it would require several dozen such missiles per month – a level of supply that, given the constraints above, seems very difficult to achieve.
- **The fact that Trump used Russian talking points, and that the US did not make the decision that Kyiv had hoped for, is most likely the result of the US President's conversation with Putin.** The call was initiated by the Kremlin, which had grown concerned about the possibility of the US supplying additional weapons to Ukraine. The prospect of a meeting with the Russian leader in Budapest, along with a vague promise of concessions during negotiations to end the war, appears to have tempered the US President's willingness to approve the transfer of Tomahawks – a move viewed as potentially complicating diplomatic efforts.
- **Kyiv continues to express its willingness to meet with Putin without preconditions and in any format, but it is against making any major concessions.** According to media reports, the topics under discussion include the scope of Ukrainian territorial concessions, among them the possibility of a withdrawal without resistance beyond the borders of Donetsk oblast. This is reportedly a demand from Moscow, which is said to be prepared to agree to a ceasefire and to relinquish claims to the uncontrolled areas of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia oblasts. For Ukraine, such a condition is unacceptable. Militarily, it would mean surrendering the most heavily fortified positions; politically, it would amount to de facto capitulation. Concessions are limited to a temporary renunciation – though not de jure – of territories currently occupied by Russian forces.

Appendix. Tomahawk cruise missiles

Tomahawks carry a warhead of approximately 450 kilograms over a range of 1,300–1,600 km (depending on the variant), flying at speeds above 800 km/h at low altitude, and manoeuvring along terrain features to evade enemy air defences. These weapons are designed for precision strikes against strategic targets such as communication and data-exchange centres, command-and-control facilities, and can also be used to destroy selected elements of critical infrastructure and key enemy industrial assets.

Tomahawk missiles are launched primarily from US surface ships and submarines; they are also used by the navies of the United Kingdom and Australia, with the Netherlands and Japan set to adopt them in future. A land-based version originally existed, but was withdrawn following the signing of the INF Treaty. Since 2019, the United States has been restoring the capability to launch Tomahawks from land as part of the Typhon system. However, the necessary launchers are still in production and constitute a strategic modernisation priority for the US Army (see [‘Enhancing deterrence in Europe: a return to](#)

intermediate-range missiles’).

In addition, there are eight launchers for the LRF (Long Range Fires) system, which were withdrawn from the US Marine Corps (USMC) this year after two years of testing. The concept of launching individual cruise missiles was deemed unpromising and considered a wasteful use of such strike assets. US think tanks, including the CSIS, have speculated about the possibility of transferring these systems to Ukraine.