

War in Ukraine

Donald Trump asked Volodymyr Zelenskyy if Ukraine could hit Moscow, say people briefed on call

US president encouraged Ukrainian leader to step up deep strikes on Russia



US President Donald Trump, right, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the recent Nato summit. Trump said he was 'very unhappy' with Russia and its president over the lack of progress towards a deal to end the war © Telegram/Handout/Anadolu/Getty Images

Christopher Miller in Kyiv, **Henry Foy** in Brussels and **Max Seddon** in Berlin

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Donald Trump has privately encouraged Ukraine to step up deep strikes on Russian territory, even asking Volodymyr Zelenskyy whether he could strike Moscow if the US provided long-range weapons, according to people briefed on the discussions.

The conversation, which took place during the July 4 call between the US and Ukrainian leaders, marks a sharp departure from Trump's previous stance on Russia's [war](#) and his campaign promise to end US involvement in foreign conflicts.

While it remains unclear whether Washington will deliver such weapons, the discussion underscores Trump's deepening frustration with Russian President Vladimir Putin's refusal to engage in ceasefire talks proposed by the US president, who once vowed to resolve the war in a day.

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The conversation with Zelenskyy on July 4 was precipitated by Trump's call with Putin a day earlier, which the US president described as "bad".

Two people familiar with the conversation between Trump and Zelenskyy said the US president had asked his Ukrainian counterpart whether he could hit military targets deep inside Russia if he provided weapons capable of doing so.

"Volodymyr, can you hit Moscow? . . . Can you hit St Petersburg too?" Trump asked on the call, according to the people.

They said Zelenskyy replied: "Absolutely. We can if you give us the weapons."

Trump signalled his backing for the idea, describing the strategy as intended to "make them [Russians] feel the pain" and force the Kremlin to the negotiating table, according to the two people briefed on the call.

A western official, who had been informed of the call, said the conversation reflected a growing desire among Ukraine's western partners to supply long-range weapons capable of "bringing the war to Muscovites" — a sentiment echoed privately by American officials in recent weeks.

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The White House and Ukraine's presidential office did not respond to requests for comment.

The discussion between Trump and Zelenskyy led to a list of potential weapons for Kyiv being shared by the US side with the Ukrainian president in Rome last week, according to three people with knowledge of it.

During a meeting with US defence officials and intermediaries from Nato governments, Zelenskyy received a list of long-range strike systems that potentially could be made available to Ukraine via third-party transfers.

The arrangement would allow Trump to sidestep the need for Congressional approval on direct US military aid by authorising weapons sales to European allies, who would then pass the systems on to Kyiv.

The Ukrainians had asked for Tomahawk missiles, precision strike cruise missiles with a range of around 1,600km. But the Trump administration — like the Biden administration — had concerns about Ukraine's lack of restraint, said a person familiar with the list shared with Zelenskyy.

During a meeting in the Oval Office with Nato secretary-general Mark Rutte on Monday, Trump [announced](#) a plan to provide Ukraine with Patriot air defence systems and interceptor missiles but did not disclose any shipments of other weapons systems.

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Donald Trump threatened 100% secondary tariffs on Russia on Monday © White House

The US president said he was “very unhappy” with Russia and its president over the lack of progress towards a deal to end its war. “I’m disappointed in President

[Vladimir] Putin, because I thought we would have had a deal two months ago.”

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Dmitry Medvedev, deputy chair of Russia’s security council and a former stand-in president for Putin, shrugged off Trump’s decision. “Trump issued a theatrical ultimatum to the Kremlin . . . Russia didn’t care,” Medvedev wrote on X.

Two of the people briefed on the call between Trump and Zelenskyy and familiar with US-Ukraine discussions on military strategy said that one weapon discussed was the Army Tactical Missile System, or Atacms.

Ukraine has used US-supplied Atacms missiles with a range of up to 300km (186 miles) to strike targets in Russian-occupied territory and, in some cases, deeper inside Russia. The Atacms can be launched from HIMARS rocket systems that the Biden administration delivered to Ukraine. But they do not fly far enough to reach Moscow or St Petersburg.

Russia has repeatedly threatened to attack western targets in response to western supplies of advanced weaponry to Ukraine, but has yet to do so.

After Ukraine first used the Atacms system to strike military targets inside Russian sovereign territory last November, Putin said the war had “taken on elements of a global nature” and responded by test-firing the Oreshnik, an experimental intermediate-range missile, on the city of Dnipro.

The Russian president said Moscow was entitled to “use our weaponry against military facilities of countries that allow their weapons to be used against our facilities, and in the case the aggressive action escalates, we will respond just as decisively and symmetrically”.

Following the Atacms strikes, Russia also published an updated version of its nuclear

doctrine that lowered the threshold for potential use. The changes could envision a Russian nuclear first strike against the US, UK and France — Nato's three nuclear powers — in response to Ukraine's strikes on Russia with weapons such as the Atacms and Storm Shadow missiles.

Washington has at times warned Ukraine off using them to strike deep inside Russia, but those constraints appear to be loosening now.

Ukraine has mostly used its own domestically-produced long-range drones to strike military targets deep inside Russia that help fuel its war machine.

Its most audacious attack came in early June, when Ukraine's SBU security service launched swarms of suicide drones hidden inside prefabricated homes that it smuggled into Russia and attacked the country's fleet of strategic bombers. The planes had been used in Moscow's bombardments of Ukrainian cities throughout the war. At least 12 aircraft were heavily damaged or destroyed in what Kyiv dubbed [Operation Spiderweb](#).

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