

Biden meets with Zelenskyy in Kyiv today



Ukrainian President Zelenskyy and President Biden in Kyiv today.

Ten days ago, the White House announced that President Biden would travel to Poland today to meet with President Andrzej Duda to discuss bilateral cooperation as well as their cooperative efforts to support Ukraine and bolster NATO's deterrence. The White House said he would also meet with the leaders of the Bucharest Nine, a group of eastern flank NATO Allies, to reaffirm the unwavering support of the U.S. for the security of the Alliance. In addition, he would deliver remarks ahead of the one-year anniversary this Friday of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Biden was scheduled to leave today. But instead, he left at 4 a.m. Sunday morning and, after arriving in Poland and then taking a 10-hour train ride, arrived this morning in Kyiv, where he met with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The visit was obviously organized in conditions of strict secrecy; only two reporters accompanied Biden and the traveling party and their phones were taken until the White House announced the visit after he was back in Poland. The U.S. did, however, alert Russia in advance that Biden would be traveling to Kyiv for what it called, without elaboration, "deconfliction purposes" – i.e., to avoid any chance of conflict if there was either a deliberate attack or an "accident." The city was in lock-down with security troops and police out in force and the central part of the city cordoned off, as Biden and Zelenskyy walked through Mikhailovskaya Square while air raid sirens went off. Biden left Kyiv around 2 p.m., after which the news of his visit was made public.

Speaking in the Mariinsky Palace, Zelenskyy's official residence, Biden said a new military aid package, worth \$500 million, that will be announced tomorrow will include more ammunition for the HIMARS (High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems) the U.S. gave Ukraine that have

proven to be so valuable in the war. He also said, “One year later, Kyiv stands. And Ukraine stands. Democracy stands. America stands with you and the world stands with you. Kyiv has captured a part of my heart. I thought it was critical that there not be any doubt, none whatsoever, about U.S. support for Ukraine in the war.” Left unsaid, however, was whether he and Zelenskyy had discussed whether the U.S. will provide Ukraine with the F-16s or other fighter jets it wants.

In a statement released by the White House after his departure, Biden said, “I am in Kyiv today to meet with President Zelenskyy and reaffirm our unwavering and unflagging commitment to Ukraine’s democracy, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. When Putin launched his invasion nearly one year ago, he thought Ukraine was weak and the West was divided. He thought he could outlast us. But he was dead wrong. Today, in Kyiv, I am meeting with President Zelenskyy and his team for an extended discussion on our support for Ukraine, I will announce another delivery of critical equipment, including artillery ammunition, anti-armor systems, and air surveillance radars to help protect the Ukrainian people from aerial bombardments. And...later this week, we will announce additional sanctions against elites and companies that are trying to evade or backfill Russia’s war machine.

February 20 is an important day for Kyiv and, indeed, all of Ukraine. It is a day of remembrance for the Day of the Heavenly Hundred Heroes (actually 107) who were killed on this day in 2014 by police and interior ministry troops as they protested against the government of President Viktor Yanukovich, who had turned his back on an Association Agreement with the EU that was scheduled to be signed in Vilnius in late November 2013 and had accepted, instead, Putin’s offer (conditional on rejection of the EU Agreement) of billions in financial assistance.

But this February 20 is important for another reason as well, because, with Russia about to launch a major offensive in eastern Ukraine, President Biden, at considerable risk to himself, went to Kyiv to assure Ukrainians that the U.S. stands with Ukraine now and will stand with Ukraine in the days to come.

David R. Cameron
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