

## Petr Fiala to the White House



A visit to the White House is a major event for almost any politician, esp. one like Petr Fiala who is new to the job of PM and is going to great effort to make a name for himself internationally. His chances of making it to Washington seem good as long as his government survives, he maintains relative social harmony in the country, and the position of the U.S. in the world remains strong. Here are a few things going in Fiala's favor.

Transatlantic relations: The Fiala government got off to a good start in its [policy statement](#): "We will promote the closest possible transatlantic link and develop a close relationship with the United States, both bilaterally and on the multilateral level." Fiala said in March after [shaking hands with Joe Biden](#) at a Nato summit in Brussels (and being photographed while doing so) that they merely exchanged polite remarks but that Biden knows very well what the CR is doing and what role it plays in Europe and in helping Ukraine. U.S. Chargé d'affaires Michael Dodman evaluated several aspects of the relationship from the other side in [LN on June 18](#), including plans for a defense cooperation agreement: "We're confident that we'll get approval for this from the Czech government and Parliament. It's clear that both sides want to reach an agreement. It will facilitate the entry of American soldiers who might arrive here in the future for training or joint military exercises."

F-35s: Dodman said that one of the priorities of his mission in the CR is to help Ukraine defend itself and to make sure

his country's relationship with the CR in terms of Ukraine is as strong as possible. Part of this, he said, is to help improve Czech military capabilities through purchases of new equipment and defense materiel, with concentration on supporting the efforts to modernize the Czech air force. After Fiala's cabinet agreed last week to enter talks to buy F-35s, [Defense Min. Jana Černochová told LN](#) that she had received a very firm promise from Defense Sec. Lloyd Austin in April that the CR would have priority in terms of the Bell helicopters already ordered, thanks to the way the CR assisted with Ukraine and to the quality of the work of Czech soldiers in Nato. Austin vowed to do all he could with regard to future purchases as well, she said.

Karel Řehka: Černochová managed the departure of Army Chief of Staff Aleš Opat in such a way that his replacement isn't one of the old-guard generals but instead the young Karel Řehka. He ran the NÚKIB cyber-security office for two years. [Ex-Foreign Min. Lubomír Zaorálek of ČSSD](#) said in March 2019 that it was NÚKIB's warning against Huawei in Dec. 2018 that opened the door to the White House for then-PM Andrej Babiš.

Miloš Zeman: Fiala has helped to neutralize Miloš Zeman, although the Russian attack on Ukraine did much of the work in this respect. Fiala used a visit with Zeman in May to announce a new plan to meet the 2% Nato target in 2024, instead of 2025. Fiala told [CNN Prima News](#) this week that his efforts to find



common ground with Zeman on major foreign-policy issues have produced visible results. When Babiš visited the White House, there was the question of [why it was not Zeman](#). The ambassador at the time, Stephen King, said that with Trump's election campaign under suspicion of having colluded with Russia, a White House visit by the Eastern-oriented Zeman would confirm in some people's minds that Trump was tied to Russia. With Fiala, Zeman is a non-issue.

Energy: Just as Fiala played a significant role in terms of supplying heavy weapons to Ukraine, he and his Polish and Slovenian counterparts helped push the EU energy agenda with their [10-point plan](#). That agenda favors the U.S., which became the [world's largest exporter of LNG](#) in the first half of this year. Fiala's government also eliminated the Russians and Chinese from the Dukovany nuclear-power tender and oversaw the awarding of ČEZ's Temelín nuclear-fuel contract to Westinghouse and Framatome.

A [Czech diplomat told HN](#) that Fiala needed something more than the Bell helicopters to get noticed by Washington. The F-35s are indeed the icing on the cake of closer Czech-U.S. relations, but it was a fairly big cake even without them.

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