

# Ukraine not invited to US-Russia peace talks in Saudi Arabia, source says

A Ukrainian government source told the BBC Kyiv would not be present at the proposed peace talks.

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By James Waterhouse

Feb 16, 2025 10:52 PM · 4 min. read · [View original](#)

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## Ukraine not invited to US-Russia peace talks, source tells BBC

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Getty Images

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has repeatedly ruled out accepting a peace deal negotiated without Kyiv's involvement

Kyiv has not been invited to talks between the US and Russia aimed at ending the war in Ukraine, a senior Ukrainian government source has told the BBC.

The US special envoy to Ukraine Keith Kellogg had said Kyiv would be involved in Monday's talks in Saudi Arabia, but the source said no delegation would be present.

European leaders have also not been asked to join the discussions, and are due to meet instead on Monday in Paris at a summit hastily arranged by the French president, as fears grow the

continent is being locked out of negotiations.

The separate meetings follow a turbulent week where Washington has signalled a drastic change in its approach to the war in Ukraine.

The White House's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff confirmed he was travelling to Saudi Arabia on Sunday evening for the first face-to-face talks between the US and Russia towards ending the conflict.

US President Donald Trump revealed on Sunday that Witkoff had met with Putin already "for a very extended period, like about three hours".

Witkoff, a billionaire real estate developer and friend of Trump, was in Moscow this week to secure the release of a [US teacher imprisoned on charges of marijuana possession](#).

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Advisor Mike Waltz are also set to meet Russian negotiators in Saudi Arabia, less than a week after

Trump held a phone call with Russia's leader Vladimir Putin.

The call on Wednesday brought to an end a three-year freeze on direct contact between Moscow and Washington.

Zelensky has repeatedly ruled out accepting a peace deal negotiated without Ukraine, telling US television network NBC on Sunday that he would "never accept any decisions between the United States and Russia about Ukraine, never".

Witkoff said US officials were speaking separately with Ukrainian officials and that Ukraine was "part of the talks" - but he did not indicate whether he expected Kyiv to be present in Saudi Arabia.

Trump told reporters in Palm Beach, Florida, on Sunday that he expected Zelensky to be involved in the talks, though he did not say how. He also said he would allow European nations to buy US weapons for Ukraine.

Asked by the BBC when he believed any peace negotiations could bear fruit and end the fighting, Trump said only that

"we're working to get it done" and laid the blame for the war on the previous administration's Ukraine policies.



Reuters

The US President said his envoy Witkoff had already met with Putin earlier in the week

Meanwhile, Rubio downplayed the Saudi Arabia talks, saying one meeting would not solve the war and that a formal negotiating process - that would mediate between Ukraine, Russia and third parties - had not yet been set up.

He told CBS News, however, that the next few days would determine if Putin was serious about achieving peace.

It is against this backdrop that a group of European leaders - including the UK's Keir Starmer, Nato secretary-general Mark Rutte, Germany's chancellor Olaf

Scholz and the European Commission's Ursula von der Leyen - will [meet in Paris](#).

French President Emmanuel Macron will hold an informal meeting in the afternoon on Ukraine and European security.

Ahead of the summit, [Sir Keir said the UK was prepared to contribute to security guarantees to Ukraine](#) by "putting our own troops on the ground if necessary".

Writing in the UK's Daily Telegraph newspaper, the prime minister said securing a lasting peace in Ukraine "is essential if we are to deter Putin from further aggression in the future".

US Ukraine envoy Kellog had earlier dismissed concerns over Europe not being invited to Saudi Arabia, arguing previous negotiations had failed due to the involvement of too many parties.

"It may be like chalk on the blackboard, it may grate a little bit, but I am telling you something that is really quite honest," he said on Saturday.

Watch: Trump's motorcade drives lap of Daytona 500 racetrack

The meetings mark an acceleration in Trump's efforts to achieve a swift end to the war.

The White House said the US president had held a "lengthy" phone-call with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Wednesday, after which Trump said negotiations to stop the "ridiculous war" in Ukraine would begin immediately.

He also said it was not "practical" for Ukraine to join Nato and "unlikely" it could return to its 2014 pre-invasion borders.

Ukraine has repeatedly called for Nato membership and has rejected ceding territory as part of any peace deal.

Trump's stance has also been [echoed by his defence secretary](#), fuelling European alarm that the US may be making concessions to Russia before any peace deal was negotiated.

Pete Hegseth also said European nations must provide the "overwhelming" share of funding for Ukraine - claiming the US would no longer "tolerate an imbalanced relationship" with its allies.

US Vice-President JD Vance likewise told the Munich Security Conference on Friday that Europe must "step up in a big way to provide for its own defence", in his speech largely spent [criticising European democracies](#).

Zelensky called on Saturday for [the creation of a European army](#), arguing the continent could no longer count on Washington.

Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine continued on Sunday - with Zelensky saying a Russian attack had left at least 100,000 people without power in Mykolaiv.

He said homes were without heating following a drone strike on the city's "critical infrastructure".

Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, having already seized Crimea and part of the eastern Donbas region in 2014.