



[U.S.-Russia Talks in Saudi Arabia to Discuss the Ukraine War Without Kyiv](#)

Earlier this week, U.S. and Russian diplomats met in Saudi Arabia to begin discussions regarding putting an end to the war in Ukraine, as the talks were held without the involvement of either Ukrainian or European representatives. These are the first high-level talks between the United States and Russia since the latter's invasion of Ukraine three years ago. To many observers, the absence of Ukrainian and European officials at the summit suggests an upending in U.S.-Ukrainian ties under Trump and that Kyiv will likely be pushed to cede territory to Russia in a potential peace agreement. Additionally, it also appears to signal a mutual interest among Trump and Russia to work towards improving relations. If so, this would mark a significant shift as the two countries had been drifting apart diplomatically in recent years. This divide had only grown after Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine in 2022, which prompted much of the international community to impose hefty sanctions on Russia in the hopes of isolating it on the global stage.

The announcement of the talks came the same day that U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth had stated Ukraine would [not likely](#) become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and that Ukraine should give up on winning all of its territory back from Russia. Hegseth's words are in stark contrast to the previous Biden administration's support for Ukraine to join NATO, and some have expressed a concern with the change in policy given the belief that Ukraine's joining of the organization could serve as a huge deterrent for any possible future incursions into its territory. Also, various analysts contend that if the ongoing peace talks allow Russia to annex the land that it invaded, it would be a huge slap in the face to the concept of sovereignty and territorial integrity. Ukraine has a right to defend its internationally recognized borders from invasion, and the idea that Russia will potentially be allowed to hold on to the regions that it has occupied as it did with Crimea over a decade ago is alarming.

Notably, the talks in Riyadh this week proceeded without any Ukrainian or European representation at the table. Both parties were understandably distraught about the United States going over their heads to talk directly with Russia in a matter that relates to them as well. Trump administration officials have tried to appease things by stating that Ukraine and Europe will be part of any "real negotiations" to end the war, and have argued that the U.S. talks with Russia were merely a chance to see how serious Putin is about peace. Ukrainian President Zelenskyy [said](#) this past Saturday that the "decades of the old relationship between Europe and America are ending" and that those involved need to act accordingly. Any possible sidelining of Europe would be a noteworthy shift in foreign policy for the United States, but it is still unclear how recent developments will ultimately impact relations especially since all of this comes just days after Trump announced that tariffs on the European Union (EU) were imminent. For his part, Zelenskyy has [called for](#) fair peace talks that include more than just U.S. and Russian representatives, and has stated that no talks will be taken seriously unless Ukraine has a seat at the table. The Ukrainian president even postponed his trip to Saudi Arabia in light of the exclusive meeting. Ultimately, the Trump administration's overture to Russian officials has raised eyebrows, particularly among European leaders who believe that Putin cannot be trusted. There is legitimate concern that a Ukraine deal without the involvement of Europe would leave the continent vulnerable to the prospect of further Putin aggression.

With respect to where the discussions were held, some commentators [pointed out](#) that Saudi Arabia was likely keen to host due to its desire to improve its standing with the international community and score a diplomatic win on the world stage, while aiming to cement its role as a key intermediary regarding the Ukraine War. In the aftermath of Saudi Arabia's devastating and highly criticized intervention in Yemen and the brutal murder of journalist Jamal Khashoggi in recent years, Saudi officials have been attempting to rehabilitate their image. Thus, the hosting of these potentially groundbreaking talks on Ukraine seems to be a clear effort to try and win back some favor. The move comes following Saudi Arabia's announcement of a \$600 billion investment in the United States, and suggestions that the hosting might also be to better position Riyadh for future talks on post-war Gaza too.

In the preceding days, an evident rift has taken shape between U.S. President Trump and his Ukrainian counterpart Zelenskyy. In response to the U.S.-Russia talks without Kyiv and Trump's comments blaming Ukraine for its ongoing conflict with Russia, Zelenskyy had stated that Trump was "living in a disinformation space" governed by Moscow. This then prompted Trump to call Zelenskyy a "dictator," which elicited backlash from other European leaders.