

1. On 18 February high-level US and Russian delegations met in Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh, for high-level talks on Ukraine. The US delegation included Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Trump's national security adviser Mike Waltz and White House Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff; the Russian delegation Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Kremlin foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov. Both Lavrov and Ushakov are highly experienced diplomats who have spent years helping Putin implement Russian foreign policy.

2. Ukraine has not been given a seat at the talks. **President Zelensky** stated on 17 February: "We cannot recognise [peace] agreements...without us". Zelensky instead met Turkey's President Erdogan in Ankara.

3. Following the talks, the head of Russia's sovereign wealth fund, **Kirill Dmitriev**, told Russian state TV's Channel One: "A very positive, constructive dialogue has begun. Unlike the Biden administration, which never tried to hear Russia's position, this was a very clear effort to start dialogue, understand Russia's position and discuss the things we agree upon."

4. **Lavrov** later described the talks as "very useful" and, when asked about the deployment of Nato forces in Ukraine, dismissed this as "completely unacceptable".

5. US state secretary **Marco Rubio** stated:

"What's important to understand is two things. The first is [that] the only leader in the world who can make this happen, who can even bring people together to begin to talk about it in a serious way, is President Trump. The second thing I would say is that in order for a conflict to end, everyone involved in that conflict has to be okay with it; it has to be acceptable to them."

6. According to the U.S. Department of State statement the sides agreed four next steps, to:

- Establish a consultation mechanism to address irritants to our bilateral relationship with the objective of taking steps necessary to normalize the operation of our respective diplomatic missions.
- Appoint respective high-level teams to begin working on a path to ending the conflict in Ukraine as soon as possible in a way that is enduring, sustainable, and acceptable to all sides.
- Lay the groundwork for future cooperation on matters of mutual geopolitical interest and historic economic and investment opportunities which will emerge from a successful end to the conflict in Ukraine.
- The parties to today's meetings pledge to remain engaged to make sure the process moves forward in a timely and productive manner.

7. Speaking from Ankara following the US-Russia talks, **President Zelensky** stressed the importance of security guarantees from the US and the involvement of European partners in any peace talks. He said: "Ukraine, Europe in a broad sense - and this includes the European Union, Turkey, and the UK - should be involved in conversations and the development of the necessary security guarantees with America. We want everything to be fair and so that nobody decides anything behind our back..."

8. Before the talks, the **EU's foreign policy spokesperson Anitta Hipper** commented:

“Russia is the aggressor. Russia needs to pay, and this is what we need to do to make and ensure that Ukraine stands strong. This means more ammunition, more weapons, more defence. Putin only understands this language of power. So this is something that we will need to do, and we are doing in a united way. And Russia is a threat, not only to Ukraine, but beyond Europe. So we need to stop Russia.”

9. And in a speech to the Institute for Government on defence reform, UKG Defence Secretary **John Healey**, declined to add to the previous statement from PM Starmer on the deployment of British troops, stating:

“We need a security guarantee for Ukraine in Ukraine that is capable of delivering what President Trump has pledged and says he wants, which is a durable peace that requires an end to the Russian attack and no repeat of that in the future. The European countries have to play a leading part in that guarantee, but require a backstop from the US, because in the end, it is only the US that can provide the deterrence to Putin that will prevent him attacking again. The detail of that is being developed. Keir Starmer will discuss that with President Trump when they meet shortly.”

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Policy Adviser|European Relations|Scottish Government|[redacted – s38(1)(b)],
Victoria Quay|Edinburgh|EH6 6QQ