

## **After Witkoff meets with Putin, Trump says they'll talk tomorrow**



Presidential Envoy Witkoff, Secretary of State Rubio, and National Security Adviser Waltz at meeting with Ukraine officials in Jeddah last Tuesday.

Last Tuesday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, accompanied by National Security Adviser Mike Waltz and U.S. Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, met in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia with Andriy Yermak, the Head of Ukraine's Presidential Office; Andrii Sybiha, Ukraine's Foreign Minister; and Rustem Umerov, Ukraine's Defense Minister, and agreed on a 30-day ceasefire in the war in Ukraine, subject to Russia's acceptance. After the meeting, Rubio said the proposal would be delivered directly to Russia through multiple channels and arrangements were made for Witkoff to meet with Putin in Moscow. A month earlier, Witkoff had met with Putin and had negotiated the release of Marc Fogel, a teacher who had been held for more than three years on drug charges.

On Thursday, in a press conference after a meeting with Belarusian President Lukashenko, Putin was asked "What's your take on Ukraine's readiness for a ceasefire? Have you already received information from the Americans and what is your response going forward?" In response, Putin said "I would like to start by thanking the President of the United States, Mr. Trump, for paying so much attention to the Ukraine settlement.... We agree with the proposals to cease hostilities but proceed from the assumption that this cessation should lead to long-term peace and eliminate the root causes of this crisis. Now, on Ukraine's readiness to cease the hostilities. You know, on the face of it, the US-Ukraine meeting in Saudi Arabia may look like the Ukrainian side made this decision under pressure from the United States. In fact, I am absolutely convinced that the Ukrainian side should have asked the Americans for this decision most emphatically, in view of the situation evolving on the ground, as has just been mentioned here. And what is the current situation on the ground? Many of you have surely noticed that yesterday I visited the Kursk Region and listened to reports from

the Chief of the General Staff, the Commander of the North group of forces and his deputy on the situation in the border area, first of all in the Kursk Region, or rather, in the incursion zone in the Kursk Region. What is happening there? The situation there is completely under our control, and the grouping that invaded our territory has been isolated. It is completely isolated and under complete fire control. The control of Ukrainian troops inside this incursion zone has been lost. At the initial stages, just a week or two ago, Ukrainian servicemen tried to get out of there in small groups. Now it is impossible. They are trying to get out in very small groups of two or three men because everything is under our complete fire control. The military equipment has been completely abandoned and it is impossible to remove it; it will remain there, one hundred percent. If this area is physically blocked in the next few days, then no one will be able to leave. There will only be two options: surrender or die. I think in these conditions it would be good for the Ukrainian side to achieve a ceasefire for at least 30 days. We are also in favor of it, but there are nuances. First, what will we do about the incursion section in the Kursk Region? What would that mean if we cease fire for 30 days? Does this mean that everyone who is in there will just walk out without a fight? Do we have to let them go after they committed numerous heinous crimes against civilians? Or will the Ukrainian leadership issue a command for them to lay down their arms and just surrender? How will this happen? It is not clear. How will other issues along the entire contact line be solved? It is almost 2,000 kilometers long. As you know, Russian troops are advancing in almost all areas of combat contact. Conditions are also very favorable there for us to block rather large units there. So, how would these 30 days be used? For forced mobilization to continue in Ukraine? For more weapons to be supplied there? For retraining the mobilized units? Or would none of this be done? If so, how will issues related to control and verification be addressed? How can we guarantee and receive guarantees that nothing like this would happen? How will control procedures be organized? I hope everyone understands the complexity of all this at the level of common sense. These are all serious issues. Who will order to cease fire? What is the price of these orders? Just imagine; almost 2,000 km. Who will be able to determine who violated the potential ceasefire agreement over a distance of 2,000 km and where exactly? Who will be held responsible for violating the ceasefire? All these issues must be meticulously worked upon by both sides. The idea itself is right, and, of course, we support it. However, there are issues that must be discussed. I think we must talk them over with our American colleagues and partners, perhaps have a telephone conversation with President Trump and discuss them with him. However, the idea to put an end to this conflict by peaceful means gets our full support.”

Witkoff met with Putin late Thursday evening and left Moscow Friday. Yesterday in an interview on CNN, he described his meeting as “positive. It was a solution-based discussion, and that’s how I would describe it.” He said, “The two sides were miles apart in where they were. The two sides are today a lot closer.” He said Trump “is involved in every aspect and dimension of these discussions” and that Trump and Putin are likely to speak by phone sometime this week. He said, “I don’t want to put words in President Putin’s mouth, but I think he’s indicated that he accepts the philosophy of

President Trump. President Trump wants to see an end to this. I think President Putin wants to see an end to this. I think President Zelenskyy wants to see an end to this.” There are, he said “details that have to get worked out at the table, and all sides, I believe, are committed to doing that.” When asked how quickly he expects an agreement, he said Trump “uses the time frame weeks, and I don’t disagree with him. I am really hopeful that we’re going to see some real progress here.”

When asked in an interview with CBS whether he thought Putin was sincere in seeking a ceasefire, he said, “Well, I was there for quite some time... We made a lot of progress in that meeting. It was a meeting that was – it could have been as long as four hours, but it was certainly at least three. We talked about a lot of specifics, and I point to the large gap that existed between Ukraine and Russia prior to the inauguration, and where we are today. We have narrowed the issues between both of these parties, making a lot of progress, in my opinion, and I think that meeting underscores that.” When asked about a possible phone call between Trump and Putin this week, he said, “Well, I would assume that, you know, they have a real relationship from the president’s first term. They’ve talked, already, after the first visit that I had with President Putin. And I think this is going to be a very positive and constructive call between the two presidents... I think it’s very positive sign that the two of them will be talking at some point. I think that’s showing that there’s positive momentum, that there’s an inclination on the part of both countries, and, by the way, this includes Ukraine as well, to get to a long term, durable peace... I saw a constructive effort over a long period of time to discuss the specifics of what’s going on in the field. There’s a 2,000 kilometer border between these two countries, and they are facing each other and shooting each other across that 2,000 kilometer border. That’s a very, very complicated ceasefire, and yet everybody is committed to have that discussion.” And he noted that doesn’t include the area of Kursk, where there are different battlefield conditions that have to be discussed, and regions the Russians are focused on, as issues involving the nuclear facility in Zaporizhzhia and ports in the Black Sea. Comparing it to Gaza, he said, “This is a much more complicated situation, and yet no one is throwing their hands up in the air. What they are doing is they are digging in, and everybody is committed, all stakeholders, including the Europeans, to doing everything we need to do to get to a successful resolution here.”

Yesterday, on a flight back to Washington from Florida, Trump said, “I’ll be speaking to President Putin on Tuesday. A lot of work’s been done over the weekend. We want to see if we can bring that war to an end. Maybe we can, maybe we can’t, but I think we have a very good chance.” When asked what concessions, if any, are being considered in ceasefire negotiations, he said, “We’ll be talking about land. We’ll be talking about power plants. I think we have a lot of it already discussed very much by both sides, Ukraine and Russia. We’re already talking about that, dividing up certain assets.”

David R. Cameron  
March 17, 2025