Geneva talks end after two days with no agreement to end the war

Russian, American and Ukrainian officials meeting Tuesday in Geneva.

Talks between the delegations of American, Ukrainian and Russian officials resumed Tuesday at the InterContinental Hotel in Geneva, nearly two weeks after the previous round of talks in Abu Dhabi on Feb. 4-5 and a week before the war between Russia and Ukraine enters its fifth year next Tuesday. The Russian delegation was headed by Vladimir Medinsky, who led the Russian team at talks in Istanbul soon after the war began in 2022, while the Ukrainian delegation was headed by Rustem Umerov, the Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council. The American delegation included presidential envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Gen. Alexus Grynkewich, the Commander in Chief of U.S. and NATO forces in Europe, and Secretary of the Army Dan Driscoll. The other delegations also included leaders of the militaries to bring their expertise into the discussions of how a ceasefire following an agreement to end the war might be implemented. British and French defense officials were also in Geneva and met with the American and Ukrainian officials.

The talks, which ran from 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. on Tuesday, concluded without any declarations from the participants and continued yesterday. But surprisingly – and obviously disappointing for those who had hoped the talks would move the parties toward a decision to end the war – yesterday's talks ended after just two hours and did so without any apparent progress in regard to the resolution of the differences between the two sides in regard to the issues on which they remain deeply divided – the provision of security guarantees for Ukraine, control of Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, the largest in Europe, which is now held by Russia; and what is clearly the most contentious issue in the talks – the territorial issue, meaning the retention by Russia or

return to Ukraine of some or all of the territory in Ukraine's regions of Luhansk and Donetsk that is now held by the Russian forces.

Before the talks ended yesterday, President Zelenskyy, speaking of Tuesday's meeting, said, "Yesterday's meetings were indeed difficult, and we can state that Russia is trying to drag out negotiations that could already have reached the final stage." Prior to the end of the talks yesterday, Medinsky was quoted by the Russian news agencies as saying the talks were "difficult but business-like" and that the next meeting would "take place in the near future." The main difficulty appeared to be Russia's insistence that it retain the territory its forces now hold in the two eastern-most regions of Ukraine – Luhansk and Donetsk – that together make up the Donbas, and Ukraine's understandable demand that those regions be returned to Ukraine. Zelenskyy also made it clear in a social media post on X that Ukraine objects to the U.S. position that it will guarantee Ukraine's security provided Ukraine accepts Russia's demand that it retain a substantial portion of the territory it now holds in eastern Ukraine: "Our American friends, they are preparing security guarantees. But they said – first this swap of territories, or something like that, and then security guarantees. I think – first, security guarantees. Second, we will not give up our territories because we are ready for compromise. What kind of compromise are we ready for? Not for the compromise that gives Russia the opportunity to recover quickly and come again and occupy us." In an interview with Axios, Zelenskyy said he's prepared to discuss a troop withdrawal for the creation of a neutral, internationally monitored buffer zone. But he has consistently rejected Russia's claim to the Donbas, and he has made it clear that he believes the Ukrainian people would never support Ukraine withdrawing from the region and turning it over to Russia: "Emotionally, people will never forgive this. Never. They will not forgive…me. They will not forgive the U.S." He's right; they wouldn't forgive him and they wouldn't forgive the U.S.

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