Witkoff & Kushner meet with Zelenskyy in Kyiv

President Zelenskyy meeting Sunday with Steve Witkoff & Jared Kushner.

On Friday, President Trump told reporters he was sending Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff to Moscow and Kyiv with a "proposal to end the war" in Ukraine. He said they would meet with President Putin in Moscow on Saturday and with President Zelenskyy in Kyiv on Sunday. He said, "I sent Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, two great negotiators. They've done a great job, and we sent them over to see whether or not we can get something done. And there may be a good chance that we'll do it. They're bringing with them a proposal to end the war." He didn't say anything about the proposal and whether, like the one issued after he and Putin met a year ago in Anchorage, it would involve Ukraine giving up a substantial portion of its territory to Russia, which was the primary reason Ukraine refused to agree to it. He said only, "We have an idea for peace."

Witkoff and Kushner met with President Putin Saturday for more than three hours. Following that meeting, Witkoff and Kushner and their staff had planned to fly from Moscow to Kyiv. But they were unable to do so because Ukrainian airspace has been closed for nearly five years. As a result they were forced to fly to Poland and then had an 11-hour train ride from Rzeszów to Kyiv, where they were greeted by President Zelenskyy. Zelensky, while waiting for them, noted that, "Unfortunately, through their strikes, the Russians demonstrated that they could not land and use an aircraft, although our airports remain operational." A direct flight from Moscow would have taken an hour.

President Zelenskyy held three rounds of talks with Witkoff and Kushner yesterday, the last of which included the national security advisers of the UK, Germany, and France. (That explains why the flags of the UK, Germany, and France appear in the photo.) At a news conference following the meetings, Zelenskyy said the discussions had covered air defense needs – including, especially, Ukraine's need

for more interceptor missiles for the Patriot air defense systems it has – as well as its needs in regard to repairing and maintaining its energy infrastructure during the colder fall and winter months. He said Kyiv was seeking "serious" American and European support in that regard. He also said the U.S. is planning to increase its production of the Patriot missiles next year with Germany also increasing its production under its current licensing agreement. Noting that Russia has intensified its air attacks on Ukraine, he said the government was working with more than 60 Ukrainian companies to develop systems to hit and destroy Russia's jet-powered drones.

Witkoff for his part said the U.S. was pursuing "a diplomatic resolution to the conflict, not a kinetic resolution." He also said the meeting in Moscow had produced some "new ideas" that had been passed along to Ukraine. And he noted the presence in Kyiv of the national security advisers of the so-called E3 – the UK, Germany, and France. When asked whether the U.S. was prepared to put more pressure on Russia if the talks failed to produce a breakthrough and ceasefire, Kushner said the U.S. was looking for a "win-win" outcome and that President Trump was focused on not only ending the war but on building "a framework that could actually lead to a durable peace." And importantly, he said he and Witkoff had a "constructive and substantive" meeting with President Putin and discussed not only what Ukraine would gain from a peace settlement but what Russia would gain as well. He said that he and Witkoff hoped to revive the trilateral talks between Russia, Ukraine, and the U.S. that had last taken place several months ago.

Importantly, President Zelenskyy spoke about the territorial issue, saying it "remains relevant." But he also said that, like the other difficult issues, that one "can only be resolved at the level of leaders" President Zelenskyy said the talks also dealt with the issues of long-term security guarantees and economic support for postwar reconstruction. He said the two sides had agreed to a follow-up meeting involving Ukraine, the U.S., and the Europeans, although a time and location had not yet been set.

In the meantime, the war continues in Ukraine and in the air over Ukraine and does so with no end in sight.

David R. Cameron
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