

**War in Ukraine**

# **Europe scrambles to respond as US and Russia prepare for Ukraine peace talks**



France to host emergency meeting as Washington and Moscow start negotiations

**Henry Foy, Laura Pitel** and **Anne-Sylvaine Chassany** in Munich, **Max Seddon** in Berlin and **George Parker** in London YESTERDAY

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Western capitals are braced for a potentially decisive week for European security, as the US and Russia begin talks to end the war in Ukraine and European leaders hold an emergency meeting to respond to the fast-moving negotiations taking place without them.

Europe's most powerful leaders will gather in Paris on Monday for crisis talks on Ukraine and the future of European defence, sparked by Donald Trump's decision to open peace talks with Russia. Those talks will formally begin in Saudi Arabia this week when Trump's top diplomat Marco Rubio sits down with Russia's Sergei Lavrov.

The Rubio-Lavrov meeting aims to lay the groundwork for the US president to meet Vladimir Putin, less than a week after Trump shocked European capitals by agreeing with his Russian counterpart to start peace talks.

Speaking to reporters on Sunday, Trump said he thought a meeting with Putin in Saudi Arabia to discuss a settlement in Ukraine could happen "very soon" as the US president expressed confidence that the Russian president wanted to end the conflict.

"I think he wants to stop fighting. I see that. We spoke long and hard," Trump said of his conversation last week with Putin, adding that he did not believe he wanted to seize all of Ukraine.

"I think he wants to stop. That was my question to him because, if he's going to go on, that would have been a big problem for us. And that would have caused me a big problem, because you just can't let that happen," Trump said.

Trump added that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also wanted the war to end, and would be "involved" in the talks. But Trump said he was "not even a little bit" concerned with Zelenskyy's warning that Russia intended to wage war against Nato countries.

It will underscore the Europeans' lack of input into negotiations that could ultimately reshape the continent's security architecture.

"This is the beginning of the beginning. Things are definitely moving," Alexander Stubb, Finland's president, told the Financial Times. "Are Europe's tectonic plates shifting?"

smiling.

Referring to the date of Russia's full-scale invasion, he added: "I think the world order started to shift on the 24th of February 2022, and we are now seeing the direction in which it might be going."



US secretary of state Marco Rubio and German foreign minister Annalena Baerbock at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday  
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Leaders including UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk and the heads of EU institutions and Nato will huddle in Paris on Monday at the invitation of President Emmanuel Macron.

Joined by the heads of government of Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark, they will discuss concrete plans aiming to safeguard European defence regardless of future US engagement, said officials briefed on the preparations, along with how best to support Ukraine and strengthen their negotiating position.

Starmer said it was a "once-in-a-generation moment for our national security where we engage with the reality of the world today".

"It's insane how fast this is moving," said a western official briefed on the talks. "All [Europe] must do is give Ukraine as much as possible so that it can better say 'no' to things rammed down its throat [by the US and Russia]."

Trump's Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, who visited Moscow last week to secure the release of detained American Marc Fogel, told Fox News he would travel to Saudi

Arabia on Sunday evening with national security adviser Mike Waltz.

Dmitry Peskov, Putin's spokesman, told Russian state TV that Trump's decision to open talks was a "powerful signal that we will try to solve problems through dialogue and talk about peace rather than war".



The Rubio-Lavrov meeting aims to lay the groundwork for a discussion between Vladimir Putin, left, and Donald Trump, seen here at the Hamburg G20 summit in 2017 © Evan Vucci/AP

Ukraine was not invited to the US-Russia talks in Saudi Arabia, and found out about them through the media, said a person close to Zelenskyy. But its diplomats will travel there independently after visiting the United Arab Emirates and Turkey.

"Of course we understand that Americans have their own issues with Russians, it's not our business — about the bilateral relations . . . but it is needed to have Ukraine and Europe if talks [are] about Ukraine and Europe," the person said.

European leaders' main focus in Paris will be a possible deployment of European troops to Ukraine, to be stationed behind, not on, a future ceasefire line as a "reassurance force", said three officials. Alternatives might emerge before the meeting, one of the officials said, while Germany in particular was cautious about the idea of peacekeeping forces.

There is uncertainty over what role the US would play in potentially guaranteeing the security of any Nato forces in Ukraine. Trump's team has ruled out deploying American troops there, but European officials say the US has not excluded the

possibility of providing external support to any deployment by Nato allies.

Many European governments are also uneasy about responding to a US [request](#) this week for specific details about weaponry, money and peacekeeping troops that they could send to post-conflict Ukraine, according to multiple officials.

“The general feeling is that this is a good exercise in terms of thinking about what each can offer, but that the response to the US should be collective,” said one of the officials.

Starmer said on Sunday that Britain was “willing to contribute to security guarantees to Ukraine by putting our own troops on the ground if necessary”.

But the UK prime minister, writing in the Daily Telegraph, said a continuing US security guarantee was critical because “only the US can deter Putin from attacking again”.

Stubb said: “I hope that whatever comes out of Paris is something which is appealing to the Americans so we can have more skin in the game.”

European leaders and diplomats at the weekend’s Munich Security Conference tried to parse the roles of members of Trump’s negotiating team, and how they might shape the president’s approach.

One senior European official said there was “95 per cent agreement” with Keith Kellogg, the 80-year-old retired general appointed as Trump’s Ukraine envoy, who has called Russia “the enemy”.

But the official cautioned that the views of Kellogg, who was not named as a member of Trump’s four-man negotiating team, did not necessarily chime with those of Rubio, “who might not see it the same way”.

In a meeting of G7 foreign ministers at Munich, Rubio was much less forthcoming with his views on Ukraine, said three people briefed on the discussions. Two said he noted that the talks with Lavrov would focus on logistics and planning for a Putin-Trump meeting.

Rubio told CBS on Sunday that Putin’s call with Trump had gone well but that “the next few weeks and days will determine whether it’s serious or not . . . there’s a lot of work to be done”.

*Additional reporting by Felicia Schwartz in Munich, Leila Abboud in Paris, Lucy*

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