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NATO Recognizes 3 Year Invasion of Ukraine by Russia

“The bravery and resilience of the Ukrainian people are an inspiration to the world.

NATO will continue to support and stand with Ukraine. And help it through the challenges ahead. To ensure this war can end, with a just and lasting peace.” Deputy Secretary General Radmila Shekerinska stressed the importance of continued support to Ukraine during a ceremony at NATO HQ marking three years since Russia’s full-fledged invasion of Ukraine.

The address was followed by a moment of silence and a musical performance by the Cultural Forces unit of the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Ukrainian soldier plays national anthem on violin in symbol of hope in war against Russia.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DN_KFc9dhNg

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Secretary Marco Rubio With Margaret Brennan of CBS's Face the Nation

02/16/2025 12:46 PM EST

Marco Rubio, Secretary of State

QUESTION: Good morning and welcome to Face the Nation. We want to begin today with Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who is in Jerusalem on the second leg of his trip through Europe and the Middle East.

Mr. Secretary, I know it's the evening hours there and you've had a long day. We appreciate your time. You've got quite a busy schedule. You met earlier with Prime Minister Netanyahu. He said he's lockstep with the Trump Administration but he can't share details on, quote, "when the Gates of Hell will be opened...if all our hostages are not released."

Did he tell you he wants to keep talks going to get to phase two of this hostage deal?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Well, I think we share a common goal. We want to see every hostage released. Frankly, I think – and the President has said this – we want to see them out as soon as we possibly can. And certainly the world has watched these images of people, and it's just heartbreaking to remember that some of them have been now almost two years there. It's a horrifying situation.

So we coordinate and work very close with them. We share the goal that every hostage needs to come home, every single one, without delay. Obviously, the – there are details of how we're pursuing that and coordinating that we're not going to share publicly because we don't want to endanger the hostages and we don't want to endanger this process. But suffice it to say that if it was up to us, every one of these hostages would be home right now, and we want it to happen as soon as possible.

QUESTION: Okay. So the deal stands?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Again, we want every hostage out as soon as possible.

QUESTION: Okay.

SECRETARY RUBIO: We – and we want to see them home. There are some that are supposed to – under the deal, there are some that are supposed to be released coming up next weekend. We expect that to happen. But we'd like to see them all come out. We're not going to – we are not in favor of waiting weeks and weeks. Now, that may be the process that's in place because of the deal, but we would like to see them all out as soon as possible, and we continue to coordinate. And that's what we'd like to see as the outcome. Who wouldn't want all these hostages to be home and with their families?

QUESTION: Yeah, understood. I want to ask you about Iran as well. President Trump has said he wants a diplomatic deal with Iran. Are you reaching out to them? And alongside that, does the U.S. support a preemptive strike by Israel on Iran to take out its nuclear program?

*(*Continued On The Following Column)*

SECRETARY RUBIO: Well, first of all, Israel will always have to act in what they believe is their national interest and their national defense, and so I'm not going to speak about whatever strategies they may on this or any other topic.

I will say that we don't have any outreach from Iran. We haven't seen any. And ultimately, we've seen in the past that efforts that Iran has undertaken diplomatically have been only about how to extend the timeframe but continue to enrich and – in addition to sponsor terrorism, in addition to build these long-range weapons, in addition to sow instability throughout the region. But let's be clear: There has been zero outreach or interest to date from Iran about any negotiated deal.

Ideally, yeah, I would love to wake up one day and hear the news that Iran has decided not to pursue a nuclear weapon, not to sponsor terrorism, and re-engage in the world as a normal government. We've had no indication of any of that – not just now but for 30 years.

QUESTION: So you head from Israel to Saudi Arabia next. I know you'll be talking about Gaza. But we've also learned that Saudi Arabia is trying to facilitate this diplomacy with Russia about Ukraine. Which Russian officials do you expect to be meeting with, and what will the focus of your talks there be? Do you actually believe Vladimir Putin is ready to negotiate and make concessions?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Well, here's what I know. I know President Trump spoke to Vladimir Putin last week and in it Vladimir Putin expressed his interest in peace, and the President expressed his desire to see an end to this conflict in a way that was enduring and that protected Ukrainian sovereignty and that was an enduring peace – not that we're going to have another invasion in three or four years. That's a good call. Now, obviously, it has to be followed up by action.

So the next few weeks and days will determine whether it's serious or not. Ultimately, one phone call does not make peace. One phone call does not solve a war as complex as this one. But I can tell you that Donald Trump is the only leader in the world that could potentially begin that process. Other leaders have tried; they have not been able to do so. When he ran in his campaign and he was elected as President, one of his promises was he would work to bring an end to this conflict in a way that's sustainable and fair.

And obviously, this is the first step in that process, but we have a long ways to go. Again, one call doesn't make it. One meeting wouldn't make it. There's a lot of work to be done. But I thought it has – even the longest journey begins with a first step. So we'll see what happens from here, hopefully good things.

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QUESTION: Who will you be meeting with?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Well, nothing's been finalized yet. I was scheduled to be in Saudi Arabia anyways. We announced that trip a week ago, a week and a half ago. So ultimately, look, if at any point in time there's an opportunity to continue the work that President Trump started last week to begin to create an opening for a broader conversation – that it would involve Ukraine and would involve the end of the war and would involve our allies all over the world, and particularly in Europe, we're going to explore it if that opportunity presents itself. I don't have any details for you this morning other than to say that we stand ready to follow the President's lead on this and begin to explore ways, if those opportunities present itself, to begin a process towards peace.

Now, a process towards peace is not a one-meeting thing. This war has been going on for a while. It's difficult; it's complicated. It's been bloody; it's been costly. So it will not be easy to end the conflict. There are other parties at stake that have opinions on this as well. The European Union has sanctions as well. The Ukrainians are obviously fighting this war. It's their country and they're on the front lines. So one meeting isn't going to solve it. But I want to reiterate the President made clear he wants to end this war, and if opportunities present themselves to further that, we're going to take them if they present themselves. We'll see what happens over the next few days.

QUESTION: But to be clear, Keith Kellogg, who is the envoy appointed to help with these talks, says these are going to be parallel negotiations, meaning the Ukrainians and Russians aren't talking to each other yet. When you meet with your Russian counterpart, whoever that is, are you going to be sitting there arguing Ukraine's position?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Well, first of all, I think what we have to understand is right now there is no process.

QUESTION: Right.

SECRETARY RUBIO: What we have right now was a call between Putin and President Trump in which both sides expressed an interest in ending this conflict. I mean, I imagine there will be follow-up conversations to figure out what a process to talk about that would look like, and then at that point perhaps we can begin to share more details. So it's a bit premature. I know there's been a lot of reaction to it because there's been no conversation about it, any serious conversation.

But I want to go back to the point I made. President Trump ran, he was very clear – he thinks this war needs to end. And if he sees an opportunity to end it, which is what he's looking for, whether there is an opportunity or not, we are going to pursue it. Ultimately, it will reach a point when you are – if it's real negotiations – and we're not there yet. But if that were to happen, Ukraine will have to be involved because they're the one that were invaded. And the Europeans will have to be involved because they have sanctions on Putin and Russia as well and they've contributed to this effort. We're just not there yet. We really aren't, but hopefully we will be because we'd all like to see this war end. (*Continued On The Following Column)

QUESTION: No doubt. The last administration did have contact through the intelligence agencies with Russia, but they didn't believe there was any proof that Vladimir Putin was interested in talks. You know the history with Vladimir Putin. He likes to use diplomacy as a cover to distract while he continues to wage war. Do you trust that this time is different?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Yeah, I don't think in geopolitics anyone should trust anyone. I think these things have to be verified through actions. I said yesterday that peace is not a noun, it's a verb – it's an action. You have to take concrete steps towards it. What I can tell you is I know of no better negotiator in American politics than Trump.

QUESTION: Yeah.

SECRETARY RUBIO: I think President Trump will know very quickly whether this is a real thing or whether this is an effort to buy time. But I don't want to prejudge that. I don't want to foreclose the opportunity to end a conflict that's already cost the lives of hundreds of thousands and continues every single day to be increasingly a war of attrition on both sides. I think everyone should be celebrating the fact that we have an American President that is seeking to promote peace in the world, not start wars but end them, in a way that's enduring. That's something we should be happy about. Whether it's possible or not, we're certainly willing; but it's not entirely up to us, obviously, but we'll find out.

QUESTION: Well, you did speak in a phone call with Russia's top diplomat, Sergey Lavrov. The Russian side claimed that you discussed restoring trade, which seemed to be a nod to sanctions, easing restrictions on diplomats, and other gestures like a high-level leaders meeting. Are you actually considering – is the Trump Administration considering lifting sanctions on Russia?

SECRETARY RUBIO: Well, the phone call was to establish communications that are consistent with the call the President made last week with Vladimir Putin, because if we are – if there is going to be the possibility of progress here towards peace, we are going to need to talk to the Russians. I mean, that is going to have to happen and we're going to have to do it across our channels.

QUESTION: About lifting sanctions, though?

SECRETARY RUBIO: I also raised in the conversation concerns that – well, we didn't go into any details. I mean, what we just discussed is basically the ability to begin communicating. I've never spoken to Mr. Lavrov in my life, so it was an opportunity for us to begin to open that channel of communication, which, again, if there's the potential for peace here, that's a channel that has to exist. But let me add one more thing. I also raised the issue of our embassy in Moscow, which operates under very difficult conditions. I raised that because it's important. It's going to be very difficult to engage in communication with Russia about anything if our embassy is not functioning. And he raised concerns about his diplomatic mission in the United States. So at a very basic level, if in fact there is going to be an opportunity here to pursue peace by engaging with the Russians, we're going to need to have functional embassies in Moscow and in Washington, D.C., and that's certainly something foreign ministers would talk about as a matter of normal course.

QUESTION: I want to ask you about what happened in Munich, Germany at the Security Conference. Vice President Vance gave a speech, and he told U.S. allies that the threat he worries about the most is not Russia, it is not China. He called it the threat from within, and he lectured about what he described as censorship, mainly focusing though, on including more views from the right. He also met with the leader of a far-right party known as the AfD, which, as you know, is under investigation and monitoring by German intelligence because of extremism. What did all of this accomplish other than irritating our allies? (*Continued on the Following Page)

SECRETARY RUBIO: Why would our allies or anybody be irritated by free speech and by someone giving their opinion? We are, after all, democracies. The Munich Security Conference is largely a conference of democracies, in which one of the things that we cherish and value is the ability to speak freely and provide your opinions. And so I think if anyone's angry about his words – they don't have to agree with him, but to be angry about it I think actually makes his point.

I thought it was actually a pretty historic speech. Whether you agree with him or not, I think the valid points he's making to Europe is we are concerned that the true values that we share, the values that bind us together with Europe, are things like free speech and democracy and our shared history in winning two World Wars and defeating Soviet communism and the like. These are values that we've shared in common. And in that Cold War, we fought against things like censorship and oppression and so forth.

QUESTION: Right.

SECRETARY RUBIO: And when you see backsliding and you raise that, that's a very valid concern. We can't tell them how to run their countries. He simply expressed in a speech his view of it, which a lot of people frankly share. And I thought he said a lot of things in that speech that needed to be said. And honestly, I don't know why anybody would be upset about it. People are – you don't have to agree someone's speech. I happen to agree with a lot of what he said, but you don't have to agree with someone's speech to at least appreciate the fact they have a right to say it and that you should listen to it and see whether those criticisms are valid. I assure you the United States has come under withering criticism on many occasions from many leaders in Europe, and we don't go around throwing temper tantrums about it.

QUESTION: Well, he was standing in a country where free speech was weaponized to conduct a genocide, and he met with the head of a political party that has far-right views and some historic ties to extreme groups. The context of that was changing the tone of it. And you know that, that the censorship was specifically about the right.

SECRETARY RUBIO: Well, I have to disagree with you. No, no, I have to disagree with you. Free speech was not used to conduct a genocide. The genocide was conducted by an authoritarian Nazi regime that happened to also be genocidal, because they hated Jews and they hated minorities and they hated those that they – they had a list of people they hated, but primarily the Jews. There was no free speech in Nazi Germany. There was none. There was also no opposition in Nazi Germany. They were a sole and only party that governed that country. So that's not an accurate reflection of history.

I also think it's wrong – again, I go back to the point of his speech. The point of his speech was basically that there is an erosion in free speech and in tolerance for opposing points of view within Europe, and that's of concern because that is eroding – it's not an erosion of your military capabilities. That's not an erosion of your economic standing. That's an erosion of the actual values that bind us together in this transatlantic union that everybody talks about. And I think allies and friends and partners that have worked together now for 80 years should be able to speak frankly to one another in open forums without being offended, insulted, or upset. And I spoke to foreign ministers from multiple countries throughout Europe. Many of them probably didn't like the speech or didn't agree with it, but they were continuing to engage with us on all sorts of issues that unite us.

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So again, at the end of the day, I think that people give all – that is a forum in which you're supposed to be inviting people to give speeches, not basically a chorus where everyone is saying the exact same thing. That's not always going to be the case when it's a collection of democracies where leaders have the right and the privilege to speak their minds in forums such as these.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, I'm told that we are out of time. A lot to get through with you. We appreciate you making time today.

SECRETARY RUBIO: Yeah.

QUESTION: We'll be back in a minute.

Europe's Military Industrial Complex Lacks Readiness for Serious Conflict

February 5, 2025

Meeting Ukraine's Needs, Unmasking Europe's Vulnerabilities

The European Military Industry Council (MIC) has faced considerable hurdles in fulfilling Ukraine's pressing demands for weaponry, revealing the limitations of Europe's current defense capabilities. Meeting the needs of its own member states has also proven difficult. "You can't just flip a switch," emphasizes a defense analyst, stressing the significant time and resources required to scale up production lines, train personnel, and establish efficient supply chains. This experience has exposed a glaring disparity between rhetoric and reality, highlighting the need for substantial investments in defense infrastructure and industrial capacity.

A "War Economy" on the Horizon?

The war in Ukraine has spurred a debate within Europe about the necessity of transitioning to a "war economy" – a paradigm shift characterized by increased defense spending, accelerated industrial mobilization, and a heightened focus on strategic self-sufficiency. Some proponents argue that this is essential for ensuring European security in an increasingly volatile world, while others express concerns about the potential economic and social costs. The decision to pursue this path will have profound implications for European society and its future role on the global stage.

Great resource for European Defense Industrial Complex:

<https://www.archyde.com/europe-s-military-industrial-complex-lacks-readiness-for-serious-conflict/>

EU plans to create defense-industrial complex ready for war

New strategy is the bloc's response to the war in Ukraine and the need to restart arms and ammunition production.

February 27, 2024 5:08 pm CET

By [Jacopo Barigazzi](#), [Laura Kayali](#) and [Joshua Posaner](#)

BRUSSELS — The EU wants to shift its defense industry onto a war footing, laying out its plan in a 27-page draft of a European Defense Industry Strategy seen by POLITICO.

The EU aims to upend the way that it finances and sells arms, spurred by Vladimir Putin's ongoing war on Ukraine and warnings from Western countries that a belligerent Russia could attack a NATO member in the coming years.

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One of the proposed measures even copies the [U.S. Foreign Military Sales scheme](#), making it easier to sell weapons to third countries, while another would make it simpler for governments to take over civilian production in case of an emergency.

Europe has retained a defense industrial base since the end of the Cold War, but it's not competitive enough, a European Commission official told reporters Wednesday. "It's there, but we're not able to produce on time and in volume."

The draft, first [reported by Bloomberg](#), doesn't include the volume of subsidies — though it's certain to be in the billions of euros. It also lacks a precise steer for how much procurement EU capitals should funnel through local industry. The details could change before Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton presents the plan and an accompanying financing proposal on March 5.

Although the Commission's mandate expires after June's EU election, diplomats said they have been given assurances the file will be pushed ahead in the next Commission — likely to be led once more by President Ursula von der Leyen.

The main objective of the European Defense Industrial Strategy, which is non-binding, is for the bloc to undergo a "paradigm shift from emergency response to defense readiness." It comes with a cash pot, the European Defense Investment Programme.

"It's not just a financing, but also an industrial organization program," the Commission official said.

On the demand side, the European Commission wants to ensure European governments buy more European military kit and purchase armaments jointly to make spending more effective.

On the supply side, Brussels seeks to make the European Defence and Technological Industrial Base (EDTIB) less risk averse and more flexible, while ensuring security of supply for governments in case of an emergency by creating mechanisms for the defense industry to have priority over civilian orders and companies.

Brussels wants Ukraine to participate in joint procurement as if Kyiv were an EU member.

"All this is being done in concert with the member states. Defense remains a national responsibility, we can organize to do things better together," the Commission official said, insisting Brussels isn't doing a "power grab."

Here are the main takeaways:

Streamlining procurement

The European Armament Programme would harmonize procurement procedures. Governments buying jointly will benefit from VAT exemptions. It includes European-level solutions to protect contested areas such as space, cyber, air and sea. It would establish a high-level European Defence Industry Group to help coordinate procurement and programming. The group will identify projects of common interest to focus EU efforts and funding programs; the aim is for the bloc to create a network of cyber defense capabilities, as well as integrated European air and missile defense systems. The Commission is also expected to set a joint procurement target, but that number is not yet in the draft.

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Making it easier to sell arms

One of the Commission's boldest ideas — to copy the U.S. system, where Washington signs contracts directly with other capitals to make arms sales easier and smoother — made it into the draft. The EU would work on a catalogue of what's available throughout the bloc. The Commission would also financially support the buildup of stocks to reduce delivery delays for potential buyers. The text provides for an exception to the Defense Procurement Directive to enable governments to add new countries to contracts already signed without having to restart the procurement process.

In the document, the Commission complains that member countries rushed to buy more arms as the security environment deteriorated thanks to the Russian attack on Ukraine, and that's caused a spike in purchases from U.S. companies.

More cash for joint procurement

The European Defence Investment Plan (EDIP) will take over from the Act in Support of Ammunition Production (ASAP) and the European Defence Industry Reinforcement through common Procurement Act (EDIRPA) by helping incentivize cooperation and joint procurement during the current seven-year EU budget, as well as supporting the development of weaponry funded by the European Defence Fund and an industrial ramp up.

The amount is not mentioned in the draft. A Commission official confirmed it would be at least €1.5 billion — adding the final amount remains under discussion — until 2027, when the current seven-year EU budget ends.

"When there is a political consensus to say that we need to do more on the budget front, we'll already have the tool [EDIP]. For us, the important thing is to build this tool," the official added.

According to Breton, the end game [should eventually](#) be a €100 billion fund to boost the European defense industry — a proposal echoed by leaders including Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas.

Keeping production high

The Commission also wants to subsidize manufacturing capacity with €1 billion — raised from loans and by investing €100 million of public cash — to sustain the arms industry even when demand is slow. That will be through a brand new pot of cash dubbed the Fund to Accelerate Defence Supply Chain Transformation (FAST), which aims to take the EU's financing of military-grade hardware beyond ammunition and missiles.

For example, FAST funding would be used to cover wages and upkeep of machinery at defense contractor plants, but the Commission also — and controversially — wants to look at powers to commandeer civilian production lines if required. EDIP, the cash pot, will be a regulation, meaning it'll need approval from EU countries and the European Parliament to come into effect. The Commission official said they hoped Council and the next European Parliament will start talks in December to finalize negotiations by Feb. 2025. ASAP and EDIRPA both end in 2025.

European leaders gather for emergency meeting after Trump shuts them out of Ukraine talks

Astha Rajvanshi

Mon, February 17, 2025 at 9:14 AM EST

European leaders are set to hold an emergency working meeting in Paris on Monday to align their position after the Trump administration said Europe would be excluded from talks with Russia to negotiate an end to the war in Ukraine.

The meeting between several key European leaders aims to address “the situation in Ukraine and security issues in Europe” by “bringing together all the partners interested in peace and security” in the region, French President Emmanuel Macron’s office said in a statement Sunday.

The talks come a day before U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio is due to meet with Russian officials in Saudi Arabia that exclude Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is currently in the neighboring United Arab Emirates on a scheduled trip to boost humanitarian support for Ukraine, officials said.

On Sunday, Zelenskyy told NBC’s Kristen Welker that he would “never accept any decisions between the United States and Russia about Ukraine,” adding, “there is no any leader in the world who can really make a deal with Putin without us about us.”

European leaders meet in Paris as US pushes ahead with Ukraine plan

By Catherine Porter and Steven Erlanger New York Times, Updated February 17, 2025, 11:42 p.m. PARIS — The leaders of many of Europe’s biggest countries came to Paris on Monday in an effort to forge a strategy for their own security, as President Donald Trump’s envoys prepared for talks with Russia over ending the war in Ukraine without them.

The meeting in Paris was pulled together hastily after the first visit to Europe last week by Vice President JD Vance and Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, which left European leaders alarmed by both the tone and message of the new Trump administration and what it might hold for the Continent.

European leaders were shocked by the hostility of Vance’s scathing speech in Munich criticizing Europe’s exclusion of far-right groups from power, and the sudden U.S. plans to begin peace talks with Russia in Saudi Arabia, starting Tuesday, without the presence of Ukrainian or European leaders.

Trump’s phone call last week to Russian President Vladimir Putin broke ranks with most European allies who have tried to isolate the man who ordered the invasion of sovereign Ukraine three years ago next week.

The meetings with the new U.S. officials sparked fear that the United States wants to pull thousands of troops out of Europe, as Hegseth suggested in Brussels last week, but on a timetable that would leave Europe vulnerable to an aggressive Russia, and that Trump will cut a deal with Putin over the heads of Ukrainians and Europeans.

(*Continued On The Following Column)

Related

“Europe’s security is at a turning point,” said Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European Commission, on the social platform X after arriving in Paris on Monday. “Yes, it is about Ukraine — but it is also about us. We need an urgency mindset. We need a surge in defense. And we need both of them now.”

The meeting, called by French President Emmanuel Macron at the Élysée Palace, was an initial effort to discuss a more coordinated and collective response to the Trump administration. Macron and Trump held a 20-minute phone call before the meeting began, the French said.

At the meeting, the European leaders discussed what they are willing to commit to secure any peace deal over the war in Ukraine in the short term, and in the long term, how to secure the continent as it faces an expansionist Russia and the predicted withdrawal of the assurance of U.S. support.

They discussed issues including military spending and how to guarantee Ukraine’s security once some sort of permanent ceasefire or peace deal is reached, including the possibility of troop commitments in Ukraine.

Trump officials have said they expect the Europeans to be responsible for the main financial and military support for Ukraine in the future, but there is enormous vagueness around the whole issue. Europeans want to be at the negotiating table, if one is ever created. As a former NATO official, Camille Grand, said, “Europeans cannot reasonably be expected to provide the security guarantees for a deal they are not negotiating.”

After the meeting, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said that any debate now on sending peacekeepers to Ukraine was “completely premature” and “highly inappropriate” while the war is ongoing.

Scholz said he was “a little irritated” about the peacekeeping debate “at the wrong time.” His views are shared by Poland and Spain, among other nations, especially given the vagueness about what any security guarantee would mean.

Scholz, like Donald Tusk, the prime minister of Poland, warned against dividing Europe from the United States despite disagreements. “There must be no division of security and responsibility between Europe and the USA,” Scholz said. “NATO is based on the fact that we always act together and share the risk, ensuring our security. This must not be called into question.”

Agreeing, Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof said he did not look at the American messages of the past few days as a sign of disengagement, but more as a strategy to push Europe to increase its own military spending and get more involved in Ukrainian security. “We are sending the message back that we are in it together,” Schoof said.

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Tusk said again that Poland would not send troops into Ukraine but would support countries that chose to do so. And he warned that “if someone seriously wants to talk about guarantees for Ukraine, they must be 100% sure that they will be able to fulfill such guarantees and obligations.”

Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen of Denmark said that such an informal meeting is “not for decision-making,” but “the most important thing from the meeting tonight is the need for all of us to step up when it comes to spending in defense. Russia is not only a threat against Ukraine but all of us.”

The Paris meeting comes the same day that Secretary of State Marco Rubio arrived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The State Department said he would be joined by Mike Waltz, the national security adviser, and Steve Witkoff, Trump’s Middle East envoy.

They are supposed to discuss with Russian officials the future of the Russia-Ukraine war, but even those talks are more about how to set up future peace talks rather than about the substance of them.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was in the United Arab Emirates on Monday for a track of negotiations with Russia that is separate from the Trump administration’s effort, focusing on prisoner exchanges and returning Ukrainian children from Russia.

He reiterated that Ukraine would accept no terms negotiated between Russia and the Trump administration without Ukrainian participation, and confirmed that Ukrainian representatives would not be at the talks in Saudi Arabia.

“The issue of a peacekeeping contingent is being discussed in France,” Zelenskyy told journalists in Abu Dhabi, UAE. “Emmanuel told me he would share all the details,” he said, referring to France’s president. “If we talk about a peacekeeping contingent, then what will be its size? Where will it be deployed? Which countries will be part of it? How will they be armed? It is crucial not to lose the U.S. in this process in one way or another.”

Zelenskyy also said that when it comes to making a deal with Russia, “Europe must be at the negotiating table — I don’t know in what format, but this is very important for us.”

Ivo Daalder, a former U.S. ambassador to NATO, said that Zelenskyy and the Europeans “have realized they’re in this boat together and can no longer rely on the U.S., and that the concern that Trump and Putin will do a deal over their heads is real.”

“So they have to depend on each other, and Europeans have to decide whether to step up to help the Ukrainians continue the war, if the proposed deal is a bad one, or to throw Kyiv under the bus, which would be appeasing Putin,” Daalder said. “They now realize that they have no real choice and that they have to back Ukraine, and that’s what this meeting is all about.”

But already there were fissures. The Paris talks included leaders from Germany, Britain, Italy, Poland, Spain, the Netherlands and Denmark, as well as the president of the European Council, the president of the European Commission and the secretary-general of NATO.

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There was criticism from front-line European states who were not invited, with one senior Baltic official saying that Macron’s initiative splits the unity of the European Union, and that the meeting should have been called by European Council President António Costa, not by Macron.

“In public, Europeans will say we all must stand together, but this selective meeting is not a good start to a united Europe on these issues,” said Mary Elise Sarotte, a diplomatic historian who wrote an influential book on the early days of NATO expansion, “Not One Inch.”

As he often does, Macron seized on a perceived vacuum in European leadership to call this informal meeting to talk about a collective response to what many perceive as a U.S. retreat from decades of security responsibility in Europe, in order to focus on Asia and domestic challenges.

Macron has made calls for increased European sovereignty and capacity for self-defense a hallmark of his presidency, which he has sometimes called “strategic autonomy,” less reliant on Washington. This meeting was expected to be the first of many among European leaders in the coming weeks, an adviser to Macron said, adding that the meetings would include other countries in the future.

On Sunday, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said in an article published in The Daily Telegraph that he was “ready and willing to contribute to security guarantees to Ukraine by putting our own troops on the ground if necessary.”

After the meeting, Starmer said for any European deployment “there must be a U.S. backstop, because a U.S. security guarantee is the only way to effectively deter Russia from attacking Ukraine again.”

Macron has been speaking for months to European leaders about forming a ceasefire buffer force in Ukraine to ensure that any peace deal with Russia is maintained. But his original idea was to have European forces far from the front lines, to help Ukrainians with training and logistics.

Military experts have said that it is first necessary to decide what kind of force is required, with what kind of resources, and what happens if they are attacked by Russia. This is why European leaders have said they must have guarantees of U.S. involvement, even if U.S. troops are not on the ground, for key weapons systems, air defense, air cover, satellite intelligence and the like.

European leaders also discussed the acceleration of European defense capabilities, as many now believe that the United States will withdraw tens of thousands of U.S. troops from Europe.

Just 23 of 32 NATO members currently spend at least 2% of their gross domestic product on defense — after having vowed to do so in 2014. And NATO has made it clear that 2% must be “a floor, not a ceiling,” and more must be spent. A new spending goal will be set at the NATO summit this summer and is likely to be 3% or 3.5%.

This article originally appeared in the New York Times.

Russia and US agree to work toward improving ties and ending the Ukraine war in landmark talks

By MATTHEW LEE, BARAA ANWER and DASHA LITVINOVA The Associated Press, Updated February 18, 2025, 3:57 p.m.

RIYADH, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Russia and the U.S. agreed Tuesday to start working toward ending the war in Ukraine and improving their diplomatic and economic ties, the two countries' top diplomats said after talks that reflected an extraordinary about-face in U.S. foreign policy under President Donald Trump.

In an interview with The Associated Press after the meeting, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the two sides agreed broadly to pursue three goals: to restore staffing at their respective embassies in Washington and Moscow, to create a high-level team to support Ukraine peace talks and to explore closer relations and economic cooperation.

He stressed, however, that the talks — which were attended by his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, and other senior Russian and U.S. officials — marked the beginning of a conversation, and more work needs to be done.

Lavrov echoed Rubio's remarks and told reporters that "the conversation was very useful."

"We not only listened, but also heard each other," he said.

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Trump's national security adviser, Michael Waltz, and special Mideast envoy Steven Witkoff joined Rubio at the table, along with Lavrov and Russian President Vladimir Putin's foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov.

No Ukrainian officials were present at the meeting, which came as the beleaguered country is slowly but steadily losing ground against more numerous Russian troops in a grinding war that began nearly three years ago.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country would not accept any outcome from the talks since Kyiv didn't take part, and he postponed his own trip to the kingdom scheduled for Wednesday. European allies have also expressed concerns that they are being sidelined.

Improving Russian-US relations

Ties between Russia and the U.S. have fallen to their lowest level in decades in recent years — a rift that has been widening ever since Russia illegally annexed Crimea from Ukraine in 2014 and only worsened after Moscow's full-scale invasion.

The U.S., along with European nations, imposed a raft of sanctions on Russia in an effort to damage its economy. And embassies in Washington and Moscow have been hit hard by expulsions of large numbers of diplomats, as well as other restrictions.

*(*Continued On The Following Column)*

Rubio said Tuesday that ending the war in Ukraine could "unlock the door" for "incredible opportunities that exist to partner with the Russians geopolitically on issues of common interest and, frankly, economically on issues that hopefully will be good for the world and also improve our relations in the long term."

His comments were further evidence of the remarkable U.S. reversal on Russia after years in which Trump's predecessor, Joe Biden, led international efforts to isolate Moscow.

Tuesday's meeting was meant to pave the way for a summit between Trump and Putin. After the talks ended, Ushakov and Waltz said no date has been set yet for that summit. Ushakov told Russian television that a meeting was "unlikely" to take place next week, while Waltz said he thought it could be arranged in the coming weeks.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Lavrov mentioned the same three goals as Rubio and said that Washington and Moscow agreed to appoint representatives to carry out "regular consultations" on Ukraine.

"I have reason to believe that the American side has started to better understand our position" the Russian foreign minister said. Witkoff said the meeting was "positive, upbeat, constructive. Everybody was there to get to the right outcome."

The meeting marked the most extensive contact between the two countries since Moscow's Feb. 24, 2022, invasion. Lavrov and then-U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken talked briefly on the sidelines of a G-20 meeting in India nearly two years ago, but tensions remained high.

Concerns from allies they are being sidelined

The recent U.S. diplomatic blitz on the war has sent Ukraine and key allies scrambling to ensure a seat at the table amid concerns that Washington and Moscow could press ahead with a deal that won't be favorable to them.

Kyiv's absence at Tuesday's talks rankled many Ukrainians, and France called an emergency meeting of European Union countries and the U.K. on Monday to discuss the war. Kyiv's participation in such talks was a bedrock of U.S. policy under Biden.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce said the talks were aimed at determining how serious the Russians are about achieving peace and whether detailed negotiations can start.

Rubio said Tuesday that there would be "engagement and consultation with Ukraine, with our partners in Europe and others. But ultimately, the Russian side will be indispensable to this effort." Rubio also said ending the conflict would require concessions from all sides and that Washington "is not going to predetermine" what those concessions would be.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth said last week that NATO membership for Ukraine was unrealistic and suggested Kyiv should abandon hopes of winning all its territory back from Russia — two key items on Putin's wish list.

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Waltz said “the practical reality is that there is going to be some discussion of territory, and there’s going to be a discussion of security guarantees.”

French President Emmanuel Macron on Tuesday said he spoke by phone to Trump and Zelenskyy following Monday’s European meeting.

“We seek a strong and lasting peace in Ukraine,” Macron wrote on social media platform X. “To achieve this, Russia must end its aggression, and this must be accompanied by strong and credible security guarantees for the Ukrainians,” he said and vowed to “work on this together with all Europeans, Americans, and Ukrainians.”

Saudi Arabia’s role

The meeting at the Diriyah Palace in the Saudi capital of Riyadh also highlighted de facto leader Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman’s efforts to be a major diplomatic player, burnishing a reputation severely tarnished by the 2018 killing of Washington Post journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

Saudi state media described the talks as happening at the prince’s direction. Like the neighboring United Arab Emirates, the prince has maintained close relations to Russia throughout its war on Ukraine, both through the OPEC+ oil cartel and diplomatically as well.

Saudi Arabia has also helped in prisoner negotiations and hosted Zelenskyy for an Arab League summit in 2023.

But Zelenskyy postponed his own trip to Saudi Arabia scheduled for this week, suggesting that he wanted to avoid his visit being linked to the talks since Ukrainian officials weren’t invited. His visit was rescheduled for March 10.

War continues

Meanwhile, Russia continued to pummel Ukraine with drones, according to Kyiv’s military. The Ukrainian air force said Russian troops launched a barrage of 176 drones at Ukraine overnight, most of which were destroyed or disabled by jamming.

One Russian drone struck a residential building in Dolynska in the Kirovohrad region, wounding a mother and her two children and prompting an evacuation of 38 apartments, the regional administration reported. Four more residential buildings were damaged by drone debris in the Cherkasy region of Ukraine, according to local officials.

Ohio-Based Supplier of Aircraft Parts and Three Employees Charged for Illicit Export Scheme Involving Russia

Thursday, February 13, 2025 - For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

Flight time Enterprises Inc., an American subsidiary of a Russian aircraft parts supplier, along with three of its current and former employees, have been charged federally with crimes related to a scheme to illegally export aircraft parts and components from the United States to Russia and Russian airline companies without the required licenses from the Department of Commerce.

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The three individuals charged include Daniela Friery, 43, a naturalized U.S. citizen residing in Loveland, Ohio; Pavil Iglin, 46, a citizen of Russia who currently resides in Florida pursuant to a non-immigrant visa; and Marat Aysin, 39, a legal permanent resident of the United States who currently resides in Florida.

According to the 11-count indictment unsealed today, the three defendants worked for Flighttime Enterprises Inc., an aircraft equipment supplier with office locations near West Chester, Ohio, and Miami.

As alleged in the indictment, following Russia’s further invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Flighttime and the individual defendants knowingly and willfully violated and evaded the export restrictions imposed on Russia to ship aviation parts to Russia and Russian end users, including airlines subject to Department of Commerce Temporary Denial Orders, by mislabeling shipments, providing false certifications, and using intermediary companies and countries to obscure the true end destination and end users. The indictment details four specific export transactions totaling more than \$2 million. For example, in June 2022, Flighttime employees allegedly negotiated the purchase of an auxiliary power unit from an American supplier for \$395,000. The U.S. supplier initially expressed hesitation about the transaction due to the company’s connections to Russia. In connection with the purchase, Aysin falsely told the American supplier that the part would be used to replenish stock in West Chester. Through Aysin, Iglin allegedly signed and dated a Russia end-user certificate with the supplier falsely certifying that the part would not be exported to Russia. The part was thereafter illegally exported to Russia for a Russian aviation company without the required license.

The company and three defendants are each charged with one count of conspiring to violate the Export Control Reform Act (ECRA), and multiple counts of violating the ECRA, which are federal crimes punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

They are also charged with conspiracy to commit smuggling, which carries a maximum penalty of five years in prison, and multiple counts of smuggling, which carry maximum penalties of 10 years in prison. Finally, they are each charged with one count of conspiring to launder monetary instruments, a federal crime punishable by up to 10 years in prison.

Sue J. Bai, head of the Justice Department’s National Security Division; U.S. Attorney Kenneth L. Parker for the Southern District of Ohio; Special Agent in Charge Elena Iatarola of the FBI Cincinnati Field Office; and Special Agent in Charge Jeffrey Levine of the Office of Export Enforcement, Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) announced the case.

The FBI and BIS are investigating the case.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Timothy S. Mangan for the Southern District of Ohio is prosecuting the case with assistance from Trial Attorneys Maria Fedor and Menno Goedman of the National Security Division’s Counterintelligence and Export Control Section.

An indictment is merely an allegation. All defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Updated February 13, 2025

Israeli Freight Forwarder Sentenced to Two Years in Prison for Violating Export Restrictions Imposed on Russia

Friday, February 21, 2025 - For Immediate Release

Office of Public Affairs

Gal Haimovich, 49, of Israel, was sentenced today to 24 months in prison and three years of supervised release for conspiracy to illegally ship aircraft parts and avionics from U.S. manufacturers and suppliers to Russia, including for the benefit of sanctioned Russian airline companies. In addition, Haimovich paid the full forfeiture amount of \$2,024,435.44 at today's sentencing.

As part of his plea agreement, Haimovich admitted that his scheme involved deceiving U.S. companies about the true destination of the goods at issue, and that the defendant and others attempted to conceal the scheme by submitting false information in export documents filed with the U.S. government.

According to court documents, Haimovich owned an international freight forwarding company that was an affiliate in a group of companies that did business in various countries, including the United States and Israel. Haimovich, through those companies, operated as a freight forwarder of choice for individuals and entities seeking to illegally export goods to Russia in violation of U.S. export control laws. Between approximately March 2022 and May 2023, Haimovich facilitated the export of aircraft parts and avionics, including those with missile technology applications, from the United States through the Southern District of Florida, to various third-party transshippers on behalf of Russian customers. These Russian-end customers routinely instructed Haimovich to deceive the U.S.-based manufacturers and suppliers about the ultimate destination of the goods.

For example, between April 2022 and April 2023, after the United States imposed additional restrictions on the export of goods to Russia in response to the country's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Haimovich arranged for more than 160 shipments to companies in the Maldives and United Arab Emirates that were responsible for the illicit transshipment of the goods to Russia. One such shipment, of an air data module, occurred in August 2022. Haimovich, who had been hired by Siberia Airlines (doing business as S7 Airlines) to deliver the aircraft component to Russia, directed a co-conspirator to falsely inform the U.S. supplier that the part was destined for the Maldives; in fact, Haimovich knew that the part was destined for Russia for the benefit of S7 Airlines. Haimovich also agreed that, between March 2022 and May 2023, he billed Russian customers, including Siberia Airlines (doing business as S7 Airlines), more than two million dollars to have aircraft parts and avionics illegally exported from the United States to Russia. In connection with Haimovich's plea, he agreed to the entry of a forfeiture money judgment in the sum of \$2,024,435 and to forfeit various aircraft parts and components.

Sue Bai, head of the Justice Department's National Security Division, Assistant Secretary for Export Enforcement Kevin J. Kurland of the Department of Commerce's Office of Export Enforcement, Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS), U.S. Attorney Hayden P. O'Byrne for the Southern District of Florida, and Assistant Director Kevin Vorndran of the FBI's Counterintelligence Division made the announcement. BIS and FBI investigated the case.

Trial Attorney Christopher M. Rigali of the National Security Division's Counterintelligence and Export Control Section and Assistant U.S. Attorney Christopher Browne for the Southern District of Florida are prosecuting the case. Assistant U.S. Attorney Joshua Paster for the Southern District of Florida handled the asset forfeiture component of the case.

MISSION STATEMENT:

Given the geopolitical state of affairs with China, Russia, and Crimea, the Occupied territories of UKRAINE, Donetsk and Luhansk Oblast, embargoed countries and other specific threatening end users and entities, located in the United States and around the globe;

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