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Ukraine's Peace Goals 'Unrealistic,' U.S. Defense Secretary Hegseth Says

Trump's defense secretary also ruled out sending U.S. peacekeepers to Ukraine and urged European NATO members to end their dependency on Washington for security.

By Charlie Hancock and Pyotr Kozlov

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US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth. **Michael Probst / AP / TASS**

BRUSSELS — U.S. Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth on Wednesday said Washington would not send peacekeepers to Ukraine as part of post-war security guarantees for Kyiv and dismissed Ukraine's goals of NATO membership and restoring its pre-2014 borders as "unrealistic."

In a speech where he stressed that the U.S. remained committed to NATO but would "no longer tolerate" European alliance members depending on Washington for security, Hegseth told the Ukraine Defense Contact Group that the U.S.'s priority was now competition with

China, as "stark strategic realities prevent the U.S. from being primarily focused on Europe."

His comments during the NATO defense ministerial in Brussels came during a critical week for the future of European security and the war in Ukraine.

Russia's nearly three-year war on its neighbor will be at the top of the agenda at the Munich Security Conference where Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is expected to be in attendance along with Hegseth, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and special envoy for Ukraine and Russia Keith Kellogg.

Hegseth said that Ukraine's future security guarantees should not be backed by NATO, but "capable European and non-European troops instead."

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However, the former Fox News presenter ruled out deploying U.S. troops to Ukraine as peacekeepers and said that any peacekeeping force should be a non-NATO mission and not covered by Article 5.

Article 5 of the NATO foundational treaty says that an armed attack on one member state should be considered an attack on the entire alliance and that members should assist the country that comes under attack.

President Donald Trump — who has vowed to end the Russia-Ukraine war without detailing how — has been highly critical of European NATO members that fail to meet the alliance's benchmark of committing 2% of GDP to defense spending.

In 2025, he said that NATO members should spend 5% of their GDP on defense (the United States spent 2.7% in 2024).

Hegseth told the meeting of 57 contact group member states and the EU on Wednesday that he thought that Poland's 5% defense spending was a model for the alliance. Poland, in fact, has pledged to spend 4.7% of its GDP on defense this year.

"Part of this is speaking frankly with your people about how this threat can only be met by spending more on defense," he said, urging attendees to donate more ammunition and equipment to Ukraine and expand their defense industrial bases.

He also said it was "unrealistic" to seek the return of Ukraine's pre-2014 borders in negotiations to end the war, a longstanding goal of Kyiv's. Russia unilaterally annexed Crimea that year and claimed to have annexed four eastern Ukrainian regions following its full-scale invasion in 2022.

"Chasing this illusory goal will only prolong the war and cause more suffering," he said. "A durable peace for Ukraine must include robust security guarantees to ensure that the war won't begin again."

Speaking on Ukraine's other long-stated goal of joining NATO, Hegseth said that the U.S. "does not believe that NATO membership for Ukraine is a realistic outcome of a negotiated

settlement.”

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