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Trump’s Ceasefire Push Not a ‘Betrayal’ of Ukraine, Hegseth Says

By Pyotr Kozlov

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U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. **Omar Havana / AP / TASS**

BRUSSELS — U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth on Thursday rejected claims that Washington is abandoning Ukraine, insisting the United States remains Kyiv’s largest financial backer even as it rapidly pushes for a negotiated settlement to the war.

“It is certainly not a betrayal,” Hegseth said after meeting with U.S. allies. “No country, as President Trump has pointed out, has made a greater commitment to Ukraine than the United States — $300 billion invested in stabilizing the front lines after Russia’s aggression.”

Hegseth underscored what he described as a growing U.S. focus on ending the war through diplomacy. “There’s no betrayal — there’s a recognition that the whole world, including the United States, is interested in peace. Negotiated peace. As President Trump has said: stopping the killing,” he said.

The defense secretary's comments came just hours after Donald Trump said that he held a "lengthy and highly productive phone call" with Russian President Vladimir Putin, adding that the two agreed to begin ceasefire negotiations for the war in Ukraine.

However, Trump's direct engagement with Putin has raised concerns that Kyiv may be sidelined in discussions about its own future. And the U.S. president has suggested that Ukraine is unlikely to reclaim all of its lost territory or achieve NATO membership as part of any potential settlement.

"I'm just here to try and get peace," Trump told reporters on Wednesday. "I don't care so much about anything other than I want to stop having millions of people killed."

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A close Trump ally and former Fox News commentator, Hegseth echoed Trump's assertion that only he could broker an end to the conflict.

"That will require both sides to accept realities they may not like. That's why the world is fortunate to have Donald Trump. Only he, at this moment, can bring the necessary powers to the table," the defense secretary said Thursday.

Despite the Trump administration's shift both in rhetoric and tactics, Hegseth sought to reaffirm Washington's commitment to European security.

"As Defense Secretary, my job — working alongside NATO — is to ensure that the alliance's defense capabilities remain as strong and as robust as possible to deter future aggression on the continent," he added.

The day before, Hegseth 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."

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 upcoming 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.

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