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Europe Should ‘Maximize Pressure’ on U.S. Over Peace Talks With Russia – Stubb

By Charlie Hancock

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Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) shakes hands with Finland's President Alexander Stubb (R) prior to their talks on the sidelines of the 61st Munich Security Conference (MSC) in southern Germany.
UKRAINIAN PRESIDENTIAL PRESS SERVICE / AFP

MUNICH – Finnish President Alexander Stubb on Saturday called on Europe to pressure Washington to ensure that Ukraine was in as strong a position as possible before peace talks with Moscow could begin.

Addressing the pessimistic mood that descended over the three-day conference amid fears that the United States might sell out Ukraine to secure a quick end to the war, Stubb told a press conference that “dialog is also much more active between Ukraine, European leaders and the Americans than many of us have been led to believe.”

Stubb described discussions as “all over the place,” saying that the U.S. defense secretary had asserted prematurely that Ukraine’s NATO membership and the restoration of its pre-2014 borders would be off the table in peace discussions.

Though he said no one had a strategy for strengthening Ukraine’s position in negotiations, he stressed the need for a ceasefire and international monitoring — rather than a peacekeeping mission — before peace talks could begin. Stubb based this on his experience mediating the end of the 2008 Russo-Georgian War, when he was Finland’s foreign minister.

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Just hours before the press conference, Trump’s special envoy for Ukraine and Russia Keith Kellog said that Europe’s perspective on peace talks would be consulted but they would ultimately not have a seat at the table.

Stubb’s predecessor Sauli Niinistö warned in January that Europe would be left out of peace talks with Moscow after leading European figures criticized German Chancellor Olaf Scholz for calling Russian President Vladimir Putin in November to discuss the war.

“When I spoke to Kellogg yesterday he didn’t say anything of that sort,” Stubb said.

He also defended Europe’s diplomatic strategy of isolating Putin, sanctions and excluding Russia from international sporting competitions.

“Of course, there comes a time when discussions have to begin. The president of the United States has begun those conversations with Putin. But the end state of this conversation is nowhere near, and everything is on the table,” he told The Moscow Times.

Security experts consider Finland a leader in Europe at civil preparedness thanks to its whole-of-society approach to defense and vast strategic stockpiles of food and fuel — a legacy of Helsinki’s history of conflict with its neighbor Russia. The country joined NATO in 2023.

Stubb said that Finland’s position remained that Ukraine should join the alliance, but that its ascension would ultimately require consensus among NATO’s members.

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