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Saudi Arabia to Host U.S.-Russia Talks on Tuesday, Kremlin Confirms

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Alexander Zemlianichenko / AP / TASS

The Kremlin has confirmed that Russian and U.S. officials will meet in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday to discuss bilateral relations and possible solutions for ending the war in Ukraine.

"At Putin's request, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and presidential aide Yuri Ushakov are flying to Riyadh today," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters at a press briefing on Monday. "They will meet with their American counterparts to discuss, first and foremost, restoring the full scope of U.S.-Russia relations."

Peskov said that the talks would also focus on preparations for "potential negotiations" on ending the war in Ukraine, as well as arranging a meeting between President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump sometime in the future.

Over the weekend, Lavrov spoke by phone with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who was set to arrive in Saudi Arabia on Monday after a stopover in Israel, Axios reported.

Rubio is expected to be joined by White House national security adviser Mike Waltz and Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, who told Fox News on Sunday that he was traveling to Saudi Arabia later that night.

Axios, citing two anonymous sources, reported that the delegations will also prepare for a meeting between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump.

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State Department spokeswoman Tammy Bruce later on Monday provided a somewhat cautious assessment of what U.S. officials are expecting to achieve in the first round of talks.

"I don't think that people should view this as something that is about details or moving forward in some kind of a negotiation," Bruce said. "This is a follow-up on that initial conversation between Putin and President Trump about perhaps if that first step is even possible, what the interests are, if this can be managed."

Bloomberg reported Friday that Putin has assembled a negotiating team of senior officials, including longtime foreign policy envoy Yury Ushakov, Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) chief Sergei Naryshkin and Russian Direct Investment Fund CEO Kirill Dmitriev.

Peskov did not mention Dmitriev during his daily press briefing on Monday. However, Interfax, citing an anonymous Saudi source, earlier reported that Dmitriev would be present at Tuesday's talks to discuss strengthening economic ties between Moscow and Washington.

Trump first floated the idea of a meeting in Saudi Arabia last week Wednesday after a surprise phone call with Putin. Riyadh announced Friday that it was open to hosting the summit.

The prospect of direct U.S.-Russia talks without Ukrainian participation has raised concerns that Kyiv's interests could be sidelined. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was visiting the United Arab Emirates on Sunday but said he had no plans to meet with U.S. or Russian officials in neighboring Saudi Arabia.

Rubio told Face the Nation on Sunday that "if it's real negotiations," Ukraine "will have to be involved because they were the ones that were invaded."

However, the secretary of state added that "right now, there is no process."

"What we have right now is a call between Putin and President Trump in which both sides expressed an interest in ending this conflict," Rubio said.

Correction: An earlier version of this article incorrectly stated that Zelensky visited Saudi Arabia on Sunday.

AFP contributed reporting.

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