The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Rubio Defends U.S.-Russia Talks, Says Trump ‘Rightfully’ Upset With Zelensky

February 21, 2025



U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio. **U.S. Department of State**

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio pushed back against accusations that the Trump administration has given in to Russia even before talks on ending the Ukraine war begin, saying Washington first wants to see whether Moscow was "serious."

President Donald Trump "wants this war with Ukraine to end. And he wants to know: Are the Russians serious about ending the war, or not serious about ending the war?" Rubio said in an interview with journalist Catherine Herridge published on Thursday.

"The only way is to test them, to basically engage them and say, okay, are you serious about ending the war, and if so, what are your demands," Rubio said, adding that he was "not a fan of most of what [Russian President] Vladimir Putin has done."

However, he added: "We ultimately have to be able to talk to a nation that has, in some cases, the largest tactical nuclear weapons stockpile in the world, and the second largest, if not the largest, strategic nuclear weapons stockpile in the world."

On Tuesday, U.S. and Russian officials met in Saudia Arabia for their first direct talks since Moscow's February 2022 invasion, with both sides striking a positive tone while downplaying the chances of an immediate breakthrough in Ukraine peace negotiations.

Related article: Zelensky Calls For Strong U.S. Ties After Trump Brands Him a 'Dictator'

During the talks, Rubio and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov agreed to organize teams to begin working on a plan to end the war in Ukraine "as soon as possible."

Rubio denied that the United States had kept Ukraine and its European allies out of the loop, saying "It's unfair to say that we didn't consult anybody on it."

"And I also think it's silly to say, well, the Ukrainians are going be cut out or the Europeans are going to be cut out. You can't... find a stop to a war unless both sides and their views are represented," he said in Thursday's interview.

Rubio also addressed growing tensions between Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. Trump this week called Zelensky a "dictator without elections" after the Ukrainian leader suggested that he was under the influence of Russian disinformation.

"I think President Trump is very upset at President Zelensky and in some cases, rightfully so," Rubio said, claiming that Trump's predecessor Joe Biden also had "frustrations" with the Ukrainian leader.

He added that Washington cares about the war in Ukraine because "it has implications for our allies and ultimately for the world," even if it does not directly impact the "daily lives of Americans."

"There should be some level of gratitude here about this, and when you don't see it and you see [Zelensky] out there accusing the president of living in a world of disinformation, that's highly, very counterproductive," he said.

AFP contributed reporting.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/02/21/rubio-defends-us-russia-talks-says-trump-rightfully-upset-with-zelensky-a88105