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U.S., Russia Talks on Ukraine Ceasefire End After 12 Hours

By Sofiane Alsaar for AFP

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Artem Priakhin / SOPA Images via ZUMA Press Wire

A meeting between Russian and U.S. officials on a partial ceasefire in Ukraine ended after 12 hours of negotiations in Saudi Arabia on Monday, Russian state media reported, with a joint statement expected the following day.

With Ukrainian negotiators waiting nearby, a day after they sat down with the U.S. team, the Americans and Russians met in Riyadh with a Black Sea ceasefire top of the agenda.

President Donald Trump is pushing for a rapid end to the three-year war and hopes the latest round of talks will pave the way for a breakthrough.

While the talks took place at a luxury hotel in the Saudi capital, nearly 90 people including 17 children were wounded in a missile attack on Sumy in northeastern Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelensky said.

The attack on a "densely populated residential area" damaged apartments and an educational facility, the regional prosecutor's office said. The city's acting mayor earlier said a hospital had been affected.

The Ukrainian negotiating team was expecting a second meeting with the U.S. delegation on Monday, a source in Kyiv told AFP, a sign that progress may have been made.

Russia's state-run TASS news agency cited a source as saying that the meeting with the U.S. had ended after "more than 12 hours of consultations" and that a joint statement on results would be published Tuesday.

'Trump's proposal'

At a previous round of talks this month in Jeddah — days after Zelensky's White House dressing-down by Trump — Kyiv agreed to a U.S.-proposed 30-day ceasefire that was subsequently rejected by Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Officials are now studying a possible resumption of the Black Sea Initiative, an agreement that allowed millions of tonnes of grain and other food exports to be shipped from Ukraine's ports.

"The issue of the Black Sea Initiative and all aspects related to the renewal of this initiative is on the agenda today," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in his daily briefing.

"This was President Trump's proposal and President Putin agreed to it. It was with this mandate that our delegation traveled to Riyadh."

The U.S.-Ukraine and U.S.-Russia talks were originally planned to take place simultaneously to enable shuttle diplomacy, with the United States going back and forth between the delegations, but they are now taking place one after the other.

Ukraine's Defense Minister Rustem Umerov, who heads the Ukrainian team, said Sunday's talks with the United States were "productive and focused."

Trump envoy Steve Witkoff has voiced optimism that any agreement would pave the way for a "full-on" ceasefire.

"I think you're going to see in Saudi Arabia on Monday some real progress, particularly as it affects a Black Sea ceasefire on ships between both countries," he told Fox News.

"And from that you'll naturally gravitate to a full-on shooting ceasefire."

'Only at the beginning'

But the Kremlin has downplayed expectations of a rapid resolution.

"We are only at the beginning of this path," Peskov told Russian state TV on Sunday, adding: "There are difficult negotiations ahead."

When Putin, in a lengthy phone call with Trump, rebuffed the joint U.S.-Ukrainian call for a full and immediate 30-day pause, he proposed instead a halt in attacks on energy facilities.

The traditional adversaries are now discussing the return of the Black Sea Initiative, which was originally brokered by Turkey and the United Nations in 2022.

Russia pulled out of the agreement in 2023, accusing the West of failing to uphold its commitments to ease sanctions on Russia's own exports of farm produce and fertilizers.

A senior Ukrainian official previously told AFP that Kyiv would propose a broader ceasefire, covering attacks on energy facilities, infrastructure and naval strikes.

'Mutually beneficial'

Before the missile strike on Sumy, both sides had launched fresh drone attacks on the eve of the negotiations.

And Ukraine's national railway operator said Monday it was countering a sophisticated cyberattack for the second day running.

Moscow headed into the Saudi talks after a rapprochement with Washington under Trump that boosted the Kremlin's confidence.

Peskov said Sunday that the "potential for mutually beneficial cooperation in a wide variety of spheres between our countries cannot be overstated."

"We may disagree on some things but that does not mean we should deprive ourselves of mutual benefit," he added.

Meanwhile, British and French defense chiefs met in London on Monday to discuss plans for allied countries to safeguard any ceasefire deal as part of U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's so-called "coalition of the willing."

Questions remain over what shape such an initiative might take, but Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron have voiced willingness to put British and French troops on the ground in Ukraine.

"If there is a deal, it's a deal that has to be defended," Starmer's spokesman said.

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