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Rubio Arrives in Istanbul Ahead of Ukraine Peace Negotiations

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

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has arrived in Istanbul ahead of negotiations aimed at ending the war in Ukraine, after talks initially scheduled for Thursday were pushed to Friday to accommodate the incoming Ukrainian delegation.

Rubio is not expected to participate in the first round of direct talks between Russia and Ukraine, but said he and other U.S. officials would meet separately with Ukrainian and Turkish officials in the morning.

Director for Policy Planning Michael Anton will represent the United States in working-level talks with the Russian delegation in Istanbul on Friday, U.S. State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce said.

Turkish Foreign Ministry sources said a meeting between Turkish, U.S. and Ukrainian officials would take place at 10:45 a.m. local time, followed by talks between Turkish, Russian and Ukrainian delegations at 12:30 p.m.

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On Thursday, Rubio met with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha in Antalya on the sidelines of a NATO meeting. The top U.S. diplomat said Washington was growing "impatient" with stalled peace efforts and was now open to "virtually any mechanism" that could lead to a breakthrough.

"I don't think – we don't have high expectations of what will happen tomorrow. And frankly, at this point, I think it's abundantly clear that the only way we're going to have a breakthrough here is between President Trump and President Putin," Rubio told reporters in Antalya.

His remarks came shortly after U.S. President Donald Trump, who is touring the Middle East this week, said "nothing's going to happen until Putin and I get together." On Friday, Trump said he would return to Washington, D.C. after having earlier floated the idea of attending the negotiations in Turkey if Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to be present.

The Kremlin leader rejected Zelensky's offer to meet with him in person during the negotiations and instead tapped his aide and former culture minister Vladimir Medinsky to lead the talks. Medinsky also headed Russia's 2022 peace talks with Ukraine, which ultimately collapsed.

Putin proposed direct negotiations with Kyiv during a surprise address at the Kremlin in the early hours of Sunday, effectively rejecting a Western-backed 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine that was supposed to begin this week.

Reuters and AFP contributed reporting.

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