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Ukraine, Russia, U.S. Agree to More Talks Next Week in UAE

By AFP

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On the eve of the second day of talks, Russia launched a barrage of drones and missiles on Ukraine, cutting off millions from electricity in subzero temperatures. **State Emergency Service of Ukraine**

Ukraine and Russia ended two days of U.S.-brokered direct talks on Saturday and agreed to hold more next week in Abu Dhabi, even as Kyiv accused Moscow of undermining the negotiations toward ending the war by launching fresh strikes.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said of the talks that "a lot was discussed, and it is important that the conversations were constructive."

He added that next round could take place "as early as next week."

On the eve of the second day of talks, Russia launched a barrage of drones and missiles on Ukraine, cutting off millions from electricity in subzero temperatures. Kyiv accused Moscow of undermining the negotiations by launching yet another "night of Russian terror."

A UAE government spokesperson said the talks, which involved top military officers from both sides, had been held in a "constructive and positive atmosphere."

But weary Kyiv residents, who had gone through yet another sleepless night, had little hope for a breakthrough.

"They'll just say that everything is fine, that again, nothing has been agreed, and again there will be rockets," said Anastasia Tolkachov, who had to spend the night in a parking lot.

When asked by AFP about the negotiations, another Kyiv resident, who gave only her first name, Valentina, said: "I don't think anything will happen. We'll just have to keep freezing a little longer, somehow."

At night, AFP journalists saw people running through the streets to find shelter as explosions lit up the capital's sky.

According to the Emirati spokesperon, the talks were held on "outstanding elements of the U.S.-proposed peace framework as well as confidence-building measures."

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According to Zelensky, "the central focus of the discussions was the possible parameters for ending the war."

Both warring sides say the fate of territory in the eastern Donbas region is the main unresolved issue in the search for a settlement.

'Again and again'

Over a million people in Kyiv and Chernihiv were left without electricity in sub-zero temperatures due to Russian strikes. About half of Kyiv's apartment blocks were cut off from heating, Ukrainian authorities said.

"This night in Kyiv, it's really all happening again and again," Iryna Berehova, 48, told AFP, adding: "These explosions, these sleepless nights, these worries for our children, for our safety, they are very exhausting."

"These negotiations that are taking place don't even give us any hope for the better."

The European Union, which has sent hundreds of power generators to Ukraine, has accused Moscow of "deliberately depriving civilians of heat."

Zelensky last week declared a state of emergency in the energy sector, which has been battered by relentless Russian strikes on heat and electricity supplies.

The Moscow-installed governor in the occupied Kherson region, Vladimir Saldo, said a Ukrainian drone strike killed three people in an ambulance van heading to a sick man.

The war has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and devastated large swathes of

Ukraine.

While diplomacy to end Europe's worst conflict since World War II has gained pace again, Moscow and Kyiv appear deadlocked over the issue of territory.

Donbas territory dispute

U.S. President Donald Trump met Zelensky at the World Economic Forum in Davos on Thursday and U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff later held talks with Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin.

Hours after Putin met Witkoff — and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner — in Moscow, the Kremlin said its demand that Kyiv withdraw from the eastern Donbas region still stood, calling it "a very important condition."

Kyiv rejects it. "The Donbas is a key issue," Zelensky told reporters on Friday, ahead of the talks in the UAE.

Zelensky said he and Trump had agreed on post-war security guarantees in Davos.

Russian and Ukrainian negotiators are last known to have met face-to-face in Istanbul last summer, in talks that ended only in deals to exchange captured soldiers.

The Abu Dhabi meeting was the first time they have faced each other to talk about the Trump administration's plan.

An initial U.S. draft drew heavy criticism in Kyiv and western Europe for hewing too closely to Moscow's demands, while Russia rejected later versions for proposing European peacekeepers in Ukraine.

Putin has repeatedly said Moscow intends to get full control of eastern Ukraine by force if talks fail.

Trump has in the past pressured Ukraine to agree to terms that Kyiv sees as capitulation.

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