

Europeans arrive for high-stakes Trump and Zelensky talks

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- Trump said Sunday that Zelensky could end the war "almost immediately, if he wants to" but that, for Ukraine, there was "no getting back" Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, and "NO GOING INTO NATO."



the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky (L) meeting with US Special Envoy for Ukraine Keith Kellogg in Washington, DC

AFP | Washington, United States

European leaders arrived at the White House yesterday ahead of high-stakes talks with US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky aimed at bridging big differences over a peace deal with Russia.

The leaders of Britain, France, Germany, Italy and Finland, as well as NATO chief Mark Rutte and European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen, are demonstrating support for Ukraine as Trump presses Kyiv to make concessions.

Air raid sirens sounded over Kyiv on Monday, AFP journalists heard, at the same time as the Europeans were arriving. Russian strikes overnight killed at



least seven people. Russian President Vladimir Putin Following his summit with Putin in Alaska last week, Trump

said Ukraine must give up Crimea and abandon its NATO ambitions -- two of Moscow's top demands.

Zelensky was due to arrive shortly for a one-on-one with Trump in the Oval Office, scene of an astonishing meeting in February February when the US president and his deputy JD Vance publicly berated the Ukrainian.

Trump will later meet separately with the European leaders.

Trump, 79, said it was a "big day at the White House" but appeared to be in a combative mood, churning out a string of social media posts.

"I know exactly what I'm doing," the Republican said on his

Truth Social network. "And I don't need the advice of people who have been working on all of these conflicts for years, and were never able to do a thing to stop them."

'Peace through strength'

The European leaders held a preparatory meeting with the Ukrainian president in Washington on Monday morning, while Zelensky also met Trump's Ukraine envoy Keith Kellogg.

Zelensky described the talks at the White House as "very serious" -- and sought to flatter Trump ahead of the meeting, by echoing his trademark "peace through strength" language.

"President Trump has that strength. We have to do everything right to make peace happen," he said.

Zelensky later called on social media for a "reliable and lasting peace for Ukraine and for the whole of Europe" and said they would discuss Western security guarantees for Ukraine.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer told reporters on the plane to Washington: "We've got to make sure there is peace, that it is lasting peace, and that it is fair and that it is just."

Reports had said Putin would be open to Western security guarantees for Ukraine in the event of any peace deal -- but had ruled out Kyiv's long-term ambition to join NATO.

Russia kept up its attacks on Ukraine ahead of the new talks, killing at least seven people, including two children, in dozens of drone and ballistic missile strikes overnight, Ukrainian officials said.

The Trump-Putin summit in Alaska failed to produce a ceasefire in the nearly three-and-a-half-year war that began with Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

After, Trump dropped his previous insistence on a ceasefire in favor of seeking a complete peace deal, meaning negotiations could proceed while the war goes on. He also alarmed Kyiv and European capitals by repeating a number of Russian talking points.

Trump said Sunday that Zelensky could end the war "almost immediately, if he wants to" but that, for Ukraine, there was "no getting back" Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014, and "NO GOING INTO NATO."



US media reports have said Putin would consider freezing much of the current frontline in Ukraine if Kyiv agreed to completely give up the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine. Trump envoy Steve Witkoff said Moscow had made "some concessions" on territory.

US envoy says Israel's turn to 'comply' as Lebanon moves to disarm Hezbollah

- Israel was to withdraw its troops from the country but has kept them at five border points

AFP | Beirut, Lebanon

US envoy Tom Barrack yesterday called on Israel to honour commitments under a ceasefire that ended its war with Hezbollah, after the Lebanese government launched a process to disarm the militant group.

Under the November truce, which ended more than a year of hostilities including two months of all-out war between Israel and Hezbollah, the Iran-backed group was to withdraw its fighters from near the Israeli border and weapons were to come under the control of the Lebanese state.

Israel was to withdraw its troops from the country but has kept them at five border points it deems strategic and has continued to strike Lebanon, threatening to do so until Hezbollah has been disarmed.

"There's always a step-by-step approach but I think the Lebanese government has done their part. They've taken the first step. Now what we need is Israel to comply," Barrack said following a meeting in Beirut.



US ambassador to Turkey and special envoy for Syria Tom Barrack

rut with Lebanese President Joseph Aoun.

"We're all moving in the right direction," he said after meeting parliament speaker Nabih Berri.

Berri, a Hezbollah ally, said Israel's commitment to the ceasefire and its troop withdrawal was "the gateway to stability in Lebanon", a statement said.

'Progress'

Asked by reporters whether he expected to see Israel fully withdraw from Lebanese territory and stop its violations, Barrack said that

"that's exactly the next step" needed.

"We need participation on the part of Israel, and we need an economic plan for prosperity, restoration and renovation," the US diplomat added, with Lebanon weighed down by an economic crisis.

Barrack said Washington was "in the process of now discussing with Israel what their position is", adding that "in the next few weeks you're going to see progress on all sides."

"It means a better life for the people... and at least the beginning of a roadway to a different kind of dialogue" in the region, he said.

The visit comes after Lebanon's cabinet tasked the army with developing a plan to disarm Hezbollah by year end -- an unprecedented step since civil war factions gave up their weapons decades ago.

The cabinet has also tackled a US proposal that includes a time-

table for Hezbollah's disarmament, with Washington pressing Lebanon to take action.

The cabinet endorsed the introduction of the US text, which lists 11 objectives including to "ensure the sustainability" of the ceasefire, and to phase out "the armed presence of all non-state actors, including Hezbollah" across all Lebanese territory.

It also provides for demarcating Lebanon's land borders with Israel and neighbouring Syria, and a process involving the international community to support reconstruction.

'Lebanese process'

Aoun told Barrack that what was needed was for "other parties to adhere to the contents" of the joint declaration, "more support for the Lebanese army", and expedited steps towards reconstruction, the presidency said.

Prime Minister Nawaf Salam said Washington needed to "fulfil its responsibility in pressuring

Israel halt hostilities", withdraw troops and release Lebanese prisoners it holds.

Hezbollah, the only faction that kept its weapons after Lebanon's 1975-1990 civil war, emerged badly weakened from last year's war with Israel.

On Friday, Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem vowed to fight plans to disarm, saying that "the resistance will not surrender its weapons while... occupation persists".

On Sunday, Aoun told the Saudi-owned Al Arabiya channel authorities would do "everything possible... to spare Lebanon any internal or external shock".

If Lebanon rejected the US plan, "then Israel will intensify its attacks, Lebanon will be economically isolated, and none of us will be able to respond to the aggression", he said.

Barrack on Monday stressed that "dealing with Hezbollah, as we've always said, is a Lebanese process".