



Russia demands Ukraine's Donbas region as Abu Dhabi talks open

Russia insists Ukraine must withdraw from the east as three-way peace talks begin

● Territory remains core stumbling block

● Kyiv rejects major territorial concessions

AFP | Abu Dhabi

Three-way talks between Russia, Ukraine and the US opened in Abu Dhabi, the UAE said yesterday, as Moscow said it was not dropping its demand that Kyiv pull out of its eastern Donbas region.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said territory remained the key issue and would be on the agenda for the talks.

They are the first direct public negotiations between Moscow and Kyiv on a plan being pushed by the US President Donald Trump to end the almost four-year-long war.

"The talks commenced today in Abu Dhabi and are scheduled to continue over two days, as part of ongoing efforts to promote dialogue and identify political solutions to the crisis," the UAE foreign ministry said in a statement.

High-level teams from the three countries gathered for the negotiations a day after Trump met with Zelensky in Davos -- and hours after US envoy Steve Witkoff held late-night talks with Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin.

The Emirates protest will take place as thousands of people in Kyiv were without heating in sub-zero temperatures due to



Russia's President Vladimir Putin welcomes US special envoy Steve Witkoff, US President Donald Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner and Commissioner of the Federal Acquisition Service, FAS, Josh Gruenbaum during a meeting at the Kremlin

Russian strikes.

The EU, which has sent hundreds of generators to the war-torn country, has accused Moscow of "deliberately depriving civilians of heat".

More deadly strikes

Before the talks began, Kyiv said Russian strikes had killed three people yesterday in the Kharkiv region and four people -- including a father and his five-year-old son -- overnight in the east.

While diplomacy to end Europe's worst conflict since World War II has gained pace, Moscow

and Kyiv remain at odds, in what looks like a deadlock, over the issue of territory.

Hours after Putin met Witkoff -- and Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner -- in Moscow, the Kremlin said its maximalist demand that Kyiv withdraw from the eastern Donbas region still stands.

"Russia's position is well known on the fact that Ukraine, Ukrainian armed forces, have to leave the territory of the Donbas," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"This is a very important condition," he added.

Kyiv, which still controls around 20 percent of the eastern region, has deemed such terms unacceptable.

Germany, a Ukraine ally, said it still had "major questions" over whether Moscow was willing to compromise.

'God willing'

Both sides say the fate of territory in Ukraine's east is one of the main outstanding issues in the search for a settlement to a war that has killed tens of thousands, displaced millions and decimated eastern Ukraine.

"The Donbas is a key issue,"



Despite peace talks, Russia occupies about 20% of Ukraine, and warns it will pursue its objectives militarily if negotiations fail

Zelensky -- who said he and Trump had agreed on post-war security guarantees in Davos -- told reporters yesterday, ahead of the talks.

"God willing (the talks will lead) to ending the war," he added, before cautioning: "It could go differently, but it's a step."

After speaking to the head of his delegation Rustem Umerov, Zelensky said the exact formats of the meetings was yet to be set.

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 is the first time they face each other to talk about the Trump administration's plan.

Along with security chief Umerov, Kyiv's team also includes Zelensky's new chief-of-staff Kyrylo Budanov, negotiator David Arakhania and ground army chief Andriy Gnatov.

Trump says US 'armada' headed toward Gulf



An aerial view shows the USS Iwo Jima (LHD-7), a US Navy Wasp-class amphibious assault ship, docked at the port of Ponce, Puerto Rico, with the USS Mahan (DDG-72), an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer

AFP | Washington

President Donald Trump said a US "armada" was heading toward the Gulf and that Washington was watching Iran closely, even after downplaying the prospect of imminent military action and saying Tehran appeared interested in talks.

Trump has repeatedly left open the option of new military action against Iran after Washington backed and joined Israel's 12-day war in June aimed at degrading Iranian nuclear and

ballistic missile programmes.

The prospect of immediate American action seemed to recede in recent days, with both sides insisting on giving diplomacy a chance.

On his way back from the World Economic Forum in Davos, the president told reporters on Air Force One the United States was sending a "massive fleet" toward Iran "just in case."

"We're watching Iran," he said. "I'd rather not see anything happen but we're watching them very closely."

Fury over five-year-old's detention in US immigration crackdown

AFP | Washington

Outrage grew yesterday at the detention of a five-year-old boy in a massive immigration crackdown in Minneapolis, as US Vice President JD Vance defended federal agents' actions.

As "the father of a five-year-old" himself, Vance acknowledged he was stunned by news of the child's predicament at first.

"I think to myself 'Oh, my God, this is terrible. How did we arrest a five-year-old?'" Vance said Thursday, pivoting to say he then did more research and changed his mind because Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) detained the child after his father ran from immigration agents.

"Well, what are they supposed to do? Are they supposed to let a five-year-old child freeze to death?"

More broadly, Vance blamed local leaders for disorder on a visit to the troubled midwestern state, which has been



An individual confronts Border Patrol agents during a protest

rocked by increasingly tense protests since federal agents shot and killed US citizen Renee Good on January 7.

The child's detention came as the US attorney general announced Thursday the arrests of three activists accused of disrupting a St. Paul church service in a protest, accusing a pastor at the church of working for ICE.

Thousands of federal agents have been deployed to the Dem-

ocratic-led state, as the Trump administration presses its campaign to deport what it says are millions of illegal immigrants across the country.

The arrests of lawyer and social activist Nekima Levy Armstrong, Chauntyll Louisa Allen and William Kelly in connection with a Sunday protest at Cities Church in the state capital St. Paul, were announced by Attorney General Pam Bondi on X.



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Yesterday's announcement that there will be no new US tariffs on Europe is positive. At the same time, the EU will continue to stand up for its interests and will defend itself, its member states, its citizens and its companies, against any form of coercion.

@eucopresident

02



Europe stood firm and united in full solidarity with Greenland & the Kingdom of Denmark. Work on Arctic security continues. We'll step up investments in Greenland and Arctic-ready equipment. And deepen security cooperation with partners in the region

@vonderleyen

03



VP Vance on left wing radicals protesting the arrests of criminal migrants: "You have a small band of very far left people who are doing everything they can...to try to make ICE out to be the ultimate enemy, and engage in this weird, small-scale civil war."

@VP

04



One year ago, President Trump signed the historic Executive Order to withdraw from WHO, the organization that covered up the worst pandemic in modern history and attempted to impose ridiculous global mandates. We stand proud in our commitment to American sovereignty.

@USAmbun

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