

Tactical success for Kyiv: a US-Ukrainian ceasefire proposal

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On 11 March, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and the United States reached an agreement on a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine. During the negotiations, which lasted over eight hours, Ukraine was represented by the Head of the President's Office Andriy Yermak; Foreign Minister Andriy Sybiha; and Defence Minister, Rustem Umerov, while the United States delegation was led by Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, and National Security Advisor, Mike Waltz. In a joint statement released following the meeting (see Appendix), Washington announced the immediate unblocking of military aid and intelligence support for Ukraine, while Kyiv expressed its readiness to implement a 30-day ceasefire, provided that Moscow also agreed to it. The parties also agreed to establish negotiating teams tasked with working towards a lasting peace settlement.

The ceasefire proposal is expected to be presented to the Kremlin shortly, although Washington has not specified how this will be done. Mike Waltz stated that he would speak with his Russian counterpart in the coming days. Additionally, according to unconfirmed reports, Steve Witkoff, the U.S. President's Special Envoy for the Middle East, may travel to Moscow for a further visit. Meanwhile, President Donald Trump has announced plans to speak with Vladimir Putin.

The agreement reached in talks with the US representatives should be regarded as a success for Kyiv. Ukraine has secured the restoration of US military and intelligence support, mitigated the fallout from Volodymyr Zelensky's dispute with Donald Trump and J.D. Vance in the Oval Office on 28 February, convinced Washington of its commitment to ending the war as swiftly as possible, and shifted responsibility for the ceasefire onto Moscow.

Commentary

- **The restoration of US arms and military equipment deliveries, and, most importantly, the resumption of intelligence sharing with Ukraine, are crucial for maintaining its defensive capabilities.** Another success for Kyiv is the easing of tensions with the US over the alleged lack of Ukraine's willingness to pursue peace. This was made possible by Volodymyr Zelensky's recent shift in rhetoric, as he expressed regret over the tone of his Oval Office meeting, reaffirmed the need for a swift end to the war, and declared Ukraine's readiness to commence peace talks immediately.
- **A 30-day ceasefire would be favourable to Ukraine, given the collapse of its defences in Kursk Oblast and the advances of the Russian army in the east.** However, the most likely scenario is that the Kremlin will reject the proposal, allowing Kyiv to attribute the failure

of negotiations to Moscow. Ukraine also hopes that Russia's refusal will persuade the US to increase military aid and intensify pressure on the Kremlin.

- **The US will treat Russia's response to the ceasefire proposal as a test of its credibility** in pursuing peace and as a measure of its true intentions. During a press conference following the Jeddah meeting, Marco Rubio stated that a refusal from Moscow would send a clear signal regarding who is obstructing the peace talks. The US has initiated this process with several gestures aimed at demonstrating goodwill towards Russia, including its opposition to Ukraine's NATO membership and the commencement of talks on easing or lifting sanctions. However, Washington expects reciprocity from the Kremlin—a point emphasised in the joint US-Ukrainian statement following the talks in Saudi Arabia.
- **The Trump administration fears that Russia may attempt to prolong the negotiation process.** Secretary Rubio indicated that the US not only expects a swift response regarding the ceasefire but also insists that the next stage should involve 'genuine negotiations' rather than 'endless talks'. A negative response from Moscow could result in a tightening of the sanctions regime—a possibility suggested by Trump himself.
- **Kyiv's agreement to a ceasefire places the Kremlin in a difficult position.** On the one hand, for many months, Russia's official **position** has been that it would not agree to any ceasefire and would only end hostilities if its demands – effectively involving Kyiv's capitulation – were met. In this context, accepting an unconditional truce would constitute a reputational defeat for Moscow and a signal its weakness. On the other hand, rejecting the US ceasefire proposal risks jeopardising the prospect of a 'reset' in relations with the Trump administration, which the Kremlin hopes could lead to a loosening or even lifting of American sanctions. Consequently, Moscow is playing for time, avoiding a public position on the proposal by claiming it requires detailed information from the US. In direct contacts with US officials, the Kremlin will likely seek to link the ceasefire to Ukraine's acceptance of Russian conditions.
- **The statement contains no reference to the need for territorial concessions, despite Rubio hinting at this requirement on the eve of the meeting. This may be regarded as a positive outcome for Ukraine.** This issue will likely be deferred until potential peace talks, which would begin if a ceasefire were implemented. According to opinion polls conducted in February, more than half of Ukrainians oppose any territorial concessions to Russia. This public sentiment may have strengthened Kyiv's position in its talks with the US, framing such a compromise as socially unacceptable. Discussions on security guarantees for Ukraine have also been deferred. Although these guarantees were not mentioned in the statement, Kyiv remains committed to pursuing them.
- **Regardless of the outcomes of the Jeddah meeting, Kyiv will continue to increase pressure on European countries, urging them to increase support** that could, as far as possible, compensate for the shortfall in US supplies. This strategy was reflected in an article by Andriy Yermak, the influential Head of the President's Office, published in *The Guardian* on the day of the meeting. In the article, he called on Europe to strengthen its defence autonomy, tighten sanctions on Russia, and utilise frozen Russian assets to support Ukraine.

APPENDIX. Main points of the joint US-Ukraine statement

- Both sides acknowledge that the restoration of lasting peace in Ukraine is their shared goal.
- Ukraine once again expresses its gratitude to the United States – particularly President Trump, the US Congress, and the American people – for facilitating significant progress towards peace.
- Ukraine agrees to the US proposal involving a temporary 30-day ceasefire. Any further extension would require mutual consent and be contingent upon Russia's acceptance and simultaneous implementation. Reciprocity from Russia is essential to achieving peace.
- The United States will immediately 'lift the pause' on intelligence sharing and resume security assistance for Ukraine.
- Humanitarian efforts are an integral part of the peace process, including the exchange of prisoners of war, the release of detained civilians, and the return of forcibly displaced Ukrainian children.
- Both sides will establish their negotiating teams and immediately begin talks to achieve a lasting peace that ensures Ukraine's long-term security. The United States has committed to discussing these specific proposals with Russia's representatives.
- Ukraine reiterates that its European partners should be involved in the peace process.
- The presidents of both countries have agreed to sign a comprehensive agreement on the development of Ukraine's key mineral resources as soon as possible.