

# Ukrainian and Russian officials meet in Istanbul

**Jason Melanovski****18 May 2025**

Ukrainian and Russian officials met in Istanbul, Turkey on Friday for the first direct talks between the two warring sides in the ongoing NATO-backed proxy war in over three years.

US and Turkish representatives were also present. The Trump administration is still attempting to reach an agreement with the oligarchic Putin regime to negotiate a settlement of the war that will ensure the maximum profit for American imperialism in whatever remains of Ukraine and the former Soviet Union more broadly.

During the talks, representatives of the Kremlin reiterated demands that Ukraine accept neutrality, renounce NATO membership, withdraw its troops from five Russian-occupied territories and guarantee language rights to Ukraine's Russian-speakers; meanwhile, Ukraine demanded a 30-day ceasefire and direct talks between Putin and Zelensky. No concrete plan to end the war appears imminent, with the Ukrainian side labeling the Russian demands as "non-starters." The only results of the talks so far were an agreement to exchange POWs and statements by both sides that they were prepared to continue to talk.

The right-wing dictatorial regime of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was reportedly forced into the talks by US and European officials, after suggesting he would not authorize any Ukrainian delegation to meet with the Russian representatives. As a result, the talks, which were originally scheduled for Thursday last week, were postponed until Friday instead.

According to the Washington Post, "The U.S. and European officials stressed it was critical to at least send a delegation of senior aides including his chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, and Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha, but faced repeated resistance from Ukraine's leader."

In the lead-up to the meetings, US President Donald Trump also publicly intervened, telling Zelensky directly on social media that Ukraine must participate in the Istanbul talks as he seeks a deal with Moscow amid his global trade war and push towards actual war with China.

Following Trump's statement, Zelensky ultimately came out in support of the talks. He appointed Ukrainian Defense

Minister Rustem Umerov to lead the negotiations, along with 12 other delegates. Among them was Oleksandr Poklad, the Deputy Head of Ukraine's notorious Security Service (SBU), which has spent the last three years imprisoning thousands of Ukrainians on trumped-up charges of "treason," including the Ukrainian socialist opponent of the war, Bogdan Syrotiuk.

The Russian delegation was represented by Vladimir Medinsky, who led previous talks in Istanbul in April 2022, and nearly came to an agreement ending the war in exchange for Ukraine terminating its drive to officially join NATO and accept neutrality, among other conditions. Ukraine ultimately withdrew from the talks after then-United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson flew to Kiev and urged Ukraine to "just continue fighting" in exchange for indefinite support from Western imperialism against Russia.

Zelensky later passed a law, with the approval of Ukraine's parliament, forbidding any direct peace talks with Moscow during his presidency, as continuing the war had become an essential part of his regime's ongoing existence.

Over three years later, hundreds of thousands of working-class Ukrainians and Russians have been killed, and billions of dollars have been spent by Western imperialism to fuel a proxy war that has seen Ukraine continue to incrementally lose territory to Russian forces and has brought the world closer to nuclear war than at any point since the Cold War.

While the working class has suffered immensely, the Ukrainian ruling class has further enriched itself throughout the war, taking advantage of billions of dollars in Western aid that have flowed into Europe's poorest country.

According to recent comments made by the head of Ukraine's Tax Service Ruslan Kravchenko to Ukraine's Channel 24, the number of millionaires in Ukraine has increased by 61 percent in 2024 alone.

Seeking to preemptively sabotage any possibility of a negotiated settlement, the Ukrainian side had already publicly criticized the talks. They have focused on the absence of Russian President Vladimir Putin, who first proposed the talks last Sunday after Ukraine's European

imperialist backers threatened Russia with additional sanctions and a massive military buildup for war.

On Thursday, Zelensky flew to Ankara to meet with Turkish President Recep Erdogan and released a statement on social media calling the Russian delegation “decorative” while claiming that the Ukrainian side “is of the highest level.” Following his meeting with Erdogan, he once again publicly rejected giving up claims to Crimea as part of a peace deal reportedly proposed by the US, stating, “Crimea is Ukraine. Crimea is a Ukrainian peninsula.”

Further underscoring his rejection of the talks, Zelensky later flew to Albania to attend a summit of the European Political Community.

Fearful that the end of the proxy war in a negotiated settlement and the loss of a substantial amount of Ukrainian territory could spell both the end of his political as well as his actual life, as former Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba has warned, Zelensky is clearly appealing to the European imperialist powers, namely France, Germany and the UK, and against a Trump-managed peace treaty.

The Ukrainian ruling class and corporate media have likewise denounced the Istanbul negotiations as a sideshow.

“This is a negotiating farce,” Hanna Hopko, co-founder of the International Center for Ukrainian Victory, told the Kyiv Independent. “It’s already clear that Putin is just mocking (US President Donald) Trump.”

The negotiations were also ridiculed by the country’s far-right leaders, who fear that a US-backed negotiated settlement with Moscow could result in a reduction of their substantial power within the Ukrainian state.

As Bohdan Krotevych, former chief of staff of the infamous neo-Nazi Azov brigade wrote on X, “So in fact, if Putin doesn’t meet with Zelensky in person, it means he’s simply afraid of him. You can try to come up with excuses or fairy tales, but the fact remains. I can’t recall a single Russian leader who was this pathetic and cowardly.”

While the US has supported the talks, at least initially, on Thursday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio revealed that, in reality, the Trump regime did not expect much from the Istanbul discussions to begin with.

“I don’t think we’re going to have a breakthrough here until President Trump and President Putin interact directly on this topic,” he said, following a meeting of Nato foreign ministers in Turkey.

Earlier in the day, Trump reiterated that ultimately he was seeking to negotiate a deal directly with Putin. On TruthSocial, he announced plans to speak with both the Russian president and Zelensky on Monday.

“Look, nothing’s going to happen until Putin and I get together,” Trump told the BBC while on board Air Force One.

Despite the public comments on ending the war coming from the Trump administration, there also clearly exists an opposing faction within the European and American ruling class that is counting on not only continuing the proxy war in Ukraine but expanding it.

Thus, Janis Sarts, director of the Riga-based NATO Strategic Communications Center of Excellence (StratCom), told the Ukrainian news site Gordonua.com, “I remain convinced the fate of peace in Ukraine will be decided primarily on the battlefield, not at the negotiating table.”

Whatever the outcome of the Istanbul talks, following the failure of its adventurist invasion of the Russian Kursk region, the Zelensky government is facing a deteriorating military situation as it continues to lose territory in an attritional war that has already killed hundreds of thousands of Ukrainian soldiers.

On Friday, Oleksandr Shyrshyn, battalion commander of the 47th Separate Mechanized Brigade, which received training from NATO and had recently taken part in operations in Russia’s Kursk and Belgorod provinces, resigned from his position, sharply criticizing Ukraine’s military leadership in the process.

“I have never received more stupid objectives than in the current direction,” Shyrshyn wrote in a Facebook post announcing his resignation. “Someday I will tell you the details, but the stupid loss of people, trembling in front of a stupid general, leads to nothing but failures.”

“I hope your children will also serve in the infantry and carry out your orders,” Shyrshyn wrote.



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