



By: Tomorrow's Affairs Staff

# Talks on Ukraine in Jeddah - a meeting after which the peace process will not go backwards



Places where significant peace agreements have traditionally been reached, such as Geneva or Vienna, have been losing their old glory, taken over by Middle Eastern mega-resorts, such as Jeddah in Saudi Arabia.

High-ranking delegations from about 40 nations convened at the Red Sea resort over the weekend for another round of negotiations on the Ukraine peace plan.

The host did a remarkable job of bringing together groups with different perspectives on the Ukrainian issue, despite the absence of a concluding statement or conclusions from the participants.

Besides, some of them more or less openly support Russia's position.

But that is the greatest quality of meeting in Jeddah. The previous similar meeting, where Ukraine gathered about 15 countries to discuss its peace plan, was held in Copenhagen last June, and did not result in a significant breakthrough.

## Russia had no place in Jeddah

Not even a meeting in Saudi Arabia will end the Russian-Ukrainian war. But afterwards, it will be hard to imagine that the peace effort will move backwards, losing the interest of the so-called "neutral" states.

Russia did not take part in the talks and would not have responded even if it had been invited.

Russia stated that it would "keep an eye on the talks" but added that the present Kyiv regime and its positions make peace negotiations impossible.

The Kremlin's attitude disqualifies Russia from any subsequent talks and attempts at peace, leaving it with its own, more frequent pleas for peace in circumstances where it lacks international support.

## The presence of China is a significant change

The meeting was held in Jeddah without Russia, but China was there, which was the greatest accomplishment of the conference organised by Saudi Arabia.

Beijing's representatives did not participate in the Copenhagen round of negotiations, but their presence in Jeddah was a strong sign that China is open to different peace scenarios, including those Moscow was excluded from.

"We have many disagreements and we have heard different positions, but it is important that our principles are shared", said Li Hui, Special Envoy for Eurasian Affairs, who attended the meeting in Jeddah.

Senior diplomats from India, Brazil, and South Africa - all Russian partners from the BRICS - also participated. Their presence demonstrated that the meeting in Saudi Arabia had no anti-Russian agenda, and that it was possible to find a peaceful solution without Russia.

"I do think it's important that China is there. The fact that China has gone despite Russia's absence says to me that the Chinese are carefully hedging away from their unstinting support for Moscow in this war", said Charles Kupchan from the Washington Council on Foreign Relations.

## Attentive listeners

With this move, China has not indicated—not even suggested—that it will alter its favourable policy toward Moscow. China can be relied upon to bring about peace, even with those who take a distinctly pro-Ukrainian position.

Ukraine is one of the conference's winners because Russia's BRICS partners agreed to attend because of it. In addition, Kyiv's 10-point peace plan, for which it has been requesting support since the end of last year, was presented to a large audience.

This plan, which involves, amongst other things, restoring Ukraine's territorial integrity, is well known to Ukraine's Western allies. Russia, of course, opposes it because it began its invasion a year and a half ago as a result of the collapse of Ukrainian sovereignty.

But the Ukrainian plan gained, if not new supporters, then at least new attentive listeners, among the countries of the Global South, in particular, among large non-Western factors, such as China, India and Brazil.

## A blow to the Russian narrative on Ukraine

It seems this was the most significant goal of Kyiv and its Western partners ahead of the meeting in Saudi Arabia because Ukraine has not had this kind of attention regarding its peace plan until now.

“It gives Ukraine an ability to try to appeal to the court of world opinion, to get major countries that have been on the fence -Saudi Arabia, Brazil, India - to get them onto its side. I don't think we're going to see anything concrete emerge from this conversation, but it is a step forward”, said Charles Kupchan.

At the same time, the composition of the

participants at the conference in Jeddah is such that it destroys the established Russian narrative that Ukraine has the support only of the so-called "collective West", whose proxy it is.

Russia's BRICS partner and some other participants will not become strong supporters of Ukraine overnight. The fact that they sat at the same table with Ukraine and its Western allies regarding the Ukrainian peace plan has not been pleasant for Moscow.

And inevitably, the Jeddah meeting's host, who is regarded as one of the "neutrals" in the Russian-Ukrainian confrontation, also emerges as the victor.

Saudi Arabia has recorded yet another significant diplomatic if not peace-making, initiative that will support its strategy to present itself as a global force that could handle crises outside its region.

After several diplomatic breakthroughs in the region, an agreement with Iran, for example, or mediation regarding Syria's return to the Arab League, with a meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia strengthened its positions towards both China and the US, with which it seeks even closer ties.