

VOA NEWS

February 20, 2025

I'm VOA's Joe Ramsey with this worldwide news update.

U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy to Ukraine and Russia visited Kyiv on Wednesday, a day after high-level U.S. and Russian talks in Saudi Arabia. The diplomatic move comes as the American president and his Ukrainian counterpart both lashed out at each other over the war's origins and plans to end it. VOA's Arash Arabasadi has more.

U.S. special envoy for Ukraine and Russia Keith Kellogg's visit comes on the heels of U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio's meeting with his Russian counterpart in Saudi Arabia's capital, Riyadh.

Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine nearly three years ago. But this week, President Trump seemed to imply that Kyiv was to blame for the conflict while dismissing Ukraine's lack of representation in Riyadh.

"Today I heard, 'oh, well, we weren't invited. Well, you've been there for three years. You should have ended it three years. You should have never started it. You could have made a deal.'"

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed Trump's comments in Kyiv.

"We have seen this disinformation. We understand it comes from Russia. Unfortunately, President Trump, with great respect for him as a leader of the American people, lives in this disinformation space."

Trump later Wednesday took to his social media platform to call Zelenskyy a "dictator," claiming he has single-digit approval ratings at home despite internal Ukrainian polling showing his favorability over 50 percent.

Zelenskyy says he'd like Trump's team to hear more truth about Ukraine as the soldiers combat advancing Russian forces.

A NATO official recently predicted Moscow would increase the pace and intensity of its assaults amid talks to end the war.

Arash Arabasadi, VOA News.

This is VOA News.

European leaders warn that the outcome of ongoing peace talks between Moscow and Washington will have profound implications for the whole of Europe as Russia's war on Ukraine enters its fourth year. Henry Ridgwell reports.

Russia's tanks rolled across the Ukrainian border three years ago this month, triggering the worst conflict on European soil since World War II. On the frozen front lines, the war grinds on as Russia's forces edge forward.

But behind the scenes, the geopolitical forces that are shaping the conflict appear to be changing fast. Russia and the United States began peace talks this week in Saudi Arabia. Ukraine and Europe have not been invited.

Britain and France have already said they may be willing to contribute a peacekeeping force in Ukraine. It's estimated that would require at least 100,000 troops.

There are deep concerns over the potential risks. The U.S. defense secretary has said that European security will no longer be a priority, and Washington is demanding NATO allies increase their defense spending.

Hard decisions with profound implications for Europe, says British Defense Secretary John Healy.

"The decisions that we make right now over the coming weeks will not only define the outcome of the conflict in Ukraine, but the security of our world for a generation to come."

Many in the region fear those decisions are being made by others, and Europe isn't in the room.

Henry Ridgwell, VOA News.

New York Governor Kathy Hochul slammed the Trump administration on Wednesday for revoking approval of New York City's congestion pricing program designed to reduce traffic and raise funds for public transit improvements. Reuters correspondent Jillian Kitchener reports.

New York City's congestion pricing program charges most drivers \$9 to enter much of Manhattan in an effort to reduce traffic.

"Feels like the commuters of our city and our region are now the roadkill on Donald Trump's revenge tour against New York."

In a Truth Social post, President Trump said, quote, "Congestion pricing is dead. Manhattan and all of New York is saved. Long live the king."

"We are not subservient to a king or anyone else out of Washington."

Transit officials say the program has cut commuting times and that subway ridership has grown since the toll was introduced.

Reuters correspondent Jillian Kitchener.

That wraps up this update, but the world and news never stop. For additional updates, visit our website, voanews.com. I'm Joe Ramsey, VOA News.