



Saudi Arabia's Efforts to Promote Dialogue on Ukraine

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Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince and Ukraine's President during the Arab League Summit in Saudi Arabia, May 2023

Source: [Arab News](#)

Saudi Arabia's growing role in international diplomacy was again highlighted after the Kingdom hosted the Ukraine peace talks among senior officials from around 40 countries in early August



2023 in Jeddah. Following a similar meeting held in Copenhagen two months prior, the Jeddah meeting allowed for a continued discussion on the crisis in Ukraine. It explored how many political, security, economic, and humanitarian issues, which have also taken on a global dimension, could be tackled. Unlike the meeting in Denmark, where the host country has been vocal and explicit in siding with Ukraine, such as through the recent provision of Danish F-16 warplanes, Saudi Arabia has maintained a more neutral position in the conflict, allowing it to have a more balanced and thus, constructive, role in mediating between the two sides. While it did not attend the talks, Russia said it would “[keep an eye](#)” on the outcome, and Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov [said](#) that “any attempt to promote a peaceful settlement deserves a positive evaluation.”

Overall, the Jeddah peace talks were significant for several reasons. First, the fact that Saudi Arabia hosted the Ukraine peace talks allowed for a broader discussion on the way forward due to the wide participation. In attendance included the GCC countries, the US, the UK, EU member-states, Türkiye, China, Brazil, India, South Africa, Canada, Australia, South Korea, and the UN. While no official statement was released, Ukraine has called the meeting “[productive](#)” in promoting further dialogue on a peaceful resolution. Andriy Yermak, head of Zelenskyy’s office, released a [statement](#) where he explained that “the meeting in Jeddah was a step toward the practical implementation of Ukraine’s 10-step-peace formula.”

The fact that the Jeddah meeting used the Ukrainian peace proposal as a point of departure set a clear direction for the discussion. Instead of only discussing the crisis, the meeting in Jeddah moved considerations of the resolution path forward among the wide range of participants. For example, the participation of China and India, both seen as close to Russia, underlined the effective role of Saudi Arabia as a driving force in bridging existing differences. It can therefore be argued that Saudi Arabia’s hosting of the Ukraine peace talks advanced the dialogue on ending the crisis in Ukraine and enhanced the Kingdom’s recognition as a global player in an increasingly emerging multipolar world.

Although no official document was issued, the Jeddah peace talks were a step in the right direction toward promoting peace in Ukraine. Oleksandr Merezhko, Ukrainian MP and head of the foreign



relations committee in the Ukrainian parliament, [stated](#), “the very fact of the start of these negotiations is already an important historical event.” Moreover, [according to](#) Yermak, “each state participating in the consultations has the opportunity to show leadership in global efforts for peace. And most of them have already defined their role in the implementation of certain points of the formula...The parties agreed to continue working at various representative levels to establish a just and comprehensive peace.” German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock praised the talks, [explaining](#) that “every millimeter of progress toward a fair and honest peace brings a glimmer of hope for the people of Ukraine.”

Second, the attendance of China was of particular value. As a result of the increasing ties between China and Saudi Arabia recently, China, which did not attend the Copenhagen talks, “participated actively” in the Jeddah meeting, giving Beijing the opportunity to develop Sino-Saudi relations even further, as well as increase its ties with its allies in the South. Additionally, the meeting provided a venue for China to improve its relations with the West, specifically with the US. The Ukraine talks showed that the Kingdom could talk to both the US and China simultaneously, as well as play a role in bringing the two countries together. US State Department spokesman Matthew Miller [stated](#) that the US does “believe it was productive that China attended,” following side talks held between the US and China during the Jeddah meeting. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba also [explained](#) that “Saudi Arabia has attracted China, and this is a historic victory,” again underlining the Kingdom’s role in such matters.

Third, the peace talks highlighted improved US-Saudi ties. The decades-long strategic relationship between Saudi Arabia and the US has hit a few bumps recently, particularly after the US accused the Kingdom of siding with Russia against Ukraine following the OPEC+ decision. Far from using OPEC+ as a tool to support the Russian war effort, the Kingdom has stood firmly against the attack on Ukraine’s sovereignty, reiterating that its decision to cut oil production was based solely on serving economic interests and the global economy. Now, bilateral ties appear to be back on track, with the US putting in the effort needed to mend the relationship. This is the US’ fifth consecutive month a senior official from the Biden Administration has visited the Kingdom. The Jeddah peace talks demonstrated that the Kingdom, having a neutral position, was, and always will be, an essential partner in promoting regional and global peace and stability on various fronts.



Already, Saudi Arabia has sought ways to contribute to achieving peace in Ukraine, as evidenced by its role in arranging for a prisoner exchange between Ukraine and Russia. The Kingdom has also [announced](#) \$400 million in humanitarian aid to Ukraine and provided \$10 million in aid to Ukrainian refugees in Poland. Following the Kingdom's vote for the latest United Nations General Assembly resolution declaring the annexation of four regions of Ukraine as illegal, the Ukrainian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, Anatolii Petrenko, [expressed](#) his "pride" that Saudi Arabia is "clearly supporting Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity." In the near future, the Kingdom could play a role in advancing the grain deal as well as continued humanitarian efforts, such as the return of captured children.

Another meeting is scheduled to take place within [six weeks](#) of the Jeddah peace talks, with a summit expected to eventually follow. The next meeting, however, should bring all parties to the table, including Russia. As [stated](#) by Brazil's foreign policy advisor, Celso Amorim, at the Jeddah peace talks, "any real negotiation must include all parties... Although Ukraine is the biggest victim, if we really want peace, we have to involve Moscow in this process in some form."

In conclusion, there is little doubt that the GCC countries are steadily establishing themselves as significant global political and economic power players. The Kingdom has branched out its diplomacy, with its balanced position an advantage in facilitating discussion on critical global issues, such as the Ukraine crisis. The Jeddah peace talks served as a constructive step in multiple aspects--advancing the dialogue on ending the crisis in Ukraine, strengthening Sino-Saudi relations, and reinforcing US-Saudi relations.

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