

Politics

Saudis Host Zelenskiy, Assad in New Show of Diplomatic Force

Ukrainian leader visits Saudi Arabia ahead of G7 meeting

He addresses gathering and meets Saudi Arabian Crown Prince



By [Sam Dagher](#)

May 19, 2023 at 12:02 PM GMT+2

Updated on May 19, 2023 at 6:10 PM GMT+2

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Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy attended an Arab summit in Saudi Arabia and addressed leaders including Syria's President Bashar Al Assad, a pariah in the West and staunch ally of Russia's Vladimir Putin.

Zelenskiy visited the kingdom on Friday en route to the Group of Seven meeting in Japan. He spoke with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and then made a speech at the gathering in Jeddah.

His trip comes as Ukraine prepares a major counteroffensive against Russia. Zelenskiy travels extensively to boost financial, diplomatic and military support for Ukraine as it tries to retake territory occupied by Moscow. Arab countries have opted against sanctioning Russia and most are neutral about the war, if not openly supportive of Putin.

Zelenskiy had sit-down meetings with the heads of the delegations from the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait and Oman, his office said.

Saudi Power

Having Zelenskiy and Assad in the same ornate hall signaled Prince Mohammed's desire for Saudi Arabia to be a major diplomatic power.

The country's de facto ruler expressed his "delight" at hosting both men and said Riyadh was ready to mediate between Russia and Ukraine.

Zelenskiy arrived in Jeddah aboard a French plane that took off from Poland, according to Saudi-owned Al Arabiya TV.

Not all the nations were pleased with his presence. State media in Algeria, a long-time backer of Russia, accused the Saudis of breaking with regional consensus with the invite. “What is Zelenskiy doing at the Arab Summit?” El Khabar newspaper asked on its front page.

Assad was attending an Arab League meeting for the first time in 13 years, marking a victory for a leader sanctioned by the US and several European nations for war atrocities.

[Read More: Saudis Welcome Assad in Diplomatic Win for Syria’s Leader](#)

Saudi Arabia is eager to be seen as the Middle East’s uncontested economic and political leader. It’s increasingly playing the role of conflict mediator, with Prince Mohammed trying to ensure regional troubles do not hold back his grand plans to transform the economy into a tourism and technology hub.

The kingdom views its relationship with Russia as crucial for ensuring stable prices for oil, by far its biggest source of revenue. Riyadh and Moscow lead OPEC+, an alliance of major crude producers.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia has tried to strike a balanced approach to the war in Ukraine.

Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal Bin Farhan traveled [to Kyiv in February](#), where he met with Zelenskiy and offered more than \$400 million in financial support. Both Ukraine and its allies in Europe and the US may be looking to the kingdom and other Gulf Arab states as a source of further funding. The Ukraine Recovery Conference will be held in London next month.

— *With Kateryna Kadabashy, Souhail Karam, and Daryna Krasnolutska*

(Updates with Zelenskiy’s meetings.)