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Ukraine's Deposed Leader Urges Zelenskiy to 'Stop the Bloodshed'

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Ukraine's former president Viktor Yanukovych. **Vladimir Gerdo / TASS**

Ukraine's deposed leader Viktor Yanukovych called on President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to reach a peace deal "at any cost" in a letter published by Russian state media on the 13th day of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The former Ukrainian president was found guilty of treason in absentia for requesting Russian military assistance during the pro-Western Euromaidan protests that ousted him from office in 2014.

"I am well aware that you have many 'advisers,' but you personally must stop the bloodshed at any cost and reach a peace agreement," Yanukovych told Zelenskiy on Tuesday.

His letter, carried by Russia's state-run RIA Novosti news agency, made no mention of Russian President Vladimir Putin's order to invade Ukraine on Feb. 24.

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Three rounds of Russian-Ukrainian ceasefire talks in recent days have made no breakthroughs and Zelenskiy accused Russia of reneging on previous escape route agreements and trying to stop evacuees with methods that include planting explosives on roads.

In his letter, Yanukovych appeared to blame Zelenskiy for the hostilities, which the United Nations says have led to hundreds of civilian deaths and displaced as many as 2 million people.

"From your first day you promised to stop the war in Ukraine, and that is the only reason why all of Ukraine supported you. You could have become president of peace, but unfortunately this did not happen," Yanukovych said.

"You probably dream of becoming a true hero! But heroism is not for show, it is not about fighting to the last Ukrainian. It is in self-sacrifice, in overcoming your own pride and ambitions to save people's lives."

Russian figures including Chechnya's strongman leader Ramzan Kadyrov have called on Zelenskiy to cede power to Yanukovych. Recent Russian media reports suggested that Yanukovych's plane may have landed in Minsk, the capital of Russia's ally Belarus, which the European Union has labeled as a "co-aggressor" in the war.

The Kremlin has said it considers Zelenskiy to be Ukraine's legitimate president despite Putin calling the country's leadership "drug addicts and Neo-Nazis."

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