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France Says Mariupol Humanitarian Mission Not Possible 'At This Stage'

By AFP

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Local people walk past a burnt out vehicle in the city of Mariupol. **Valentin Sprinchak / TASS**

The conditions for carrying out a humanitarian operation sought by France to help citizens in the besieged Ukrainian port of Mariupol are not met "at this stage," President Emmanuel Macron's office said after the French leader spoke by telephone with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin.

Macron outlined to Putin details of the mission that France, Turkey and Greece would oversee, but the Russian leader replied that "he was going to think about it" before responding, an Elysee Palace official said.

In the meantime, "relaxing our efforts is out of the question" because the situation is "catastrophic" for Mariupol and its residents, the official said.

According to the Kremlin, however, Putin told Macron that Ukrainian "nationalists" in

Mariupol would have to "lay down their arms" before Russian forces allow any emergency humanitarian assistance.

It was the ninth telephone call between the two leaders since Russia invaded its neighbor on Feb. 24, as Macron presses to keep a diplomatic line open in hopes of ending the conflict.

He sees his task as "achieving first a ceasefire and then the total withdrawal of (Russian) troops by diplomatic means," he told broadcaster France 3 at the weekend.

Ukrainian authorities say at least 5,000 people have died in Mariupol since the invasion began, with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky calling the siege of the city a "crime against humanity."

The Elysee official declined to comment on the latest round of cease-fire talks between Russia and Ukraine in Istanbul, which raised hopes of progress after previous rounds of talks failed to produce any breakthrough.

"We wish to consult first with the Ukrainians," the source said. "For now the war continues" and "our demands remain the same."

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