

Putin Rejected Early Ukraine Peace Deal to Pursue 'Expanded' Annexation Goals – Reuters

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Putin at the Feb. 22 Security Council meeting where he laid out his intent to formally recognize the Donbas' separatist republics as independent states. kremlin.ru

Russian President Vladimir Putin had rejected a potential deal with Ukraine offered by his key envoy in the early days of the invasion as he “expanded” his goals to include annexing more territory, Reuters [reported](#) Wednesday, citing three unnamed sources close to Russia's leadership.

Kremlin deputy chief of staff Dmitry Kozak, Putin's chief envoy on Ukraine, was said to have secured a deal guaranteeing that Ukraine would not join NATO — a key Russian demand prior to its full-scale invasion of its pro-Western neighbor.

According to Reuters, Putin made clear that Kozak's deal with an unspecified number of Ukrainian concessions did not go far enough.

Putin reportedly “expanded his objectives to include annexing swathes of Ukrainian territory,” Reuters reported.

“Everything was canceled. Putin simply changed the plan as he went along,” one of Reuters’ sources was quoted as saying.

The timing of negotiations was disputed by the people interviewed by Reuters, with two sources saying the push to finalize the deal occurred “within days” of Russia’s Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine.

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A third source, who was told about the events by people briefed on the discussions, said Putin was presented with and rejected Kozak’s deal “just before” the invasion.

Kozak has since been stripped of his Ukraine portfolio, Reuters reported, citing six unnamed sources.

“From what I can see, Kozak is nowhere to be seen,” a person close to pro-Moscow separatist leaders in eastern Ukraine’s Donbas region was quoted as saying.

Kozak, who himself was born in Ukraine, had been Putin’s chief negotiator on the Donbas with Ukrainian counterparts since 2020.

Reuters also reported that Kozak spoke out against escalating the situation with Ukraine three days before Putin launched the 2022 invasion.

That candid move by a loyal Putin ally reportedly happened immediately after cameras were ushered out from the February Security Council meeting where Putin laid out his intent to formally recognize the Donbas’ separatist republics as independent states.

The Kremlin denied the Reuters report’s authenticity, with spokesman Dmitry Peskov telling the British news agency that “No such thing ever happened.”

The report comes as Ukraine, riding on the success of a lightning counteroffensive in its northeast and south, has signaled no interest in new talks with Russia.

While Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said this week that Moscow does not oppose talks with Ukraine, ex-President Dmitry Medvedev [called for](#) “the total surrender of the Kyiv regime on Russia’s terms” in a social media post.

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