

Putin Says Ukraine Must Withdraw Troops To Start Peace Talks

By [AFP](#)

June 14, 2024



Valery Sharifulin / TASS

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday demanded Ukraine effectively surrender to Moscow if it wants to open peace talks, drawing anger and rebukes from Kyiv and the West.

In a combative speech in Moscow on the eve of a major Ukraine peace summit in Switzerland, Putin said Russia would halt its offensive only if Ukraine fully withdraws its troops from the east and south and drops its bid for NATO membership.

The countries have been locked in bloody conflict for more than two years, and no direct peace talks have been held since the first weeks of Russia's campaign, when it was advancing on the Ukrainian capital.

Kyiv has called for Russia's full withdrawal from its internationally recognized territory, including the annexed Crimean peninsula, as part of any peace deal.

President Volodymyr Zelensky, who hopes to marshal international support for that position this weekend, slammed Putin's demands as a territorial "ultimatum" reminiscent of Adolf Hitler.

"Ukrainian troops must be completely withdrawn from the Donetsk People's Republic, the Luhansk People's Republic, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions," Putin said in a televised address to Russian diplomats in Moscow.

Russia claimed to have annexed the four regions in 2022, despite not having full control over any of them.

Embed:

Putin just said he'd give an order to cease fire and begin peace talks if Ukraine accepts Russia's new conditions.

Those conditions are maximalist and unrealistic: Ukraine would have to withdraw from all of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia regions.

pic.twitter.com/7h5Cpqsprb

— max seddon (@maxseddon) [June 14, 2024](#)

The regional capitals of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia are still in Ukrainian hands — meaning Putin is demanding Ukraine cede swathes of territory under its control as a precondition for negotiations.

"As soon as Kyiv says it is ready to do this and begins really withdrawing troops and officially renounces plans to join NATO, we will immediately, literally that very minute, cease-fire and begin talks," Putin said.

Russia was seeking "Ukraine's neutral, non-aligned, non-nuclear status, its demilitarization and de-Nazification," he added.

'Ultimatum'

Kyiv immediately attacked the demands.

"These messages are messages of ultimatum... it's the same thing Hitler did," Zelensky told Italy's Sky TG24 TV channel on the sidelines of the G7 summit.

"Nazism has already arrived and now it has Putin's face," he added.

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry said the "absurd" demands showed Russia wanted "the occupation of Ukraine, the destruction of the Ukrainian people."

And Ukraine's Western backers also blasted Russia over the proposals.

At the end of a NATO meeting in Brussels, U.S. Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin said: "Putin has occupied, illegally occupied, sovereign Ukrainian territory. He is not in any position to dictate to Ukraine what they must do to bring about peace."

Jens Stoltenberg, the alliance's chief, said Putin was not acting in "good faith."

In Italy, G7 leaders committed Friday to support Ukraine "for as long as it takes," according to a draft statement from a summit where they agreed a new \$50 billion loan for Kyiv.

"We are standing in solidarity to support Ukraine's fight for freedom and its reconstruction for as long as it takes," said the draft seen by AFP.

Ukraine has said it will only countenance peace if Russia fully withdraws.

It sees any halt in fighting on Moscow's terms as a chance for Russia to regroup for another attack, with the goal of capturing the entire country.

Putin on Friday said Moscow could let Ukraine keep "sovereignty" of the southern Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, "on the condition that Russia has a strong land link with Crimea."

Military analysts have long said Russia wanted to control a "land bridge" between Russia and the Crimean peninsula, along the southern coast of Ukraine.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Friday evening that the West's and Ukraine's dismissal of its "deep and constructive proposals" was "predictable."

Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said Ukraine was denying its citizens a "chance at peace."

'Trick'

Putin's comments came a day before heads of state and senior officials from some 90 countries and organizations are set to gather in Switzerland for a major summit on peace in Ukraine.

Kyiv will use the forum to outline its own peace agenda and rally international support behind it.

Russia was not invited and Putin on Friday dismissed the initiative as a "trick" to distract attention.

Ukraine has struggled on the battlefield in 2024, facing shortages in manpower and ammunition as well as hold-ups to Western military aid.

Soldiers near the front lines in the eastern Donetsk region told AFP of an intensification of Russian attacks over the last two weeks.

Speaking to decorated soldiers at a separate event on Friday evening, Putin said "almost 700,000" Russian troops were fighting in Ukraine.

Moscow last month launched a new ground assault on the northeastern Kharkiv region, further stretching Ukrainian forces.

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