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Kremlin Says Open to Peace Talks With Zelensky, But Needs More Clarity

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Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov. **Sergei Bulkin / TASS**

The Kremlin said Thursday that it was still open to negotiations with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky despite Moscow's questions about his legitimacy as leader.

"Russia is generally open to the negotiation process, but we first need to understand if the Ukrainian side is ready," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

"From a practical point of view, we're open to achieving our goals through negotiations," Peskov added, referring to the Kremlin's demands for Ukraine to give up four regions partially occupied by Russian troops and drop its ambitions to join NATO.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Wednesday while visiting China that Kyiv was prepared to negotiate with Moscow when it shows "good faith."

"[Kuleba] stressed that currently there is no such readiness on the Russian side," the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

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Peskov on Thursday also raised what he described as the "legal problem" of Zelensky's presidential mandate, which expired after five years in office this May. Zelensky and Ukraine's Western allies say that peacetime political rules do not apply at a time of war.

"In addition to the general problem with Zelensky's legitimacy, there's also a problem with the actual legal prohibition of any contacts and negotiations with the Russian side," Peskov said, characterizing the Ukrainian leader as a U.S. puppet.

"So there's still a lot to be clarified here," the Kremlin spokesman added, leaving the prospects of Russian-Ukrainian talks in the air amid international efforts to reach a negotiated ceasefire.

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