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# Putin Orders Easter Ceasefire as Russia and Ukraine Exchange Hundreds of POWs

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Vladimir Putin. **Vyacheslav Prokofiev / TASS**

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a temporary Easter ceasefire in Ukraine, the Kremlin announced Saturday, as both Moscow and Kyiv said they exchanged hundreds of prisoners of war with mediation from the United Arab Emirates.

"Out of humanitarian considerations, Russia is declaring an Easter ceasefire from 6:00 p.m. [Moscow time] today until midnight Sunday into Monday. I am ordering all combat operations to be halted during this period," Putin said in a televised meeting with Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov.

"At the same time, our forces must remain ready to respond to any ceasefire violations or provocations by the enemy, as well as to any aggressive actions," the Kremlin leader added.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky initially dismissed Moscow's Easter truce, saying

that Russian armed forces were launching air attacks on his country right as the announced pause in hostilities was supposed to begin.

"As for yet another attempt by Putin to play with human lives — at this moment, air raid alerts are spreading across Ukraine.. At 5:15 p.m., Russian attack drones were detected in our skies," Zelensky wrote on X. "Shahed drones in our skies reveal Putin's true attitude toward Easter and toward human life."

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However, later on Saturday, the Ukrainian leader appeared to signal that he was ready to support Russia's temporary ceasefire if it could pave the way for a broader, unconditional truce between the two countries, much like the United States had proposed in March.

"If a complete ceasefire truly takes hold, Ukraine proposes extending it beyond the Easter day of April 20. That is what will reveal Russia's true intentions," Zelensky said. "Because 30 hours is enough to make headlines, but not for genuine confidence-building measures. Thirty days could give peace a chance."

"As of now, according to the Commander-in-Chief reports, Russian assault operations continue on several frontline sectors, and Russian artillery fire has not subsided," he added.

The governor of southern Ukraine's Kherson region reported several Russian drone strikes after Moscow's Easter ceasefire was set to take effect on Saturday evening, saying that "unfortunately, we don't see any lull. Shelling continues, and civilians are again under attack."

According to a Russian diplomat who spoke to The Moscow Times on condition of anonymity, the Kremlin's decision to announce a truce was likely intended to serve multiple goals beyond what Putin described as a "humanitarian" gesture.

"Our president is killing multiple birds with one stone," the diplomat said. "It's a pass to Trump, who is expecting us to move quickly to halt the war. It's also designed to show that Christian values are important to us."

"And it's an attempt to cast President Zelensky as an unreliable negotiating partner in the eyes of the American president," the diplomat added.

Shortly after the Kremlin announced the Easter ceasefire, Russia's Defense Ministry confirmed it received Putin's order and noted that the truce would be "observed by the Russian Joint Group of Forces, provided it is reciprocated by the Kyiv regime."

The Defense Ministry also said it exchanged 246 Ukrainian prisoners of war for the same number of captured Russian soldiers. "As a gesture of goodwill," an additional 31 wounded Ukrainian POWs were transferred in exchange for 15 wounded Russian soldiers, the ministry added.

**Embed:**

> Our people are home—one of the best pieces of news that can be. Another 277 warriors have returned home from Russian captivity.
>
> The warriors of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the National Guard of Ukraine, the State Special Transport Service, and the border guards. They defended... pic.twitter.com/bm4OF80070
>
> — Volodymyr Zelenskyy / Володимир Зеленський (@ZelenskyyUa) April 19, 2025

Zelensky later confirmed the swap, saying 277 Ukrainian servicemen were released. He posted photos and a video of the soldiers after returning home from captivity.

During Saturday's televised meeting in the Kremlin, Gerasimov told Putin that all six Russian military groupings are currently advancing along 11 fronts in eastern and southern Ukraine.

He also claimed that 99.5% of the Kursk region has been "liberated," adding that Russian forces continued counteroffensive operations to clear the border region of Ukrainian forces.

"The main part of the [Kursk] region's territory, where the invasion took place, has now been liberated. This is 1,260 square kilometers," Gerasimov said.

Earlier in the day, Russia's Defense Ministry said its troops had captured the second-to-last village in the Kursk region still held by Ukrainian forces, coming just weeks after Moscow staged a surprise attack in the key border town of Sudzha.

While not addressing the Russian military's claim directly, Zelensky said his top commander told him that Ukrainian forces remain in control of some parts of the border region.

"Today, our forces continued their activity on the territory of the Kursk region and are holding their positions. In the Belgorod region, our warriors have advanced and expanded our zone of control," he wrote on X.

**Related article**: Russian Forces Close to Fully Liberating Kursk Region, Military Says

Russia's Easter ceasefire announcement and the prisoner exchange came a day after U.S. President Donald Trump threatened to back out of negotiations to end the war in Ukraine unless Moscow and Kyiv showed a willingness to make progress toward peace in the coming days.

On Friday, the Kremlin said a 30-day pause in strikes against Ukraine's energy infrastructure — the only notable concession Trump has so far managed to secure from Moscow — had expired.

*Pyotr Kozlov contributed reporting.*

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