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Putin Says Russia and Ukraine Nowhere Close on Peace Terms

By AFP

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Vladimir Putin. **Sergei Karpukhin / TASS**

President Vladimir Putin said Friday that Russian and Ukrainian demands for peace remain "absolutely contradictory," as recent talks failed to bring the two sides closer to a ceasefire.

Russian and Ukrainian negotiators exchanged written proposals at peace talks in Istanbul earlier this month, but aside from agreeing on large-scale prisoner exchanges, the negotiations have yielded no tangible progress.

"As for the memorandums, as expected, nothing surprising happened... these are two absolutely contradictory memorandums," Putin said during a press conference in Minsk, Belarus, referring to each side's peace proposals.

"That's why negotiations are being organized and conducted — to try to bring these positions closer," he added.

Putin has so far rejected calls for an immediate ceasefire and ramped up air attacks as Russian forces advance further into Ukrainian territory, including beyond the four regions Moscow claims to have annexed since launching its full-scale invasion in February 2022.

Russia has demanded that Ukraine cede more land and abandon Western military support, conditions Kyiv has called unacceptable.

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Despite the deadlock, Putin said both sides would "continue further contact" after completing prisoner swaps agreed to during the last direct talks on June 2.

Several exchanges have already taken place, with each side freeing more than 1,000 captured soldiers. Putin said Russia is prepared to return the bodies of an additional 3,000 dead Ukrainian soldiers.

The Russian president also acknowledged the strain the war has placed on the economy, with defense spending now accounting for 6.3% of GDP, or 13.5 trillion rubles ($172 billion).

"It's a lot," Putin said. "We paid for it with inflation, but now we are fighting this inflation."

He also criticized NATO members for pledging to boost defense spending to 5% of GDP, calling the move "aggressive."

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