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Zelensky Calls for Putin Talks as Peace Efforts Stall

By AFP

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky takes part in events on Ukraine's Independence Day on Aug. 24, 2025. **president.gov.ua**

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said on Sunday a meeting with Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin would be "the most effective way forward" amid stalled diplomatic attempts to end the war as he celebrated Ukraine's Independence Day.

Ukraine launched drone strikes on Russia, triggering a fire at a nuclear power plant as Ukrainians marked their independence day with the conflict now in its fourth year.

After a push by U.S. President Donald Trump to broker a Ukraine-Russia summit, hopes for peace dimmed when Russia on Friday ruled out any immediate Putin-Zelensky meeting.

But Zelensky said Sunday the "format of talks between leaders is the most effective way forward," renewing calls for a bilateral summit with Putin.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov earlier accused Western countries of seeking "a pretext to block negotiations" and slammed Zelensky for "demanding an immediate meeting at all costs."

Zelensky vowed to "to push Russia to peace" as he spoke at a ceremony attended by U.S. envoy Keith Kellogg — whom he awarded with the Ukrainian Order of Merit — and other Western officials.

With the war having already claimed tens of thousands of lives, Russia has recently claimed new advances, including taking two villages in the eastern Donetsk region Saturday.

Ukrainian commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky said Sunday that three other villages had been reclaimed in Donetsk, that has emerged as the focal point for peace talks.

Ukraine's Independence Day drone attacks in Russia included one shot down over the Kursk Nuclear Power Plant in western Russia.

Russian authorities said Ukrainian drones had also been shot down over areas far from the front, including St. Petersburg in the northwest.

Ten drones were shot down over the port of Ust-Luga on the Gulf of Finland, sparking a fire at a fuel terminal owned by Russian energy group Novatek, local authorities said.

Speaking at the ceremony to marked the anniversary of Ukraine's 1991 independence after the break-up of the Soviet Union, Zelensky said: "This is how Ukraine strikes when its calls for peace are ignored."

"Today, both the U.S. and Europe agree: Ukraine has not yet fully won, but it will certainly not lose. Ukraine has secured its independence. Ukraine is not a victim; it is a fighter."

He said the presence of foreign troops in Ukraine once the war ends would be "important" as Kyiv seeks to work on potential security guarantees with its allies.

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney on a visit to Kyiv said it was not "the choice of Russia how the future sovereignty, independence, liberty of Ukraine is guaranteed."

Zelensky thanked other world leaders including Trump, Chinese President Xi Jinping, French President Emmanuel Macron, Britain's King Charles and Pope Leo for sending messages to mark the occasion.

Norway announced it would contribute 7 billion kroner ($700 million) as part of its joint pledge with Germany to provide Ukraine with two complete U.S. Patriot systems that Germany already possesses.

The systems are in Germany and will be delivered to Ukraine "as soon as possible," the Norwegian government said.

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