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Russia Prepared to Keep Fighting if Ukraine Diplomacy Fails, Putin Says

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Vladimir Putin in Beijing. **Vladimir Smirnov / TASS**

President Vladimir Putin suggested on Wednesday that there may be "light at the end of the tunnel" in negotiations to end the war in Ukraine, but paired his hint of optimism by vowing that Russian forces would continue their fight if diplomacy failed to bring about peace.

Speaking at a moonlit press conference in Beijing after attending a Chinese military parade marking 80 years since Japan's surrender in World War II, Putin struck his familiar tone of defiance mixed with guarded flexibility.

"If common sense prevails, it should be possible to agree on an acceptable way to end the conflict, that's my assumption," he told a crowd of Russian journalists. "All the more so since we see the mood of the Trump administration, and not just rhetoric but a genuine desire to find a solution."

"We'll see how the situation evolves," Putin added. "If not, then we will have to achieve our objectives by military means."

The parade in Beijing, as well as an annual summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in Tianjin held before it, has been viewed by many observers as a show of defiance against U.S. President Donald Trump's disruptive "America First" foreign policy.

The events brought together more than two dozen heads of state, a motley crew of countries that have challenged or questioned U.S. dominance in global affairs.

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Putin on Wednesday said any settlement to end the war in Ukraine would require what he called the "legitimacy" of Kyiv's leadership, suggesting that Ukrainian authorities hold a referendum, something he said could not happen during martial law.

The Russian leader has repeatedly questioned Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's legitimacy, accusing authorities in Kyiv of being drug-addicted neo-Nazis. In March, Putin claimed that "democratic elections" in Ukraine could only take place under temporary external administration led by the UN and the United States.

In Beijing, Putin also insisted that Russia would not consider any security guarantees for Ukraine as part of a potential exchange of territory, which some observers have speculated Moscow and Kyiv may undertake in a peace deal.

"Security guarantees are natural. Every country should have them, Ukraine included," he said. "But that is not connected with territorial exchanges. We are fighting not so much for territory, but for human rights."

The remarks came amid ongoing discussions in Europe, where France and Britain are leading a so-called "coalition of the willing" — an informal group of Western countries vowing to provide security guarantees to Ukraine following a peace agreement with Russia. However, the details of those possible guarantees remain vague, while Trump has ruled out Ukraine joining NATO.

During Wednesday's press conference, Putin also painted a triumphant picture for Russia's military in eastern Ukraine, even as analysts say Moscow's recent incremental gains on the battlefield have come at a heavy cost in the lives of soldiers.

"All groupings of Russia's armed forces are advancing successfully in all directions," the president said.

At the same time, he sought to push back against Western portrayals of the Beijing military parade, as well as the annual SCO summit, as a defiant show of anti-Western unity, describing the meetings as constructive.

"For four days, there was nothing one could call 'confrontational,'" Putin said. "We are not thinking about outmaneuvering or outplaying anyone. We are thinking about how to best organize our work."

On Tuesday, Trump, writing on his Truth Social platform, accused Russia, China and North Korea of "conspiring" against the United States.

“The U.S. president is not without a sense of humor,” Putin said when asked to comment on Trump’s accusation, adding that, in Beijing, “nobody expressed negative views about the current American administration.”

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