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# Russia Slams Ukrainian-European Plan for Peacekeeping Force

By AFP

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The Russian Foreign Ministry building in Moscow. **Alexander Yarik / TASS**

Russia on Thursday slammed a plan for European peacekeepers to be deployed to Ukraine as "dangerous" and dubbed Kyiv and its allies an "axis of war," dousing hopes the plan could be a step towards ending the almost four-year-war.

US President Donald Trump has been pushing the warring sides to strike a deal to halt the conflict, running shuttle diplomacy between Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky and Russia's Vladimir Putin in a bid to get an agreement across the line.

An initial 28-point plan which largely adhered to Moscow's demands was criticised by Kyiv and Europe, and now Russia has slammed the attempts to beef-up protections for Ukraine should an elusive deal be reached.

Ukraine's allies said they had agreed key security guarantees for Kyiv at a summit in Paris

earlier this week, including a peacekeeping force.

But in its first comments since the summit, Moscow said the statements were far away from anything the Kremlin could accept to end its assault.

"The new militarist declarations of the so-called Coalition of the Willing and the Kyiv regime together form a genuine 'axis of war'," Russia's Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said in a statement.

She called the plans drafted by Kyiv's allies "dangerous" and "destructive."

The remarks come as Russian strikes plunged hundreds of thousands in Ukraine into darkness, leaving families without heat in below-freezing temperatures — attacks that Zelensky said showed Russia was still set on war.

## 'Legitimate military targets'

European leaders and U.S. envoys announced earlier this week that post-war guarantees for Ukraine would include a U.S.-led monitoring mechanism and a European multinational force to be deployed when the fighting stops.

But Moscow has repeatedly warned that it would not accept any NATO members sending peacekeeping troops to Ukraine.

"All such units and facilities will be considered legitimate military targets for the Russian Armed Forces," Zakharova said Thursday, repeating a threat previously uttered by Putin.

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Zelensky also said Thursday that a bilateral agreement between Kyiv and Washington for U.S. security guarantees was "essentially ready for finalisation at the highest level with the President of the United States" following talks between envoys in Paris this week.

Kyiv says legally-binding assurances that its allies would come to its defence are essential to convince Russia not to re-attack if a ceasefire is reached.

But specific details on the guarantees, the European force, and how it would engage have not been made public.

Zelensky said earlier this week he was yet to receive an "unequivocal" answer of what they would do if Russia does attack again after a deal.

Zelensky has also said that the most difficult questions in any settlement — territorial control of the eastern Donbas region and the fate of the Russian-occupied Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant — were still unresolved.

## Russian strikes cut heating

Ukraine was meanwhile scrambling to restore heating and water to hundreds of thousands of households after a new barrage targeted energy facilities in its Dnipropetrovsk and Zaporizhzhia regions.

"This is truly a national level emergency," Borys Filatov, mayor of Dnipropetrovsk's capital Dnipro, said on Telegram.

He announced power was "gradually returning to the hospitals" after the blackouts forced them to run on generators. The city authorities also extended school holidays for children.

About 600,000 households in the region remained cut off from power in Dnipropetrovsk, Ukrainian energy company DTEK said.

In a post on social media, Zelensky said the attacks "clearly don't indicate that Moscow is reconsidering its priorities."

In addition to the unrelenting pummelling of Dnipropetrovsk, Russia pressed on with its ground assault on the region, claiming to have taken another village there.

It is not one of the five Ukrainian regions that Moscow claims to have annexed.

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