

Trump, Putin agree to broader talks – but limited ceasefire in Ukraine

Trump's long call with Putin was an extraordinary olive branch to the Russian leader, but a limited halt to strikes on energy targets was less extensive than a plan originally sought by the White House.

**By Michael Birnbaum, Mary Ilyushina and Cat Zakrzewski
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Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed Tuesday to halt strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure after a lengthy conversation with President Donald Trump, a first step toward easing Russia's war on Ukraine, but he appeared resistant to the fuller ceasefire championed by the U.S. leader and endorsed by Kyiv.

The limited agreement showed the difficulty Trump may have in bringing to a close the war in Ukraine despite a campaign promise to do so in "24 hours." Still, the Kremlin embraced the broader conversation with Trump as a signal that it was being welcomed back into the club of global superpowers despite its years-long campaign to capture neighbors' territory, undermine democratic elections and make common cause with U.S. foes in Beijing, Tehran and Pyongyang.

A top Russian official, Kirill Dmitriev, deemed it "a PERFECT call," capturing the Kremlin's glee at the sharp turnabout in White House attitudes toward Russia after Trump's reorientation of generations of U.S. policy. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Tuesday that he would agree to the limited 30-day halt on strikes on energy targets provided that the United States ensure that the Russians were doing the same. He noted that he had not yet been briefed by Washington on the outcome of the talks, itself an extraordinary situation given Ukraine's stake in their outcome.

The energy infrastructure ceasefire was more limited than the broader halt to hostilities that Trump had sought and that the Ukrainians endorsed last week, an apparent concession to Putin. Russia and Ukraine began secret talks last year on a mutual halt on strikes on energy infrastructure, but the conversations ended after Kyiv seized Russian territory in a surprise incursion in August. Trump and Putin also agreed Tuesday to start negotiating a maritime ceasefire that they said could lead to a full ceasefire and a permanent peace.

In one sign of the questions about the deal, the White House said that the two sides had agreed to a halt to strikes on "energy and infrastructure," while the Kremlin said it was "energy infrastructure" — a difference that would allow it to continue pounding Ukrainian bridges, railways, ports and other targets.

But the details of the peace proposals were secondary to the extraordinary olive branch that Trump handed Putin in the form of the call itself. Putin has long mourned Russia's loss of superpower status following the breakup of the Soviet Union, and he recaptured some of that role as the two men hashed out a wider menu of world events during what the Kremlin said was a 2½-hour call.

Over Putin's 25 years in power, he has sought through military force, sabotage and political influence campaigns to restore the Kremlin to equal status alongside the White House in determining world events — a role far out of line with Russia's shrunken economic might. No U.S. president until Trump has agreed to elevate Putin to that near-peer level.

"My phone conversation today with President Putin of Russia was a very good and productive one," Trump posted on Truth Social. "We agreed to an immediate Ceasefire on all Energy and Infrastructure, with an understanding that we will be working quickly to have a Complete Ceasefire and, ultimately, an END to this very horrible War between Russia and Ukraine."

For all the comity between Trump and Putin, it was still unclear whether the U.S. leader would be able to achieve peace, with Russia issuing public demands for even more territorial concessions and rejecting any European troop presence inside Ukraine, the baseline that Kyiv has said it would need to feel assured that the Kremlin would not rebuild its military and reinvade.

Neither the White House nor Kremlin accounts of the call referenced European security forces in Ukraine.

Putin also demanded a "complete cessation" of foreign military and intelligence assistance to Kyiv, the Kremlin said, a step that would weaken Ukraine.

The Kremlin released an extensive summary of the call that said the two leaders had agreed to joint talks on a sweep of world crises, including those in the Middle East. It referenced "the special responsibility of Russia and the United States for ensuring security and stability in the world," and praised the "joint vote in the U.N." last month in which Washington sided with Russia, North Korea and Belarus and against Ukraine and U.S. allies on resolutions marking the third anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Putin "expressed gratitude" to Trump for efforts "to help achieve the noble goal of ending hostilities and human losses," the Kremlin said, without noting that the hostilities were started when Russia itself invaded the sovereign territory of its neighbor and sought to eliminate Ukraine as an independent nation.

The Kremlin said that Putin had directed his military immediately to halt strikes on Ukrainian energy infrastructure. But broader attacks appeared to continue unabated, as air raid sirens sounded over Kyiv in the hours after the call, warning that Russian drones had entered Ukrainian airspace.

The two sides will discuss a maritime ceasefire and eventually a “full ceasefire and permanent peace,” the White House said in its summary of the call, which said that negotiations will start immediately in the Middle East.

The conversation came after weeks in which Trump has repositioned U.S. policy toward Ukraine and Russia, at times appearing to take the aggressor’s side against Kyiv and its shocked European backers. Trump has called Ukraine’s democratically elected leader a dictator, blamed Kyiv for being invaded and ejected President Volodymyr Zelensky from the White House following an angry meeting last month.

Now Trump has embarked on talks about Ukraine’s future without Kyiv at the table, a situation that has frustrated Ukrainian leaders.

“This war has two sides — Russia and Ukraine. And negotiating without Ukraine, in my view, is pointless,” Zelensky told reporters on Tuesday.

But he said he would agree to the infrastructure deal.

“It cannot be a one-sided deal where Russia continues hitting our energy sector while we remain silent. We will respond. But if both sides — Ukraine and Russia — commit to refraining from such attacks, our side will uphold it,” he said.

A pause could offer Russia some breathing room as well, since Ukraine has been hitting Russian oil refineries, pressuring the country’s energy industry.

In meetings last week with Secretary of State Marco Rubio and National Security Adviser Michael Waltz, Ukrainian negotiators proposed a ceasefire focused on long-range land and sea attacks before agreeing to U.S. demands for a broader halt to hostilities. Russia appears to have successfully pushed back on the U.S. effort where Ukraine failed, leading to a narrower deal that is closer to what Ukraine had originally suggested.

Russia also agreed to release 23 wounded Ukrainian soldiers who were being treated in Russian hospitals and to swap 175 prisoners with Kyiv.

Top Russian officials cheered the conversation, embracing the moment with a positive tone that would have seemed unfathomable at any previous moment since the Kremlin annexed Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula 11 years ago and plunged relations with Washington into an ice bath.

Ukraine’s secondary role was notable given how much was at stake for the country and how much appeared to be agreed on between the U.S. and Russian leaders. The Kremlin said that Trump had agreed to a Putin suggestion “to organize hockey matches in the United States and Russia between Russian and American players” who play in the NHL and the Russian national hockey league — a notably conciliatory step so long as Russia continues to wage war on Ukraine.

Trump and Putin started talking at 10 a.m. on Tuesday, White House Deputy Chief of Staff Dan Scavino said. More than 2½ hours later, the White House said the call was over.

Ahead of the talks, White House officials indicated that they were ready to allow Russia to maintain control over the roughly 20 percent of Ukraine territory it holds, and also suggested that the control of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, Europe's largest, was also subject to discussion. Russia captured the facility in 2022.

Russia has put forward maximalist demands that Ukraine views as unacceptable. In June, Putin said Russia would stop hostilities if Ukraine surrendered four southeastern regions that Russian troops partly occupy and if it renounced plans to join NATO.

France and Britain have led the effort to create a “coalition of the willing” — countries that would help guarantee any agreement, including by putting troops inside Ukraine. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's spokesman said Monday that more than 30 countries had joined the coalition. “This will be a significant force, with a significant number of countries providing troops and a larger group contributing in other ways,” he said.

Sergei Markov, a pro-Kremlin political analyst, stated ahead of the phone call that Russia would seek to prevent a ceasefire from being used to “pump the Ukrainian army with weapons” or to deploy peacekeepers from NATO countries.

“There are four main conditions for the duration of the truce,” Markov said. “An arms embargo on Ukraine, a ban on mobilization, a prohibition on training Ukrainian soldiers at NATO bases in Europe, and no NATO troops entering Ukraine under any pretext.”

But Russia has made more demands that go far beyond Ukraine's borders, seeking to reinvent Europe's security architecture and reimpose the Kremlin's will on NATO members that were once part of the communist bloc.

On Monday, a senior Russian diplomat, Alexander Grushko, said Moscow had its own security guarantees outlined in a list of demands presented in December 2021, a few months before the full-scale invasion of Ukraine, which at the time was dismissed as a nonstarter. The proposal included eight points, one of which called for NATO to roll back its presence in Europe to pre-1997 levels, before its eastward expansion.

That effort would effectively spell the end of the defense alliance in its post-Cold War incarnation, leaving eastern Europe with significantly watered-down security guarantees and vulnerable to Russian invasion.