

BY SAMYA KULLAB AND JOANNA KOZLOWSKA

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Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed restarting direct talks with Ukraine in Istanbul on May 15, “without preconditions,” an offer that came in response to Ukraine and its allies urging Moscow to commit to an unconditional [30-day ceasefire](#) or face additional sanctions.

Putin referenced the unsuccessful 2022 peace talks that took place in Istanbul in March, shortly after Moscow’s full-scale invasion, and proposed “restart” them without preconditions in remarks to reporters in the early hours of Sunday.

“We are committed to serious negotiations with Ukraine,” Putin said, adding that he doesn’t rule out agreeing to a ceasefire later, in the course of direct talks with Ukraine.

Putin’s proposal came after leaders from four major European countries threatened to [ratchet up pressure on](#) Moscow if it does not accept an unconditional 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine that they offered on Saturday in a strong show of unity with Kyiv.

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The [leaders of France](#), the United Kingdom, Germany and Poland said the proposal for a ceasefire to start on Monday was supported by U.S. President Donald Trump, whom they had briefed over the phone earlier in the day.



**Russia declares 72-hour ceasefire in Ukraine for next week**



**Russia says it has fully reclaimed the Kursk region. Ukraine says it is still fighting there**



## **Trump express doubts that Putin is willing to end the war in Ukraine**

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Trump has called for Ukraine and Russia to meet for “very high level talks, saying they are “very close to a deal” on ending the bloody three-year war

Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has previously said he was ready for peace talks, but only after a ceasefire is in place.

### **Moscow’s proposals**

Putin said that Russia proposed several ceasefires in recent months — a halt on strikes on energy infrastructure, which Ukraine had agreed to, a unilateral 30-hour Easter truce and another unilateral ceasefire on May 8-10 that has since expired.

Ukrainian officials said Russia repeatedly violated all of those.

Putin on Sunday accused Ukraine of sabotaging “these initiatives time and time again” and launching multiple attacks on Russia.

In March, the United States proposed an immediate, limited 30-day truce, which Ukraine accepted, but the Kremlin has held out for [terms more to its liking](#).

Putin on Sunday once again said the Kremlin needs a truce that would lead to a “lasting peace” instead of one that would allow Ukraine to rearm and mobilize more men into its armed forces.

He said he would speak to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and ask him to facilitate the peace talks on May 15.



Shortly after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Turk hosted unsuccessful talks between Russian and Ukrainian negotiators aimed at ending the hostilities. The proposed deal reportedly included provisions: Ukraine's neutral status and limits on its armed forces, while delaying talks on the status of Russian-occupied areas.

Moscow has blamed Kyiv and the West for the talks collapsing.

Putin said that "those who truly want peace cannot but support" his proposal to restart the peace talks.

**‘A very important signal’**

Zelenskyy, speaking to reporters alongside the European leaders in Kyiv on Saturday, called their meeting “a very important signal.”

In a joint statement, as published on Zelenskyy’s official website, the five leaders called for a ceasefire “lasting at least 30 days” from Monday, to make room for a diplomatic push to end the war.

“An unconditional ceasefire by definition cannot be subject to any conditions. If Russia calls for such conditions, this can only be considered as an effort to prolong the war and undermine diplomacy,” the statement read.

French President Emmanuel Macron said that the U.S. would take the lead in monitoring the proposed ceasefire, with support from European countries, and threatened “massive sanctions ... prepared and coordinated, between Europeans and Americans,” should Russia violate the truce.

Macron traveled to Kyiv with British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk.

“This is Europe stepping up, showing our solidarity with Ukraine,” Starmer said.

Retired Lt. Gen. Keith Kellogg, Trump’s special envoy to Ukraine, said Saturday that a “comprehensive” 30-day ceasefire, covering attacks from the air, land, sea and on infrastructure, “will start the process for ending the largest and longest war in Europe since World War II.”

Meanwhile, Putin on Saturday held a series of bilateral talks with foreign officials who had attended Moscow’s own celebrations marking the defeat of Nazi Germany, in an apparent attempt to underscore the West’s failure to isolate it on the global stage. Putin’s interlocutors included To Lam, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Vietnam, and the leaders of Zimbabwe, Burkina Faso and the Palestinian Authority.

## **Europe threatens more sanctions if Russia ignores ceasefire offer**

Progress on ending the three-year war has seemed elusive in the months since Trump returned to the White House, and his previous claims of imminent breakthroughs have failed to come to fruition. Trump has previously pushed Ukraine to cede territory to Russia to end the war, [threatening to pull away if a deal becomes too difficult](#).

Since the start of U.S.-mediated talks, Russia has kept up attacks along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, [including deadly strikes on residential areas with no obvious military targets](#).

The ceasefire would include a halt to fighting on land, sea and in the air. Top European leaders threatened to ratchet up sanctions, including on Russia's energy and banking sectors, if Putin did not comply.



The priority was to make it too costly for Russia to keep fighting in Ukraine, said Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha.

When asked how the monitoring mechanism would work, Sybiha told The Associated Press the details were still being discussed.

Addressing skepticism over whether fresh sanctions against Moscow, which has so far managed to keep fighting in the war, Merz said “almost all member states of the European Union and a large coalition of the willing around the world are determined to enforce these sanctions even if our initiative of this weekend should fail.”

The leaders also discussed security guarantees for Ukraine.

Building up Kyiv’s military capabilities will be a key deterrent against Russia and require supplying Ukraine with robust quantities of arms to deter future attacks and investing in its defense sector. A force comprised of foreign troops could also be deployed as an added “reassurance” measure, Macron said.

He said details about potential European deployments to Ukraine were still being fine-tuned. No mention was made of NATO membership, still Kyiv’s top choice for a security guarantee.

Earlier on Saturday, the European leaders joined a ceremony at Kyiv’s Independence Square marking the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II. They lit candles alongside Zelenskyy at a [makeshift flag memorial](#) for fallen Ukrainian soldiers and civilians slain since Russia’s invasion.

## **Russian attacks continue**

Russian shelling in Ukraine’s northern Sumy region over the past day killed three residents and wounded four more, local officials said. Another civilian

died Saturday as a Russian drone struck the southern city of Kherson, according to regional Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin.

The U.S. Embassy in Kyiv on Friday warned of a “potentially significant” Russian air attack in the coming days, without giving details.

Russia in November gave the U.S. brief advance warning before striking Ukraine for the first time with its [Oreshnik intermediate-range ballistic missile](#), an experimental hypersonic weapon that Putin claimed could travel 10 times the speed of sound.

Ukrainian Telegram channels linked the embassy’s warning to reports of an imminent flight ban by Moscow over the Kapustin Yar military training and rocket launch complex. A similar flight ban preceded November’s strike. There was no immediate comment from Russian officials.

Trump said last week that he doubts Putin wants to end his [war in Ukraine](#), expressing new skepticism that a peace deal can be reached soon, and [hinting at further sanctions against Russia](#).

Ukraine’s European allies view its fate as fundamental to the continent’s security, and pressure is now mounting to find ways to support Kyiv militarily regardless of whether Trump pulls out.

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Kullab reported from Kyiv, Ukraine. Kozlowska reported from London. Associated Press writers Thomas Adamson in Paris, Philipp Reissfelder in Berlin and Danica Kirka in London contributed to this report.

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## **SAMYA KULLAB**

Kullab is an Associated Press reporter covering Ukraine since June 2023. Before that, she covered Iraq and the wider Middle East from her base in Baghdad since joining the AP in 2019.

