

**A “Yes but” from Putin on the proposed ceasefire.
He likes the idea but says it needs “more detailed work”**



President Putin at news conference today after meeting with President Lukashenko.

On Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, accompanied by National Security Adviser Mike Waltz and U.S. Middle East envoy Steve Witkoff, met in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia with Andriy Yermak, the Head of Ukraine’s Presidential Office; Andrii Sybiha, Ukraine’s Foreign Minister; and Rustem Umerov, Ukraine’s Defense Minister, and agreed on a 30-day ceasefire in the war in Ukraine, subject to Russia’s acceptance. After the meeting, Rubio said the proposal would be delivered “directly to Russia through multiple channels.” Yesterday, when asked if Russia is willing to accept the ceasefire, he said, “We don’t know.... That’s what we want to know, whether they’re prepared to do it unconditionally. We’ll have contact with them today. There’s already been contacts and different levels with counterparts, different members of the administration, and that’ll continue. But as far as the Russian reaction to it, that’s really the question here.... We’re going to bring it to them directly. We’re going to say that Ukraine is prepared to stop all battlefield activity and begin the immediate process of negotiating an enduring end to the war, and we’ll see what their response is. If their response is yes, then we know we’ve made real progress and there’s a real chance of peace. If their response is no, it’ll be highly unfortunate, and it’d make their intentions clear. So that’s what we’re hoping to hear from them... And so we hope to have a positive answer from them. The ball is truly in their court.”

Today we got the answer – first, an ambiguous one from Yuri Ushakov, President Putin’s foreign policy advisor, and later a more authoritative “yes but” from Putin himself at his news conference following a meeting with Belarusian President Lukashenko. Speaking on Russian television today, Ushakov said the proposed ceasefire is “nothing else than a temporary respite for the Ukrainian military, nothing

more.” He said Russia’s “goal is still a long-term peaceful settlement...[that] takes into account the legitimate interests of our country. Steps that imitate peaceful actions, it seems to me, are of no use to anyone.” He also said he had conveyed that position to Waltz in a phone call yesterday – “that this is nothing more than a temporary respite for the Ukrainian military and nothing more” – and that Russia doesn’t want a temporary ceasefire: “Our goal is a long-term peaceful settlement. That is what we are striving for.” He also reiterated Russia’s demands – that Ukraine recognize Russia’s annexation of Crimea and the Ukrainian regions of Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson and withdraw its troops from those regions. He said Russia also wants there to be limits on the size of the Ukrainian military, protections for Russian speakers, and elections to replace President Zelenskyy.

Later, in his press conference following his meeting with Lukashenko, Putin described the proposal as “great and correct” and said Russia supports it in theory, although there are issues that have to be discussed as Witkoff arrived in Moscow. Specifically, he said, “We agree with the proposal to cease hostilities but we have to bear in mind that this ceasefire must be aimed at a long-lasting peace and it must look at the root causes of the crisis.” He went on to raise a number of questions about a potential ceasefire – how it would be verified, who would give the orders to cease hostilities, what would happen in Russia’s Kursk region, which he had visited, dressed in military gear, yesterday: “What will we do with this area in the Kursk region – if we stop military actions for 30 days, does this mean that everyone who is there will leave without a fight? Should we release them from there after they have committed a lot of crimes against civilians?” He also raised a question about what Ukraine might do during the 30-day ceasefire: “How will other issues be resolved along the entire contact line, which is almost 2,000 kilometers?”

It’s a “Yes but.” But that’s better than a “No.”

David R. Cameron
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