

Despite Trump-Putin phone call, war continues with no end in sight



British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation as of today.

On May 10, President Putin issued a statement in which he proposed that “the authorities in Kiev should resume the negotiations that they interrupted at the end of 2022 and resume direct talks. And I stress, without any preconditions. We suggest starting without delay next Thursday, May 15, in Istanbul, where they were held earlier and where they were interrupted.... We are set on serious negotiations with Ukraine. Their aim is to eliminate the root causes of the conflict and to achieve a long-term lasting peace for a historical perspective. We do not rule out that in the course of these negotiations it will become possible to agree on some kind of new truce and a new ceasefire. And a real ceasefire that would be observed not only by Russia but also by the Ukrainian side and would be the first step, I repeat, towards a long-term, sustainable peace, rather than a prelude to continuing armed conflict.... Our proposal is, as they say, on the table. The decision is now up to Ukrainian authorities... Let me reiterate myself: Russia is ready for talks without any preliminary conditions.” After the arrangements for the talks in Istanbul were made, they took place last Friday and lasted almost two hours.

On Monday, Presidents Trump and Putin spoke by telephone for two hours. Following the call, Trump posted a statement on Truth Social in which he said, “Just completed my two-hour call with President Vladimir Putin of Russia. I believe it went very well. Russia and Ukraine will immediately start negotiations toward a Ceasefire and, more importantly, an END to the War.” He added, “The Vatican, as represented by the Pope, has stated that it would be very interested in hosting the negotiations. Let the process begin!”

After the phone call, Putin, speaking to journalists, said, “This conversation has effectively taken place and lasted more than two hours. I would like to emphasize

that it was both substantive and quite candid. Overall, I believe it was a very productive exchange. First and foremost, I expressed my gratitude to the President of the United States for the support provided by the United States in facilitating the resumption of direct talks between Russia and Ukraine aimed at potentially reaching a peace agreement and resuming the talks which, as we know, were thwarted by the Ukrainian side in 2022. The President of the United States shared his position on the cessation of hostilities and the prospects for a ceasefire. For my part, I noted that Russia also supports a peaceful settlement of the Ukraine crisis as well. What we need now is to identify the most effective ways towards achieving peace. We agreed with the President of the United States that Russia would propose and is ready to engage with the Ukrainian side on drafting a memorandum regarding a potential future peace agreement. This would include outlining a range of provisions, such as the principles for settlement, the timeframe for a possible peace deal, and other matters, including a potential temporary ceasefire, should the necessary agreements be reached. Contacts among participants of the Istanbul meeting and talks have resumed, which gives reason to believe that we are on the right track overall. I would like to reiterate that the conversation was highly constructive, and I assess it positively. The key issue, of course, is now for the Russian side and the Ukrainian side to show their firm commitment to peace and to forge a compromise that would be acceptable to all parties. Notably, Russia's position is clear. Eliminating the root causes of this crisis is what matters most to us."

Today, four days later, we don't yet know whether Russia has in fact proposed and engaged with Ukraine "on drafting a memorandum regarding a potential future peace agreement" – one that "would include outlining a range of provisions, such as the principles for settlement, the timeframe for a possible peace deal, and other matters, including a potential temporary ceasefire, should the necessary agreements be reached." In the meantime, the war continues – and does so with no end in sight. As today's British Defence Intelligence map of the battlefield situation indicates, the war has continued this week throughout eastern Ukraine, with the Russian forces continuing to attack, as they have for the past several months, toward Kupiansk in Kharkiv region, toward the area around Chasiv Yar, and toward Pokrovsk. The General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces reported in its daily updates this week that, in the five days from Sunday through yesterday, the Russian forces conducted a total of 801 attacks against the Ukrainian forces defending the cities and towns of eastern Ukraine. As in previous weeks and, indeed, for the past several months, the greatest number of Russian attacks in eastern Ukraine thus far this week were the 279 – on average about 55 attacks each day – conducted against the forces defending Pokrovsk.

Pokrovsk is an important target – indeed, the most important target – in eastern Ukraine for the Russian forces; it is an important transit hub on the highway that connects Donetsk city with Dnipro, and, if taken, would also open a pathway northward toward the cities of Kostyantynivka, Kramatorsk, and Sloviansk in the

western portion of Donetsk region. But there are other important targets for the Russian forces in Donetsk region as well as Pokrovsk, and the Ukrainian forces defending Lyman about 30 kilometers southeast of Iziium, Kramatorsk about 25 kilometers northwest of Chasiv Yar, and Toretsk about 20 kilometers south of Chasiv Yar have been subjected to repeated attacks as well.

There has been no evidence thus far that Russia and Ukraine have drafted the memorandum regarding a potential future peace agreement – one that would, as Putin said, outline a range of provisions, such as the principles for settlement, the timeframe for a possible peace deal, and a potential temporary ceasefire. But there has, at least, been some progress on the agreed exchange of prisoners of war. Today, each side turned over to the other side 390 military and civilian prisoners of war. Russia turned over 270 military personnel and 120 civilians to Ukraine in Belarus and Ukraine turned over the same numbers of military personnel and civilians to Russia. Both sides will complete the agreed-upon release of 1,000 prisoners of war over the weekend.

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