

Putin suggests Ukraine peace deal still a way off

Russia's president praises Trump's efforts but won't accept parts of the U.S. proposal.

BY DASHA LITVINNOVA

Russian President Vladimir Putin says some proposals in a U.S. plan to end the war in Ukraine are unacceptable to the Kremlin, indicating in comments published Thursday that any deal is still some way off.

President Trump has set in motion the most intense diplomatic push to stop the fighting since Russia launched the full-scale invasion of its neighbor nearly four years ago. But the effort has once again run into demands that are hard to reconcile, especially over whether Ukraine must give up land to Russia and how it can be kept safe from any future aggression by Moscow.

Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, and son-in-law Jared Kushner are expected to meet later Thursday with the Ukrainian delegation led by Rustem Umerov following the Americans' discussions with Putin at the Kremlin.

The meeting is scheduled to take place at the Shell Bay Club, a golf property developed by Witkoff in Hallandale Beach, Fla.

Putin said his five-hour talks Tuesday with Witkoff and Kushner were "necessary" and "useful," but also "difficult work," and some proposals were unacceptable.

Speaking to the India Today television channel before he landed Thursday in New Delhi for a state visit, Putin said the American proposals discussed at the Kremlin meeting were based on earlier discussions between Russia and the U.S., including his meeting with Trump in Alaska in August, but also included new elements.

"We had to go through practically every point, which is why it took so much time," he said. "It was a meaningful, highly specific and substantive conversation. Sometimes we said, 'Yes, we can discuss this, but with that one we cannot agree.'"

Trump said Wednesday that Witkoff and Kushner came away from the marathon session confident that Putin wants to find an end to the war. "Their impression was very strongly that he'd like to make a deal," he added.

Putin said the initial U.S. 28-point peace proposal was trimmed to 27 points and split into four packages. He



GRIGORY SYSOYEV Kremlin Pool Photo

PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin of Russia met Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Thursday.

refused to elaborate on what Russia could accept or reject, and none of the other officials involved offered details of the talks.

The Russian leader praised Trump's peace efforts, noting that "achieving consensus among conflicting parties is no easy task."

"To say now what exactly doesn't suit us or where we could possibly agree seems premature, since it might disrupt the very mode of op-

eration that President Trump is trying to establish," Putin said.

He emphasized that Russia will fulfill the goals it set and take all of the eastern Donetsk region. "All this boils down to one thing: Either we take back these territories by force, or eventually Ukrainian troops withdraw," he said.

European leaders, left on the sidelines by Washington as U.S. officials engage di-

rectly with Moscow and Kyiv, have accused Putin of feigning interest in Trump's peace drive.

French President Emmanuel Macron met in Beijing with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, seeking to involve him in pressuring Russia toward a ceasefire. Xi, whose country has provided strong diplomatic support for Putin, did not say respond to France's call but said that "China supports all efforts

that work towards peace."

Russian barrages of civilian areas of Ukraine continued overnight into Thursday. A missile struck Kryvyi Rih on Wednesday night, wounding six people, including a 3-year-old girl, according to city administration head Oleksandr Vilkul.

The attack on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's hometown damaged more than 40 residential buildings, a school and do-

mestic gas pipes, Vilkul said.

A 6-year-old girl died in the southern city of Kherson after Russian artillery shelling wounded her the previous day, regional military administration chief Oleksandr Prokudin wrote on Telegram.

The Kherson Thermal Power Plant, which provides heat for over 40,000 residents, shut down Thursday after Russia pounded it with drones and artillery for several days, he said.

Authorities planned emergency meetings to find alternate sources of heating, he said. Until then, tents were erected across the city where residents could warm up and charge electronic devices.

Russia also struck Odesa with drones, wounding six people, while civilian and energy infrastructure was damaged, said Oleh Kiper, head of the regional military administration.

Overall, Russia fired two ballistic missiles and 138 drones at Ukraine overnight, officials said.

Meanwhile, in the Russia-occupied part of the Kherson region, two men were killed by a Ukrainian drone strike on their vehicle Thursday, Moscow-installed regional leader Vladimir Saldo said. A 68-year-old woman was wounded in the attack, he said.

Litvinova writes for the Associated Press. AP writers Aamer Madhani and Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report.

One hostage remains in Gaza, and next steps are unclear

BY AUDREY HOROWITZ,
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JERUSALEM — Remains that militants in Gaza handed to Israel were those of Thai agricultural worker Sudthisak Rinthalak, Israeli and Thai officials said Thursday. The confirmation brought the first phase of Gaza's tenuous eight-week-old ceasefire a step closer to completion, with one more hostage's remains still to be returned.

The subsequent phases under a U.S.-drafted, U.N.-backed plan for Gaza remain deeply uncertain. There has been no word on how provisions for Hamas' disarmament will be carried out, or how a planned international administration and security force will be established.

Both Israel and Hamas

accuse each other of violating the truce since it began Oct. 10. Israeli airstrikes and shootings during the ceasefire have killed some 366 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Israel says Hamas has carried out attacks on its soldiers. Around half the devastated Gaza Strip remains under Israeli military control, with most of the population of some 2 million displaced from their homes and dependent on international aid.

In a sign of the potential for turmoil, the leader of an Israeli-backed Palestinian militia, Yasser Abu Shabab, was shot to death during a dispute with another family in southern Gaza, his militia said Thursday. The killing could be a setback for Israeli efforts to prop up its own alternative to Hamas in Gaza.

The Popular Forces is one of several armed Palestinian groups supported



Hostage and Missing Families Forum
THE BODY of Sudthisak Rinthalak, of Thailand, was returned to Israel.

maintains detailed records viewed as generally reliable by the international community.

Thai Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nikorndej Balankura said Sudthisak's family has been notified and thanked the Israeli government for assistance that led to the release of all 31 Thai

clan's head, Attiya Awda Abu Suneima. He praised the clan members who killed Abu Shabab for "unwavering courage and resolve in the face of injustice and treachery" — but provided no details on what happened.

He warned that remaining member of Abu Shabab's group, "which has strayed from the values of our people, will face a severe reckoning."

There was no immediate Israeli comment on Abu Shabab's death.

Abu Shabab was the most prominent of the Palestinian militia leaders that Israel has said it is backing to oppose Hamas. Before the war, he had been involved in smuggling cigarettes and drugs from Egypt, according to two members of his extended family, one of whom was once part of his group.

During the war, his mili-

Thursday in several villages in southern Lebanon, targeting what the military said were weapons storehouses of the Lebanese militant Hezbollah group. There was no report of casualties from the strikes, which came after the military issued warnings to residents to evacuate areas around the targets.

Israel accuses Hezbollah of continuing to hold onto its weapons and rebuilding its arsenal in violation of a year-old ceasefire. Hezbollah has refused to give up its weapons as long as Israel continues to occupy several hills along the border and carries out almost daily strikes.

Strike kills a family

In southern Gaza, an Israeli airstrike on a tent encampment housing displaced Palestinians late Wednesday killed five people from a single family, including two children, according to the Kurdish Socially Un-