

Putin Rejects the Trump Cease-Fire

The Russian wants much bigger concessions that would cripple Ukraine.

By [The Editorial Board](#)

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Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday Photo: Mikhail Metzel/Zuma Press

President Trump and [Vladimir Putin](#) talked on the phone on Tuesday, and neither side is divulging many details of their chat. But strip away the diplomatic pieties and the main result is that Mr. Putin didn't agree to Mr. Trump's 30-day cease-fire, while Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky did. Have we figured out yet who's the real obstacle to peace?

"Both leaders agreed this conflict needs to end with a lasting peace," the White House readout of the call said. Mr. Putin made minor concessions, including a breather from targeting Ukraine's energy infrastructure. The White House also claimed progress on deconfliction in the Black Sea. The statement ended with overtures to "potential cooperation" in the Middle East and "an improved bilateral relationship."

Yet it's clear the Kremlin is demanding major concessions even for a short-term cease-fire, much less for a broader peace deal. The Russian readout repeated its demand for a "complete cessation of foreign military aid" and intelligence sharing for Ukraine. Mr. Putin also wants Ukraine cut out of the talks and deal only with the President—oh, and sanctions relief.

These are terms Ukraine can't accept, except at the end of a bludgeon. A peace deal that disarms Ukraine won't produce a long peace that lets Mr. Trump focus on his priorities. Mr. Putin has been insisting on swallowing entire provinces in Ukraine, including territory his troops aren't even occupying today.

It's a good sign Mr. Trump didn't concede to Mr. Putin's demands in this call, but the Russian dictator will play rough. He knows he can sustain more losses on the battlefield and that Mr. Trump has promised voters he'll deliver peace. Mr. Putin is unlikely to budge from his core demands unless the President and Europe are willing to turn the screws on him with tougher sanctions and arming Ukraine to the hilt. Mr. Putin is betting Mr. Trump won't do that, and based on the mood music so far from this Administration, it isn't a bad bet.

GOP Sen. Lindsey Graham said over the weekend that he'd advise the President to "go back to maximum pressure" if Mr. Putin declined to accept the cease-fire on the same terms as Ukraine, and he said he has legislation in the works that "would crush the Russian economy."

The larger worry is that Mr. Trump is struggling to see Mr. Putin for the aggressor he is—one that previous Presidents have failed to tame via talks. The White House even heralded the possibility of working with Russia in the Middle East, where Mr. Putin has spent a decade as a force for instability.

Mr. Trump is bombing Yemen's Houthi terrorists, who have held global shipping hostage and shot at U.S. Navy ships with impunity. And who has helped hand the Houthis the intel to target ships? [Russia](#). Ditto for providing trainer aircraft to Iran in return for drones.

Mr. Trump's legacy would be permanently damaged by an outcome that the world perceives as a victory for Mr. Putin. U.S. public opinion isn't sold on Mr. Trump's bent, with more than 75% of Americans saying in a survey this month they're concerned that Mr. Putin wouldn't honor a peace deal, including 69% of Republicans.

For all the noise of negotiations, what matters are the terms of a peace deal. Mr. Trump might want to keep a note card reminding him that roughly seven in 10 Americans wanted out of Afghanistan in 2021. President Biden thought he'd be a hero for wrapping up that war. We know how that turned out.