

Putin–Trump phone call: no shift in either side’s position

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On 29 April, at Russia’s initiative, Vladimir Putin held a 90-minute phone call with Donald Trump. The US president said the conversation was “very good”, while Putin’s adviser Yuri Ushakov described it as “friendly, open and businesslike”.

According to Ushakov, the talks focused mainly on the situation in the Persian Gulf and the prospects for ending the Russia–Ukraine war. Reportedly, Putin welcomed Trump’s decision to extend the ceasefire with Iran and presented several proposals to address Iran’s nuclear programme. Trump, in turn, reiterated his intention to end the fighting between Russia and Ukraine as soon as possible and confirmed the United States’ readiness to continue mediating. As in previous exchanges, he also pointed to the prospect of lucrative economic projects once the war ends. Ushakov added that Trump shared the Kremlin’s view that the main obstacle to ending the war is President Volodymyr Zelensky, portrayed by Moscow as being “instigated” by European actors. Putin also proposed a ceasefire during Moscow’s Victory Day celebrations on 9 May.

Trump said he believed Putin wanted to end the war and suggested that the main obstacle to an agreement was the stance of the Ukrainian leadership, without naming Zelensky directly. He supported the idea of a Victory Day ceasefire, while presenting it as his own initiative. At the same time, he indicated that he had declined Putin’s offer to assist in resolving the issue of Iran’s enriched uranium.

Russia’s attempt to use the Iranian issue as leverage to encourage greater US pressure on Kyiv was unsuccessful. Both Moscow and Washington maintain their current positions on how to end the Russo-Ukrainian war.

Commentary

- **Putin’s main aim was to test whether President Trump would be willing to pressure Kyiv** in exchange for Russia’s cooperation on Iran. As part of this effort, he presented a proposal for Russia to take custody of Iran’s enriched uranium, an idea Moscow has been promoting publicly for several weeks. In the Kremlin’s view, such an arrangement could push Ukraine to accept Russia’s terms for ending the war, effectively amounting to capitulation.
- **The Kremlin’s immediate goal was to use US support to persuade Kyiv to agree to a ceasefire on 9 May.** These celebrations are important for maintaining the political legitimacy of Putin’s regime, and the authorities appear concerned about possible Ukrainian actions that could disrupt them. This concern is reflected in the decision not to

hold a military parade for the first time since 2007. Instead, the events are intended to have a purely 'civilian' character, making it more difficult for Kyiv to justify any potential attack.

- **Russia feels increasingly sidelined in ongoing international talks on Iran.** It points to the role it played under the 2015 multilateral nuclear agreement with Iran. At the same time, Moscow is seeking to position itself as a mediator in negotiations between Washington and Tehran.
- **Trump's response indicates that the United States is not interested in Russian mediation or in linking the Iran issue to Russia's war against Ukraine.** On this latter issue, both sides appear to maintain their positions. Russia continues to pursue its maximalist goals in Ukraine and expects Washington to help pressure Kyiv into capitulation. Trump, by contrast, is primarily focused on ending the fighting and seeks to entice the Kremlin with the prospect of economic benefits.