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Zelensky vows to retake Crimea despite Trump's peace push

The US president earlier called it “impossible” for the peninsula, which voted to join Russia in 2014, to return to Kiev's control



Vladimir Zelensky delivers a speech during a ceremony on Independence Day in Sophia Square, in Kiev, Ukraine, Aug. 24, 2025. © Sean Kilpatrick/The Canadian Press via AP

Ukrainian leader Vladimir Zelensky has rejected US calls to withdraw its claim to Crimea or make any territorial concessions to Russia.

In a speech marking Ukraine's Independence Day on Sunday, Zelensky vowed to retake the peninsula, which is predominantly populated by ethnic Russians and overwhelmingly voted to join Russia after the 2014 Western-backed coup in Kiev. He also pledged to reclaim the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, which, along with Kherson and Zaporozhye Regions, joined Russia in 2022 after referendums.

“Here at the zero kilometer, this is a starting point where distances to Ukrainian cities are marked – to

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our Donetsk, our Lugansk, our Crimea,” Zelensky said in an address filmed at Kiev’s Maidan Square, the site of the Western-backed 2014 coup. “All of this is Ukraine... and no temporary occupation can change that. One day... we will be together again as one country. It’s only a matter of time.”

While [mediating](#) peace efforts between Moscow and Kiev, US President Donald Trump has floated the idea of *“land swaps,”* but firmly stated that Kiev will not regain Crimea, [calling](#) that scenario *“impossible.”*

Land issues were reportedly on the agenda at talks between Trump, Zelensky, and Kiev’s EU backers earlier this week, but Zelensky [reportedly](#) rejected proposals to cede territory. He confirmed this in his speech on Sunday, declaring: *“Ukraine will never again in history be forced to bear the shame that the Russians call ‘a compromise’.”*

Trump has called for a one-on-one meeting between Putin and Zelensky, saying it could accelerate the peace process, but [warned](#) that the Ukrainian leader must *“show flexibility,”* including on territorial claims. He congratulated Ukraine on its national holiday in a post on X, while again urging Kiev to negotiate a settlement with Moscow to *“stop the senseless killing.”*

Putin has not ruled out meeting with Zelensky, despite questioning the Ukrainian leader’s legitimacy due to the expiration of his term, but insists that this can only happen after tangible progress in negotiations.

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On Friday, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Putin could meet Zelensky *“when the agenda is ready for a summit,”* but added that *“as things stand, no meeting is planned.”* Moscow has consistently maintained it will only accept a peace deal that includes Ukrainian neutrality, demilitarization, and recognition of Crimea, Donetsk, Lugansk, Kherson, and Zaporozhye as Russian.

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