

United States, Russia announce Black Sea ceasefire

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On Tuesday, the United States and Russia announced an agreement to halt hostilities between Kiev and Moscow in the Black Sea. The deal is already under question, as the European Union made clear on Thursday that it will not honor terms that the Kremlin insists must be implemented in order for the arrangement to go forward.

The so-called “Black Sea Initiative” imposes a ceasefire on both sides in the conflict, guarantees safe navigation, and bars the use of commercial ships for military purposes. Since the onset of the war, Ukraine and Russia have repeatedly struck each other’s naval forces, resulting in major losses and upending exports of grain and other resources.

The deal, which according to the White House’s statement commits the US and Ukraine to working towards a “durable and lasting peace,” also pledges both sides to prisoner exchanges, the release of civilian detainees, and the halt of strikes on energy infrastructure. Since being authorized by the US and NATO to use drones and long-range missiles against Moscow, Kiev has repeatedly attacked infrastructure critical to Russia’s oil production, storage, transit and refining capacities. The Kremlin’s forces have destroyed half of Ukraine’s electricity system, and large segments of Ukraine’s population have repeatedly lost heat and power over the last three years.

In an indication of the tenuous character of the arrangement, the White House and the Kremlin issued separate statements about the deal. While the Trump administration’s declaration says it will “help restore Russia’s access to the world market for agricultural and fertilizer exports, lower maritime insurance costs, and enhance access to ports and payment systems for such transactions,” the Putin government’s statement says that the ceasefire includes and is contingent upon the rollback of specific sanctions.

In addition to guaranteeing that Russian agricultural exports and fertilizers can be sold on global markets and the country can once again import agricultural machinery, the Kremlin asserts that Rosselkhozbank (Russian Agricultural Bank) and other institutions are to be reconnected to the

SWIFT network, an international payments system key to participation in the global economy. In 2022, Russia was booted out of SWIFT, crippling the country’s financial and trade position.

Agricultural exports are, after energy products, metals and arms, one of Russia’s biggest earners, and Moscow is in search of more revenues. The country’s economy, while not destroyed by Western sanctions, is wracked by an endless series of problems—inflation, labor shortages, wages that do not keep up with everyday costs, and a rapidly growing federal budget deficit driven by an unprecedented and still-growing increase in military spending.

While the Kremlin’s statement indicated that the lifting of sanctions had already been agreed upon, the White House acted as if the matter was under consideration, with Trump stating Tuesday, “We’re thinking about all of them right now.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, crushed by the White House’s seeming turn towards the Kremlin and desperately working to secure more European support for the war before his regime falls apart, said his government would uphold the deal and described it as moving in the “right direction.”

Shortly thereafter, however, he claimed that Russia was lying about the agreement to end sanctions and doing so would be a “disaster for diplomacy.” His defense ministry also stated that any operations by the Russian military outside of the eastern Black Sea would be regarded as a violation of the ceasefire.

The European powers have responded with outrage at the prospect of halting sanctions. On Wednesday, Germany stated that it was “unaware” of the arrangement with regards to SWIFT, which is under EU control. That night, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer described Putin as not being a “serious player in these peace talks” and derided him for “playing games with the agreed naval ceasefire in the Black Sea despite good-faith participation from all sides.”

The following day, after a 30-nation summit in Paris to which the US was not invited, the EU declared it would not

halt any sanctions until all of Russia's troops were withdrawn from Ukraine—terms to which Moscow cannot agree without ceding every territorial gain it has secured since 2014, when a NATO-backed coup led to the coming to power of a far-right, anti-Russian government in Kiev.

Coming out of the meeting this week, Paris and London also announced that any possible peace deal would entail the stationing of French and British troops on Ukrainian soil. In an indication of the disarray and fracturing within Europe that has been caused by the United States' apparent abandonment of Kiev, leaders of the two nations had to admit, however, that they were unable to secure any sort of agreement from the other assembled nations on this matter.

It remains to be seen what will happen with the "Black Sea Initiative" and the White House's overtures to the Kremlin. The arrangements with the Kremlin currently being pursued by the White House may fall apart under the weight of the contradictions in the world political and economic system and Trump's artless deals. Kiev is, as it was under President Biden as well, a pawn to be used or sacrificed at will.

Just hours before the agreement was announced, for instance, Trump's Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, warned the Senate Intelligence Committee that Russia remained a major threat, due to its cyber-attack and nuclear arsenals. The Republican Party, whose representatives just last year were hailing Zelensky and authorizing billions of dollars in funding for his regime, is deeply implicated in the anti-Russian war drive.

But what is clear is that the real target of the Trump administration's current moves around Ukraine is Europe, whose leaders slavishly committed themselves to the US' agenda against Moscow. The political capital of these governments, and an inordinate amount of their treasury's economic capital, have been expended on this effort. What has been the unifying theme of the EU's foreign policy over the last two decades apart from hatred of Russia?

Having failed in its war aims in Ukraine—managing to lay waste to the country but accomplish little else—the US is now hanging its European allies out to dry, so to speak. Under Trump's leadership, the American ruling class is turning against the NATO alliance. It increasingly sees the EU countries as enemies, forces that it must subdue and dominate as part of a gathering conflict with China. The European powers respond to this by racing madly to arm themselves.

The prospect that the war in Ukraine will end is no doubt looked upon by the masses of that country, Russia and the entire post-Soviet sphere with relief. Already by last fall, Gallup, a major US polling agency, was recording majority support among Ukrainians for ending the war. Hundreds of thousands have died, the country is ruled by a right-wing

autocrat with no popular base of support, and the Ukrainian ruling elite, wracked by endless corruption scandals and completely sustained by injections of money and arms from the US and Europe, has made clear that everything under its purview is up for sale.

In Russia, the Putin government uses a mixture of Russian nationalism, the population's hatred of NATO and the latter's evident desire to kill them, and unsustainable but also paltry expenditures of federal money to stay afloat. Tens of thousands of men have lost their lives in a war, which, however much instigated by Washington and the EU, the Russian ruling class wages in order to shore up its right to exploit its own people. Notwithstanding all the claims of Ukraine's fascists, the two countries have a long, shared history and culture and were once united in the Soviet Union. The war is experienced by tens of millions as a human tragedy.

But the fascist Donald Trump, whatever temporary reprieve might emerge out of a deal with the Putin government, is not going to rescue the Ukrainian and Russian working class from the disaster in which they find themselves. The United States is fighting for world domination and it can only do so through world war, from which there is no refuge on the planet. Russia, which has always contended with the geostrategic implications of being caught between Europe and Asia, will not be spared. Its ruling elite is not going to turn back from the war economy. It will continue to squeeze all it can out of the workers on the bottom. It will continue to send them to the front, perhaps one in a different locale.

The fight against world war in the 21st century requires the same solution that it did in the 20th century—the international unity of the working class, world socialism.



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