

Modi tells Zelenskiy he is ready to work ‘as a friend’ to bring about peace deal

August 23, 2024

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Indian PM says he respects and supports ‘sovereignty and territorial integrity’ of Ukraine during historic visit



India’s prime minister, Narendra Modi, made a historic visit to Kyiv on Friday and told Volodymyr Zelenskiy he was ready to work “as a friend” to bring about a peace deal that would end Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Modi said he respected and supported Ukraine’s “sovereignty and territorial integrity”. “It is our highest priority,” he said, adding that he had told Vladimir Putin during their meeting in July that “problems cannot be resolved on the battlefield”. The war could only end through “dialogue and diplomacy”, he stressed.

The trip is the first to Ukraine by an Indian leader since the country’s 1991

independence from the Soviet Union. It follows a period of strained relations. Zelenskiy criticised Modi's recent trip to Moscow, which came on the same day Russian missiles flattened a children's hospital in Kyiv.

Modi has sought to present his government as a neutral peace broker. Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine began in 2022, prompting western sanctions, India has imported large volumes of discounted Russian oil. It attended Ukraine's July peace summit in Switzerland but did not sign a communique.

But the Kremlin's deepening partnership with China – India's biggest geo-political and neighbourhood rival – has prompted a reassessment. On Friday, Zelenskiy embraced Modi warmly and described his support for Ukraine's integrity in the face of Russian aggression as "critical".

"Today, history was made," Zelenskiy posted on X. He pointed out Modi's "friendly" and "symbolic" visit came on the eve of celebrations for Ukraine's independence day.

The two leaders stood together in front of a museum memorial to Ukrainian children killed by Russian missiles. In official talks, they discussed the 10-point peace formula Zelenskiy has presented to the international community, India's foreign ministry said.

The blueprint envisages the withdrawal of Russian troops from occupied areas, reparations and war crime tribunals for Russian generals and political figures. Ukrainian officials are preparing to organise a second peace summit this year, and are keen to involve global south countries. One venue under discussion is Saudi Arabia, it is understood.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser in the Ukrainian president's office, said Friday's discussions in Kyiv were significant because Delhi "really has a certain influence" over Moscow.

"It's extremely important for us to effectively build relations with such countries, to explain to them what the correct end to the war is – and that it is also in their interests," he told Reuters.

Modi's trip comes at a time when the Russian and Ukrainian armies are both making gains. Two and a half weeks ago Ukraine launched a surprise incursion into Russia. On Friday, its military said it had used US-supplied glide

bombs to carry out precision strikes on a Russian platoon base in the Kursk region, destroying enemy equipment. A video showed explosions and clouds of smoke.

Ukraine's armed forces now control a 1,250 sq km salient inside Russia, centred on the town of Sudzha. The Kremlin has downplayed the incursion and pledged to drive out Ukrainian "terrorists". About 130,000 Russians have fled. Fierce fighting continues in the town of Korenevo and in a dozen frontline villages.

The invasion of Russia – the first by foreign troops since the second world war – has gone better for Kyiv than expected. On Thursday, Zelenskiy said the "buffer zone" had reduced cross-border shelling of civilians. It is unclear if there is a Ukrainian military exit strategy if Putin responds with overwhelming force.

