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Getting Along With Russia Would be 'Great,' Trump Tells Concerned Baltic Leaders

By Reuters

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Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump **Kremlin Press Service**

U.S. President Donald Trump, standing alongside the leaders of three Baltic countries most concerned about the potential for aggression from Moscow, on Tuesday said he thought he could have a good relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Trump, at a news conference after meeting the presidents of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia, told reporters "it's a real possibility that I could have a good relationship" with Putin, but acknowledged it was not a certainty.

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"Getting along with Russia is a good thing," Trump said. "I think I could have a very good

relationship with Russia and with President Putin, and if I did, that would be a great thing. And there's also a great possibility that that won't happen. Who knows?"

Trump reiterated his belief that "nobody has been tougher on Russia than I have," noting he has pushed for increased defense spending to bolster the U.S. military and has aggressively pushed energy production, enabling the United States to become an exporter in competition with Russia.

"We're essentially now energy-independent. We're an exporter of energy. That is not a positive for Russia," Trump told reporters.

"We are going to have a military stronger than we've ever had before by far," he added. "That's not exactly a great thing for Russia."

Trump also said he had prodded NATO members to meet their defense spending commitments, generating "many billions of dollars" in additional military spending by NATO allies.

He praised the three Baltic presidents for their countries' commitment to meeting the NATO goal of spending 2 percent of gross domestic product on defense this year. Estonia reached that goal in 2017, but Latvia and Lithuania were just shy of the mark at 1.75 percent and 1.73 percent, respectively, according to NATO figures issued last month.

The Baltics leaders expressed confidence in Trump's security commitments.

The United States plans to provide $100 million for large-caliber ammunition for the Baltics and $70 million for training and equipment, the White House said. It also is working to build the region's defense and energy infrastructure.

Estonian President Kersti Kaljulaid said the presidents had discussed the region's security needs and what was required "to make sure that our deterrence is believable to everybody who might want to question it."

"We are an ally situation together. And we find the solutions together, which will work for us all together, because we are in it all together," Kaljulaid added.

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