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Trump Tells Putin to Make Ukraine Deal 'Now' or Face Tougher Sanctions

By Danny Kemp for AFP

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U.S. President Donald Trump stepped up the pressure on Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin to make a peace deal with Ukraine Wednesday, threatening tougher economic measures if Moscow does not agree to end the war.

Trump's warning in a Truth Social post came as the Republican seeks a quick solution to a grinding conflict that he had promised to end before even starting his second term.

"If we don't make a 'deal,' and soon, I have no other choice but to put high levels of Taxes, Tariffs, and Sanctions on anything being sold by Russia to the United States, and various other participating countries," Trump said.

Trump said he was "not looking to hurt Russia" and had "always had a very good relationship with President Putin," a leader for whom he has expressed admiration in the past.

"All of that being said, I'm going to do Russia, whose Economy is failing, and President Putin, a very big FAVOR. Settle now, and STOP this ridiculous War! IT'S ONLY GOING TO GET WORSE."

He added: "Let’s get this war, which never would have started if I were President, over with! We can do it the easy way, or the hard way - and the easy way is always better. It’s time to 'MAKE A DEAL.'"

Russia already faces crushing U.S. sanctions over the war since invading Ukraine in 2022 and trade has slowed to a trickle. Trump's predecessor Joe Biden's administration imposed sweeping sanctions against Moscow's energy sector earlier this month.

But Trump — a billionaire tycoon famed for his book "The Art of the Deal" — and his administration reportedly believe there are ways of toughening measures to press Putin.

The United States imported $2.9 billion in goods from Russia from January to November 2024 — down sharply from $4.3 billion over the same period in 2023, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

Top U.S. imports from Russia include fertilizers and precious metals.

'Destroying Russia'

It was Trump's toughest line on Putin since he returned to the White House this week, and comes despite fears that it was Kyiv rather than Moscow that he would strongarm into making a peace deal.

During a White House press conference on Tuesday Trump said only that it "sounds likely" that he would apply additional sanctions if Putin did not come to the table.

The U.S. president however declined to say whether he would continue Biden's policy of sending billions of dollars in weaponry to help Ukraine.

"We're looking at that," he said at the press conference. "We're talking to [Ukrainian President Volodymyr] Zelensky, we're going to be talking to President Putin very soon."

Trump has also said he expects to meet Putin — with whom he had a summit in his first term in Helsinki — soon.

Prior to beginning his new inauguration on Monday, Trump had vowed to end the Ukraine war "within 24 hours" and before even taking office, raising expectations he would leverage aid to force Kyiv to make territorial concessions to Moscow.

But his promised breakthrough has proved elusive.

In unusually critical remarks of Putin on Monday, Trump said the Russian president was "destroying Russia by not making a deal."

Trump added that Zelensky had told him he wanted a peace agreement to end the war.

Putin congratulated Trump on his inauguration for a second term on Monday.

The Russian leader added that he was "open to dialogue" on the Ukraine conflict with Trump's incoming U.S. administration, adding he hoped any settlement would ensure "lasting peace."

Trump has repeatedly praised Putin, whose hyper-masculine style and professed attachment to traditional values has increasingly found favor among some U.S. Christian conservatives.

U.S. special counsel Robert Mueller and the FBI both investigated alleged collusion between Russia and Trump's 2016 presidential campaign — which Trump in his post on Wednesday dubbed once again the "Russia hoax."

Mueller won convictions of six members of the Trump campaign but said he found no evidence of criminal cooperation with Russia by the Trump campaign.

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