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# Zelensky Warns Putin Wants to 'Manipulate' Trump on Ukraine

By AFP

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Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky on Friday warned that his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin wanted to "manipulate" Donald Trump, after the Kremlin chief praised the U.S. leader and said he was ready for talks with him.

Kyiv earlier warned against any Putin-Trump peace talks on the near three-year war without its and European participation.

"He wants to manipulate the desire of the President of the United States of America to achieve peace," Zelensky said during a daily evening address on social media. "I am confident that no Russian manipulations will succeed anymore."

He said Putin, who launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, was ready to continue the war and "manipulate the leaders of the world."

Putin had earlier praised Trump as a "smart" leader who might have prevented the conflict from starting.

The Russian leader did not say when talks would take place, and the Kremlin said Friday it was still waiting for "signals" from Washington, despite Trump announcing Thursday he was willing to meet Putin "immediately."

"We have always said, and I want to emphasise this once again, that we are ready for these negotiations on Ukrainian issues," Putin told a reporter from Russian state TV.

Praising Trump as a "smart" and "pragmatic" man, Putin also repeated the Republican's unfounded claim that he won the US presidential election against Joe Biden in 2020.

"I cannot but agree with him that if he had been president — if his victory hadn't been stolen in 2020 — then maybe there would not have been the crisis in Ukraine that emerged in 2022," Putin said.

## Pressure from Trump

The Ukraine conflict has plunged relations between the two nuclear powers to their lowest levels since the Cold War.

Trump, who was inaugurated on Monday, has called the conflict "ridiculous" and threatened Russia with tougher economic sanctions if it does not agree to stop its offensive.

"If they don't settle this war soon, like almost immediately, I'm going to put massive tariffs on Russia, and massive taxes, and also big sanctions," the Republican said during a Fox News interview on Thursday.

Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos on the same day, Trump said he would ask Saudi Arabia and OPEC to lower oil prices, claiming: "If the price came down, the Russia-Ukraine war would end immediately."

Putin pushed back at Trump's claim that lower oil prices might expedite the end of the conflict.

"I have a hard time imagining there will be decisions taken that are detrimental to the American economy," Putin said Friday.

## 'Come back to reality'

Neither side has shown signs of de-escalating hostilities since Trump's inauguration, despite the President claiming he would end the conflict in "24 hours" once in power.

Kyiv on Friday warned against being excluded from any talks.

"He [Putin] wants to negotiate the fate of Europe — without Europe. And he wants to talk about Ukraine without Ukraine," the head of Ukraine's presidential office Andriy Yermak said.

"This is not going to happen. Putin needs to come back to reality himself, or he will be

brought back. This is not how it works in the modern world."

Russian aerial attacks near Kyiv killed three people and wounded several others, Ukrainian officials said Friday, while Ukraine fired 120 drones at least 12 Russian regions, including the capital Moscow.

The Kremlin has launched drone or missile attacks at Kyiv almost every day since sending troops into Ukraine in February 2022, ostensibly targeting military and energy facilities.

"Three people were killed in an enemy attack in the Kyiv region," the emergency services said in a statement on social media.

Fragments of a drone had struck a 10-storey residential building after the head of the region said a private home had also been hit, it added.

Black smoke billowed from a residential building damaged in the strike as rescue workers hauled out the bodies of the victims, official images from the scene showed.

In Russia, the Ukrainian military said it launched an overnight drone attack striking an oil refinery, power station facilities and an electronics plant.

State media reported that a microelectronics factory had halted work after six Ukrainian drones damaged production and storage facilities in the Bryansk region.

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