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Trump Says Zelensky and Putin Must ‘Get Together’

By AFP

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Jim Watson / AFP

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Friday that Ukraine's Volodymyr Zelensky and Russia's Vladimir Putin will have to "get together" to end the war between Moscow and Kyiv.

Trump's comments marked a shift from criticizing Zelensky as a "dictator" after the Ukrainian president complained that his country — invaded by Russia in 2022 — had been left out of talks between U.S. and Russian officials.

"President Putin and President Zelensky are going to have to get together. Because you know what? We want to stop killing millions of people," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office.

Trump added Kyiv would "hopefully in the next fairly short period of time" sign a deal handing Washington preferential access to Ukraine's mineral deposits.

"They're very brave, in every way you can imagine. But we are spending our treasure on some

country that's very, very far away," Trump said of Ukraine.

Trump wants Ukraine to give U.S. companies access to its vast natural resources as compensation for the tens of billions of dollars of aid delivered under his predecessor Joe Biden.

In return, Ukraine is seeking security guarantees from the United States for signing away the precious rights.

Zelensky — who had rejected the agreement — said Friday he hoped for a "fair result."

Trump: Ukraine has no 'cards'

The minerals deal has become a major sticking point in the increasingly fraught relations between Washington and Kyiv.

In a public spat, Trump this week called Zelensky a "dictator without elections" and falsely blamed Ukraine for starting the war.

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Earlier Friday, Trump described Ukraine as at a disadvantage in the negotiations — further alarming allies who think he will offer concessions to Putin.

"I've had very good talks with Putin, and I've had not such good talks with Ukraine. They don't have any cards," Trump said at the White House.

His call for Zelensky and Putin to work together came despite him saying in a Fox News interview that it was not "very important" for Zelensky to be involved in U.S.-Russia talks.

Trump again declined to blame Russia for the February 2022 invasion, saying that Putin "attacked but they shouldn't have let him attack."

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The U.S. president added that Putin — the Russian strongman for whom he has repeatedly expressed admiration — faced no pressure to make a deal.

"He doesn't have to make a deal, because if he wanted, he'd get the whole country," Trump said.

French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer — who are both due at the White House next week for potentially tricky discussions — have been accused by Trump of doing nothing to end the war.

Macron said Friday he will tell Trump that "you can't be weak with President Putin."

Europe 'must do more'

On the ground, both sides in the war are trying to improve their position on the battlefield amid Trump's push for a ceasefire.

Russia's army on Friday said it had captured two more villages in eastern Ukraine.

With Europe shaken by the new U.S. stance on the conflict, Ukraine got renewed support from German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

"We won't leave Ukraine alone and decide things over their heads," he said Friday at his last major campaign event before weekend elections.

After speaking to Scholz and other regional leaders, Zelensky said in his televised evening address that "Europe must and can do much more to ensure that peace is actually achieved" in Ukraine.

On the diplomatic front, the United States proposed Friday a resolution at the United Nations that omitted any mention of Kyiv's territory occupied by Russia.

Washington's text, seen by AFP, calls for a "swift end to the conflict" without mentioning Kyiv's territorial integrity, and was welcomed by Moscow's ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia as "a good move."

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