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Kremlin Confirms U.S.-Russia Talks as Trump Envoy Lands in Moscow

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Steve Witkoff, White House special envoy for the Middle East. **Alex Brandon / AP / TASS**

The Kremlin confirmed Thursday that U.S. negotiators were on their way to Moscow for planned talks as Washington seeks to persuade Russia to accept a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine.

"Negotiators are flying in, and indeed, contacts are scheduled," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters, without specifying the members of the U.S. delegation.

Earlier, the White House said that U.S. President Donald Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, a mediator in the Gaza and Ukraine conflicts, would be in Moscow this week.

Flight trackers and Russian state media footage showed Witkoff's plane landing at Moscow's Vnukovo Airport around 12:30 p.m. local time Thursday.

According to the business newspaper Kommersant, President Vladimir Putin plans to meet with Witkoff later on Thursday, following discussions with Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko.

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Peskov also said Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov spoke with U.S. National Security Adviser Mike Waltz by phone the day before.

Ushakov, asked about his conversation with Waltz, appeared to pour cold water on the 30-day ceasefire proposal in a statement to state media aired Thursday.

"I naturally commented on the agreements reached regarding the temporary truce and outlined our position that this is nothing more than a brief respite for Ukrainian forces — nothing else," the Kremlin aide said.

"These kinds of steps, which merely imitate peace efforts, seem unnecessary to anyone in this situation," Ushakov added.

The talks come days after Ukraine agreed to a U.S.-brokered 30-day ceasefire during negotiations in Saudi Arabia. Moscow has requested further details before indicating whether it will accept the proposal.

Trump said Wednesday he hoped Putin would agree to the truce or face "very bad, devastating" financial sanctions.

"But I don't want to do that because I want to see peace. And we're getting close to getting something done," Trump told reporters.

Russia, grappling with economic strain, has pushed for sanctions relief as part of any deal. Peskov on Thursday reiterated Moscow's stance that the sanctions are "illegal" but declined to comment further ahead of negotiations.

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U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, who led the American negotiating team in talks with Ukraine in Saudi Arabia, said Washington wants Moscow to agree to the ceasefire with no preconditions.

Putin, however, signaled on the day of Trump's inauguration in January that he would not accept a "temporary ceasefire" and would continue pursuing Russia's stated interests in Ukraine.

Anonymous sources told Reuters on Wednesday that Russia presented the U.S. with a list of broad demands similar to its previous ultimatums to Ukraine, Washington and NATO.

AFP contributed reporting.

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