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Trump Envoy Meets With Putin in St. Petersburg for Ukraine Talks

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U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff. **AP / TASS**

U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff wrapped up his latest talks with Russia's Vladimir Putin on Friday, after President Donald Trump urged his Russian counterpart to move quicker to end what he said was the country's "senseless war" with Ukraine.

Witkoff met with Putin at the presidential library in St. Petersburg, which state news agencies said lasted four and a half hours.

The Kremlin said afterward only that the meeting had taken place and "focused on various aspects of the Ukrainian settlement," without elaborating.

Spokesman Dmitry Peskov had earlier said he expected no diplomatic "breakthroughs" from the talks — Witkoff's third with Putin since February.

He also said "maybe" when asked about whether a possible meeting between Putin and Trump would be discussed.

After their last meeting, Witkoff — a longtime Trump ally who worked with the U.S. president in real estate — said Putin was a "great leader" and "not a bad guy."

The envoy's praise of a president long seen by the United States as an autocratic adversary highlights the dramatic turn in Washington's approach to dealings with the Kremlin since Trump took office for a second term.

Earlier Friday, the state-run TASS news agency reported that Witkoff held a meeting at the Grand Europe Hotel in St. Petersburg with Russian Direct Investment Fund head Kirill Dmitriev, who also serves as Putin's economic envoy. It published a video of the two men leaving the hotel and getting into separate vehicles.

Witkoff hosted Dmitriev in Washington last week, after which the Putin envoy expressed "cautious optimism" about renewed U.S.-Russian diplomatic engagement.

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Witkoff's visit comes a day after the release of U.S.-Russian dual national Ksenia Karelina in a prisoner exchange with the U.S. in Abu Dhabi. Karelina was swapped with Arthur Petrov, a German-Russian dual national arrested in Cyprus in 2023 at the request of U.S. authorities for allegedly exporting sensitive U.S.-made microelectronics to Russia.

In February, Witkoff was involved in negotiations to release Marc Fogel, an American teacher jailed in Russia on drug charges, in return for Russian cryptocurrency figure Alexander Vinnik. The Trump administration hailed the release of Fogel as a positive step for diplomacy.

Witkoff's trip to St. Petersburg also comes amid Trump's growing frustration over stalled efforts to end the war in Ukraine.

Both Ukraine and Russia have accused each other of violating a pause in strikes against energy infrastructure, further dimming hopes for even a partial halt in attacks amid the ongoing war.

The collapse of that agreement, which the U.S. brokered, could push Trump to "move forward" with new sanctions on Russia either unilaterally or through Congress if no broad ceasefire is reached by the end of April, Axios cited an anonymous source familiar with the issue as saying.

On Thursday, Trump said "we're getting relatively close" to achieving a ceasefire.

AFP contributed reporting.

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