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U.S. Envoy Witkoff, Putin Discuss 'Possibility' of Direct Russia-Ukraine Talks

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Steve Witkoff and Vladimir Putin. **Kristina Kormilitsyna / TASS**

U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff and Vladimir Putin on Friday discussed the "possibility" of direct talks between Russia and Ukraine during a meeting in Moscow, the Kremlin said Friday.

Donald Trump is pushing for a ceasefire in the three-year conflict but has so far been unable to extract any meaningful concessions from Putin.

Witkoff held a three-hour meeting with the Russian leader in the Kremlin, Moscow said, a day after a Russian strike killed 12 people in Kyiv and as a car bomb killed a Russian general in an attack the Kremlin blamed on Ukraine.

"There was a discussion on the possibility of renewing direct negotiations between representatives of the Russian Federation and Ukraine," Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said after he talks.

He called the conversation "constructive and very useful."

Russia and Ukraine have not held direct talks on halting the fighting since the start of Moscow's 2022 offensive.

Lower-level officials have cooperated in areas such as prisoner exchanges, the return of dead soldiers' remains and to strike the now-defunct Black Sea grain deal in 2022.

Moscow's invasion, launched in February 2022, has devastated swathes of eastern Ukraine and killed tens of thousands.

In its push to end the conflict — which has so far yielded few results and frustrated Trump — the United States is holding talks with both sides separately.

Ushakov said the meeting brought the U.S. and Russian positions on Ukraine "closer together."

Kyiv and its European allies fear Moscow and Washington will strike an unfair deal for Ukraine.

Witkoff, a billionaire real estate investor and one of Trump's most trusted aides, is playing a key role in Washington's peace efforts, though has made several comments that have infuriated Ukraine.

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> ⛔⛔ The Kremlin published a video of Steve Witkoff meeting with Vladimir Putin in the Kremlin for talks on Friday afternoon.
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> Read more: https://t.co/jJJ8JfF9FU pic.twitter.com/1cRjBG1dJO
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> — The Moscow Times (@MoscowTimes) April 25, 2025

Earlier, U.S. officials told Axios that Witkoff was expected to meet with Putin on Friday, as Trump pushes for a ceasefire agreement between Moscow and Kyiv.

Some reports suggested Witkoff may press Russia to recognize Ukraine's right to maintain its military and defense industry as part of a future peace deal. When Putin launched the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, he said one of Russia's war goals was to "demilitarize" the country.

Trump said Wednesday that he was "very close" to reaching an agreement with the Kremlin, while accusing Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky of being "harder to deal with" after he rejected the idea of recognizing Russian control of the Crimean peninsula.

On Friday, Reuters reported that Ukrainian and European officials have pushed back against U.S. proposals aimed at ending the war, offering counterproposals during recent talks in Paris

and London. The differences center on issues, including territorial control and the future of Ukraine's military.

The U.S. proposal, put forward by Witkoff, includes recognizing Russia's control over Crimea and parts of eastern and southern Ukraine, while the European-Ukrainian text defers territorial discussions until after a ceasefire, according to Reuters.

The two sides also diverge on sanctions and security terms, with Ukraine seeking stronger guarantees and compensation funded by frozen Russian assets.

Trump has faced criticism for appearing more amenable to Russia's demands than to those of Ukraine and its European allies. Kremlin officials have repeatedly praised the Trump administration's shift in foreign policy priorities.

Related article: Lavrov Says Russia Is Ready for Ukraine Deal After Trump Urges Putin to Halt Attacks

On Thursday, Trump called on Putin to "get this Peace Deal DONE" following a wave of Russian airstrikes on Kyiv that killed at least 12 people and injured dozens more.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov later said that Moscow was ready to make a deal and that remaining issues were being "fine-tuned."

Zelensky has urged an "immediate, full and unconditional ceasefire" in response to the recent deadly attacks on Ukrainian cities.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt said Trump's patience was "running very thin" amid the protracted negotiations.

AFP contributed reporting.

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