

Trump Envoy Meets With Putin in Moscow Just Ahead of Ukraine Peace Deadline

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Vladimir Putin and Steve Witkoff. **Gavriil Grigorov / Kremlin / TASS**

U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff arrived in Moscow on Wednesday for talks with President Vladimir Putin, just two days before U.S. President Donald Trump's deadline for the Kremlin to end the war against Ukraine or face a fresh round of sanctions is set to expire.

After landing in Moscow, Witkoff was met by Kremlin special representative Kirill Dmitriev, Russian state media reported. Photos and videos published by the TASS news agency showed the two men walking together at Moscow's Zaryadye Park, surrounded by aides and bodyguards.

The Kremlin later [confirmed](#) that Putin and Witkoff met on Wednesday, publishing a [video](#) of them shaking hands, but it did not immediately provide further details.

Witkoff, who officially serves as Special Envoy to the Middle East, has traveled to Russia

several times since Trump took office in January. The envoy [last visited](#) the country in April, when he met with Putin to discuss the possibility of renewing direct peace negotiations between Ukraine and Russia.

His latest trip to Russia comes after Trump gave Moscow until Friday to halt its ongoing war or face new sanctions and what he called “secondary tariffs” targeting its key trade partners, including China and India.

“Putin will stop killing people if you get energy down another \$10 a barrel. He’s going to have no choice, because his economy stinks,” Trump said in an [interview](#) with CBS aired Tuesday.

When asked earlier what Witkoff’s message would be to Moscow, and if there was anything Russia could do to avoid new sanctions, Trump [told](#) reporters: “Yeah, get a deal where people stop getting killed.”

Related article: [Trump’s Break-Up With Putin Is a Slap on the Wrist, Not a Knock-Out Punch](#)

But even as he threatens tougher sanctions on Russia, Trump has also suggested that the impact may be limited, having said over the weekend that Moscow has proven to be “pretty good at avoiding sanctions.”

“They’re wily characters,” he said of the Russians.

In public, the Kremlin has [brushed off](#) the looming threat of new sanctions and secondary tariffs on its trading partners. Yet according to Russian sources cited by Reuters, Putin is [reportedly concerned](#) about angering Trump and realizes he may lose a chance to improve relations with Washington by ignoring the U.S. president’s call for peace.

According to those same sources, however, Russia’s war goals take precedence. Those are said to include the full withdrawal of Ukrainian forces from the four regions of eastern Ukraine that Moscow claims as its own, as well as Kyiv accepting neutral status and limits on the size of its military — demands that Ukraine has repeatedly rejected.

Kyiv, in turn, is calling for an immediate ceasefire and last week urged allies to push for “regime change” in Moscow. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky [said](#) Wednesday morning that “it is extremely important that Moscow is beginning to feel the pressure of the world, the pressure from the United States, the threat of tougher sanctions for continuing the war.”

Earlier, sources [told](#) Bloomberg that the Kremlin is considering the possibility of an air ceasefire with Ukraine in an attempt to both pacify Trump and press forward with its military campaign, where Russian forces have been making steady advances on the battlefield in recent months. However, Putin does not plan to agree to a broader ceasefire for the time being, those sources said.

Adding to tensions, Trump recently announced that he had ordered the deployment of two U.S. nuclear submarines after exchanging barbs on social media with former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. He did not specify whether the vessels were nuclear-powered or nuclear-armed, or where exactly they were deployed.

On Monday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov urged caution in response to the submarine deployment.

AFP contributed reporting.

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