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Trump Nudges Zelensky to 'Show Flexibility' in Peace Talks, Blames Russia's Invasion on NATO Expansion

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Donald Trump. **Daniel Torok / The White House**

U.S. President Donald Trump warned Tuesday that Russia's Vladimir Putin could face a "rough situation" if he does not show a willingness to work toward a peace settlement with Kyiv, while urging Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky to be ready to "show some flexibility" in negotiations.

"I hope President Putin is going to be good. And if he's not, that's going to be a rough situation," Trump said during a phone interview on Fox & Friends. "And I hope that Zelensky... will do what he has to do. He has to show some flexibility."

Trump surprised the world on Monday when he revealed that plans were underway for a face-to-face meeting between Putin and Zelensky, an announcement that rounded off a day of high-stakes talks between European leaders and the Ukrainian president at the White House.

“Maybe they’re getting along a little bit better than I thought. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have set up the [bilateral meeting],” Trump told Fox & Friends, referring to bilateral talks with Zelensky and Putin. “I wouldn’t say they are ever going to be best friends, but they are doing OK.”

Zelensky said Monday that he is ready to meet with Putin. The Kremlin has not confirmed whether planning has begun for a summit, saying only that it was “considering the possibility” of high-level “direct talks” with Ukraine after a phone call between Trump and Putin on Monday.

Two sources familiar with that conversation told AFP that Putin suggested holding a meeting with Zelensky in Moscow, to which the Ukrainian president responded: “No.”

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On Fox & Friends, Trump also appeared to suggest that Ukraine instigated Russia’s 2022 invasion, arguing that the “war really started over NATO and Crimea,” which Moscow annexed in 2014.

He described Crimea as “the most beautiful piece of property you’ve ever seen” and blamed former President Barack Obama for allowing it to be “given away in one of the dumbest real estate deals.”

The Obama administration responded to Russia’s 2014 annexation with economic sanctions and reduced diplomatic engagement.

At the same time, Trump said the war has mainly killed Russian and Ukrainian soldiers, with fewer civilians struck by missiles that “hit wrong spots or get lobbed into cities like Kyiv and towns,” suggesting that he believes Russia is not intentionally targeting civilians.

“But you know, if I can save 7,000 people a week from being killed, I think that’s... I want to try and get to heaven if possible,” he said during the phone interview. “I just want to end it.”

When asked about potential land swaps between Moscow and Kyiv as part of a peace settlement, Trump said Ukraine would “get a lot of land” but did not elaborate.

He then suggested that France, Germany and the U.K. could provide “boots on the ground” in Ukraine as peacekeepers, while rejecting direct U.S. military involvement.

“There will be some form of security [for Ukraine]. It can’t be NATO,” the American president said. “If you were Russia, who would want to have your enemy, your opponent, on your line? You don't do that,” he added, referring to Ukraine as a “sort of buffer between Russia and the rest of Europe.”

“Everything worked out well until Biden got involved,” Trump said.

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