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Witkoff Advised Kremlin Official on Ukraine Deal and Trump – Bloomberg

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Kremlin economic envoy Kirill Dmitriev (L), Kremlin foreign policy aide Yury Ushakov, President Vladimir Putin and U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff (R-L) at a meeting in St. Petersburg in April. **Vyacheslav Prokofyev / Russian Presidential Press and Information Office / TASS**

U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff advised a senior Kremlin official on how Russia's Vladimir Putin should pitch a Ukraine peace deal to President Donald Trump, according to a transcript of their conversation published by Bloomberg.

The phone conversation in mid-October appears to point to the origins of a 28-point proposal endorsed by Trump, which was widely seen as favoring Russia by requiring Ukraine to make significant territorial concessions and pledge not to join NATO.

Bloomberg said it had produced the transcript after reviewing a recording of the conversation between Witkoff and Yuri Ushakov, Putin's foreign policy adviser, but did not indicate how the recording was acquired.

Related article: Trump Says Envoy Witkoff Will Meet Putin in Moscow as Peace Deal 'Close'

According to the transcript, Witkoff said during the call that he believed Russia "has always wanted a peace deal," and that he has "the deepest respect for President Putin."

The U.S. envoy advised Ushakov that Putin should flatter Trump during an upcoming call over the recently concluded Gaza ceasefire and say "that you respect that he is a man of peace and you're just, you're really glad to have seen it happen."

Witkoff also suggested the creation of a 20-point peace plan for Ukraine "just like we did in Gaza," and urged that Putin bring it up with Trump.

"I think... the president will give me a lot of space and discretion to get to the deal," he told Ushakov.

On Wednesday, Ushakov stopped short of explicitly confirming the authenticity of the call published by Bloomberg, but his remarks suggested it was genuine.

"Someone is leaking it, someone is listening in. But not us," the Kremlin adviser told Russian state media. "It's unlikely this was done to improve relations, which are already difficult and rely on contacts like these, including by phone."

In comments to the business newspaper Kommersant, Ushakov said that he occasionally uses WhatsApp to call Witkoff, suggesting that "someone can somehow apparently eavesdrop" on those conversations.

Trump and Putin last spoke over the phone on Oct. 16, with the U.S. president describing it as "very productive" and subsequently questioning Kyiv's push for Tomahawk missiles just a day before hosting Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House.

Witkoff is expected to discuss a new version of the White House's original 28-point proposal with Putin in Moscow soon. Trump said there were "only a few remaining points of disagreement" in the revised plan.

AFP contributed reporting.

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