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Trump Says He Believes Russia Wants Peace Even as Putin Vows to Take All of Donbas

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Donald Trump. **Andrew Caballero-Reynolds / AFP**

U.S. President Donald Trump said Wednesday that he believes Russia's Vladimir Putin wants to end the war in Ukraine, even as the Kremlin leader renewed threats to seize more Ukrainian territory and peace talks in Moscow this week failed to produce a breakthrough.

Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner met with Putin and other top Russian officials at the Kremlin on Tuesday to discuss a new U.S. peace plan, which was drafted with input from Ukrainian officials.

After the talks, Kremlin foreign policy adviser Yury Ushakov told journalists that the sides were unable to find a compromise to end the war, now approaching its fourth year, though he called the meeting with Witkoff and Kushner "useful" and "constructive."

Trump echoed that sentiment on Wednesday, telling reporters in the Oval Office that the

American delegation “had a reasonably good meeting with President Putin.”

He cautioned that it was too early to predict the outcome of the negotiations “because it does take two to tango.” But he also said he believed that Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky should have agreed to a ceasefire during their first meeting at the White House in February.

“That would have been a much better time to settle. But [Ukrainian officials], in their wisdom, decided not to do that. They have a lot of things against them right now,” Trump said.

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Pressed on whether Witkoff and Kushner had come away from their Moscow meeting convinced that Putin genuinely sought to end the fighting, Trump told reporters: “He would like to end the war. That was their impression.”

Witkoff and Kushner are scheduled to meet top Ukrainian negotiator Rustem Umerov in Florida on Thursday in a follow-up to their meeting with Putin., two U.S. officials told AFP.

The Kremlin said this week that the Russian military’s recent gains on the battlefield in eastern Ukraine, including the reported capture of the key city of Pokrovsk, have strengthened its position in ceasefire talks.

In an interview with Indian media broadcast on Thursday, Putin reiterated that Russia intends to take full control of the Donbas region in eastern Ukraine and will not retreat from that demand, even if it means taking the territory by force.

Meanwhile, in Kyiv, Zelensky said that though a window of opportunity for peace has opened, it must be accompanied by pressure on Moscow.

“The world now clearly feels that there is an opportunity to end the war, and the current activity in negotiations must be supported by pressure on Russia,” he said in a regular evening address on Wednesday.

AFP contributed reporting.

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