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U.S., China Can Help End Ukraine War, Trump Tells Xi Before Trilateral With Putin

By Reuters

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Russia's President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump greet each other during a meeting on the sidelines of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Leaders' Summit in Shenzhen, China, Nov. 19. **Sputnik/Vyacheslav Prokofyev/Pool via REUTERS**

U.S. President Donald Trump told his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping on Thursday that they should both help end the war in Ukraine ahead of their unprecedented three-way meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

The diplomatic gathering of the leaders of the world's largest nuclear powers is unlikely to produce major agreements, analysts say, given deep differences over Ukraine, Iran, nuclear weapons and trade. But it has unnerved smaller countries that fear their interests might be disregarded.

Trump met Putin and Xi separately ahead of the trilateral talks, calling the Russian leader a "friend." The Kremlin said they discussed the war in Ukraine and that Putin left the meeting in an "excellent" mood.

When meeting Xi right after, Trump thanked him for a lavish welcome and expressed hope that their trilateral with Putin would be successful.

"We're looking to both help with respect to the war with Russia and Ukraine," Trump said. "I'd like to see it ended. I think I can speak for both of us very much."

He said the two sides found "balance" in what is now a "fair" trade relationship. Xi said he would work with Trump to keep ties stable.

Trump said both presidents felt strongly about oil having to flow through the Strait of Hormuz, which has been disrupted by the Iran war. Xi did not mention Ukraine or Iran in his remarks.

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Patricia Kim, foreign policy fellow at the Brookings Institution, said China would not want to be seen as brokering a deal over Ukraine, given the "problematic optics" of Kyiv and European leaders not taking part.

"Xi has characterized the Russia-Ukraine war as fundamentally a European problem, making Beijing even less inclined to assume responsibility for resolving it," Kim said.

Fanfare and pageantry

Speaking to Fox News earlier on Thursday, Trump highlighted the pomp surrounding his arrival, which contrasted with the more muted greeting of other leaders, including Putin. Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi landed without any welcoming ceremony.

Xi greeted Trump at the airport, the first time he has done so with any visiting leader since becoming president, reciprocating his counterpart's gesture at Joint Base Andrews in September when they last met. The leaders also briefly hugged.

"This is a great president, one of the great presidents of China, and he's never gone to the airport to meet somebody," Trump said, when asked what he wanted to get out of the trilateral.

"And not only that, the fanfare, the beauty, the pageantry, the thousands of people, the young children, the soldiers, the whole thing. It was great respect, and I appreciate that. That's a big win for us. It's a big win for China too."

Trump arrived after Xi and Putin delivered pointed speeches at an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in China's southern tech hub of Shenzhen, denouncing Western trade "protectionism" and sanctions.

During Thursday's APEC proceedings, Xi reiterated his advocacy for what he called "free and open" trade. Western leaders say China's growth model favoring industrial strength over consumers is unfair and creates destabilising global trade imbalances.

Putin, fresh from a setback in his war against Ukraine after the crippling of a key bridge linking Crimea to Russia, said Russia was an integral part of the Asia-Pacific region's food and energy security.

Trump told the audience the U.S. has been a Pacific power for hundreds of years and touted the strength of its economy.

Tough nuclear arms decision

Trump has insisted nuclear arms control be a central topic of the summit, despite China's repeated objections to joining talks with Washington and Moscow, which have far larger nuclear arsenals.

The president has also expressed interest in meeting North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, but there was no confirmation of an imminent encounter.

Trump's Asia trip has offered a chance to showcase U.S. influence, strengthen ties with regional allies and pursue a high-profile diplomatic opening with Xi and Putin.

But the U.S. president will return home facing political challenges, including the fallout from bruising midterm elections, the Nvidia spy scandal and a spate of tech and air travel outages that have rattled Americans.

The leaders have plenty of reasons to appear together but far fewer to agree on substance, given differences over Ukraine, Iran, nuclear weapons, trade and China's military buildup, said Craig Singleton of the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

"A photograph could serve all three men well," Singleton said, adding that he thought the "agenda is much harder to agree on."

Trump's talks with Xi come after an extension of their trade truce this month, but also amid growing tension over reports of Nvidia chips being diverted to China through Southeast Asia, raising questions about the effectiveness of U.S. export curbs and the future of Chinese access to advanced technology.

"This is Beijing's worst nightmare. China wants chip access that it can negotiate with the president. It may get chip restrictions written into law by both parties," Singleton said.

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