

# Trump tells Russia to 'get moving' on Ukraine as Witkoff meets Putin

AFP- US envoy Steve Witkoff wrapped up his latest talks with Russia's Vladimir Putin on Friday, after President Donald Trump urged his Russian counterpart to move quicker to end what he said was the country's "senseless war" with Ukraine. Trump has been pressing Moscow and Kyiv to agree a ceasefire deal but has failed to extract any major concessions from the Kremlin, despite repeated negotiations between Russian and US officials.

The US leader told NBC News last month he was "pissed off" with his Russian counterpart, while top US diplomat Marco Rubio warned last week that Washington would not tolerate "endless negotiations" with Russia over the conflict.

"Russia has to get moving," Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform, adding that the conflict, which began in February 2022 when Moscow sent troops into Ukraine, was "senseless" and "should have never happened".

Kyiv and several of its Western allies suspect Russia of stalling the talks on purpose.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky has accused Russia of dragging Beijing into the conflict and on Friday claimed that hundreds of Chinese nationals were fighting at the Ukraine front line alongside Russian troops.

Trump's post came just before Witkoff's meeting with Putin at the presidential library in Saint Petersburg, which state news agencies said lasted four and a half hours.

The Kremlin said afterwards only that the meeting had taken place and "focused on various aspects of the Ukrainian

settlement", without elaborating.

Spokesman Dmitry Peskov had said earlier that he expected no diplomatic "breakthroughs" from the talks – Witkoff's third with Putin since February.

He also said "maybe" to a question about whether a possible meeting between Putin and Trump would be discussed.

– Kellogg's 'zones of responsibility' –

After their last meeting, Witkoff – a long-time Trump ally who worked with the US president in real estate – said Putin was a "great leader" and "not a bad guy".

The envoy's praise of a president long seen by the United States as an autocratic adversary highlights the dramatic turn in Washington's approach to dealings with the Kremlin since Trump took office for a second term.

Despite a flurry of diplomacy, there has been little meaningful progress on Trump's main aim of achieving a ceasefire.

Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy to Ukraine, suggested British and French troops could adopt zones of control in the country, in an interview with The Times published Saturday.

Kellogg suggested they could have areas of responsibility west of the Dnipro river, as part of a "reassurance force", with a demilitarised zone separating them from Russian-occupied areas in the east.

"You could almost make it look like what happened with Berlin after World War II," he told the British newspaper.

"I was speaking of a post-ceasefire resiliency force in support of Ukraine's sovereignty. In discussions of partitioning, I was referencing areas or zones of responsibility for an allied force (without US troops)," he

said later on X.

– ‘Using Chinese lives’ –

Kyiv said this week that its forces had captured two Chinese nationals in the eastern Donetsk region fighting for Moscow.

The Kremlin denied the claim, while Beijing warned parties to the conflict against making “irresponsible remarks”.

“As of now, we have information that at least several hundred Chinese nationals are fighting as part of Russia’s occupation forces,” Zelensky told military chiefs from allied countries in Brussels.

“This means Russia is clearly trying to prolong the war – even by using Chinese lives.”

The Ukrainian leader also called out Russia for having refused a complete ceasefire proposed by the United States with Ukrainian approval a month ago.

Putin last month rejected a full and unconditional pause in the conflict, while the Kremlin has made a truce in the Black Sea conditional on the West lifting certain sanctions.

– Question of trust –

Trump has pushed for a broad rapprochement with Moscow, which has yielded some results.

On Thursday, Russia freed dual US-Russian ballet dancer Ksenia Karelina from prison in exchange for suspected tech smuggler Arthur Petrov, the second exchange between Moscow and Washington in less than two months.

Karelina, arrested last January while visiting Russia to see family, was serving a 12-year sentence on “treason” charges after she donated the equivalent of around \$50 to a pro-Ukraine charity.

The head of Moscow's foreign intelligence service, Sergei Naryshkin, said Friday that Russia would discuss more prisoner swaps in the future.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said the swaps helped build confidence between the two sides, which deteriorated under former US president Joe Biden's administration.

"It helps build trust, which is much needed, but it will take a long time to finally restore it," he told reporters.

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