

Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin to have summit in Helsinki on July 16

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The synchronised announcement comes a day after Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton held talks with Russian officials in Moscow to lay the groundwork for the summit.

U.S. President Donald Trump, right, and Russia's President Vladimir Putin, center, talk during the family photo session at the APEC Summit in Danang, Saturday, Nov. 11, 2017. (Jorge Silva/Pool Photo via AP)

Moscow: Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. President Donald Trump will hold a summit in Helsinki on July 16, the Kremlin and the White House announced Thursday.

A terse synchronised statement said the two presidents will discuss bilateral issues and international relations. The announcement comes a day after Trump's National Security Adviser John Bolton held talks with Russian officials in Moscow to lay the groundwork for the summit.

"We've said it from Day One, getting along with Russia and with China and with everybody is a very good thing," Trump said Wednesday. "It's good for the world. It's good for us. It's good for everybody."

He said they would discuss Syria, Ukraine and "many other subjects."

Finland has been a favoured location for U.S.-Russian summits since the Cold war times, a role helped by its efforts to maintain friendly ties with its huge eastern neighbour.

The summit will offer Putin a chance to try to persuade Washington to lift some of the sanctions imposed on Russia over its 2014 annexation of Crimea, its support for separatists fighting the government in eastern Ukraine and its alleged meddling in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

During Wednesday's meeting with Bolton, Putin argued that U.S.-Russian relations were at a low point because of American political infighting and expressed a desire to "restore full-fledged relations based on equality and mutual respect."

Putin had two brief meetings with Trump on the sidelines of international summits last year, but plans for a full-fledged summit had been delayed amid the U.S. investigations into alleged collusion between Trump's campaign and Russia, a probe that Trump has dismissed as a "witch hunt."

Ahead of the announcement, Trump repeated Russian denials of election interference, tweeting "Russia continues to say they had nothing to do with Meddling in our Election!"

Trump has continually parroted the Kremlin's denial of election interference, a move that has put him out of step with the findings of the U.S. intelligence community and nearly all Democrats and Republicans in Congress, who say there's clear evidence of Russian efforts to influence the 2016 U.S. presidential campaign.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov said after Putin's meeting with Bolton that the issue of alleged Russian meddling in the U.S. presidential election was raised during the conversation, and the Kremlin reiterated its denial of any interference with the vote.

It was stated clearly by our side that the Russian state hasn't interfered with the U.S. domestic politics, moreover hasn't interfered in the 2016 election," Ushakov said.

The decision on holding a full-fledged summit is a very positive development," Russian upper house speaker Valentina Matvienko said Thursday in remarks carried by Russian news agencies. "We hope it will play a very important role in helping begin the normalization of Russia-U.S. ties."

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is likely to meet with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo within the next two weeks as part of efforts to set the stage for the summit, according to Lavrov's deputy, Sergei Ryabkov.

Ryabkov said in remarks carried by Russian news agencies Thursday that Moscow already has made a proposal regarding the specifics of the meeting and is waiting for Washington's answer.

Finland served as a venue for a 1975 meeting between U.S. President Gerald Ford and Soviet leader Leonid Brezhnev and also hosted a summit between U.S. President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990. In 1997, President Bill Clinton met his Russian counterpart Boris Yeltsin in Helsinki.

- AP