

## **Finland Offers To Host Putin-Biden Summit: President's Office**

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*Finnish President has offered Finland as a host country for a possible meeting between Biden and Putin.*

**Helsinki, Finland:** Finnish President Sauli Niinisto has offered Finland as a host country for a possible meeting between US president Joe Biden and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, Niinisto's office said on Friday.

"When it comes to this possible meeting, the readiness of Finland to organise it has been presented to both Washington and Moscow," a spokesman for the Finnish President's Office told AFP by email.

Austria has also offered to host the world leaders and the country's foreign ministry told AFP on Friday that "both sides are aware of our readiness" to host a meeting.

"It is up to the two countries to decide whether, when and where such a summit meeting will take place. Of course, Austria will always be available for high-level talks of all kinds," the ministry said.

Biden proposed a meeting "in a third country" with his Russian counterpart during a call on Tuesday, in order to discuss rising tensions between Russia and Ukraine and in a bid to de-escalate increasingly strained relations between Washington and Moscow.

On Thursday, the United States announced sanctions and the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats in retaliation for what the White House says is the Kremlin's US election interference, a massive cyberattack and other hostile activity.

The US proposal for a first meeting between the presidents this summer has been welcomed -- but not yet accepted -- by the Kremlin.

Finland's president has been a strong advocate of upholding a dialogue with Putin despite Finland's troubled history with its eastern neighbour.

Two bloody conflicts during World War II, in which Finland ceded land to Russia, still scar the national consciousness, and the shadow of Russia is a key reason for Finland's non-membership of NATO.

Finland previously hosted Putin and President Trump in Helsinki for the 2018 summit between the two leaders.

But Niinisto's decision to host the 2018 Trump-Putin summit came under criticism from some in Finland who said it gave the impression that the Nordic country was neutral, rather than a Western power belonging to the EU.

On Tuesday Niinisto spoke to Putin by phone and expressed "serious concern" over Russia's troop movements along the border with Ukraine.

- AFP