

A Short-Lived Honeymoon: Russia Curbs Its Enthusiasm For Trump Presidency

Moscow's Excitement Gives Way To Caution in Face of Trump's Still-Unknown Foreign Policy

By [Matthew Kupfer](#) and [Matthew Bodner](#)

November 10, 2016



Kremlin Press Service

Across Russia, Donald Trump's election as United States president has been hailed as a victory for Moscow. Given the country's affinity for the American president-elect, [the celebration](#) should be going strong only a day later.

But it appears the honeymoon is coming to a swift end.

"We are not experiencing any euphoria," Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov said on Nov. 10. "[We've had] very diverse experiences doing business with U.S. administrations, both Republican and Democrat."

While lawmakers reportedly celebrated news of Trump's surprise victory as results came in early on Nov. 9 in Moscow, the Kremlin's response was already muted. President Vladimir Putin sent Trump a telegram that same day. In it, he expressed the sober hope that relations would improve under Trump's administration.

Both sides have repeatedly praised each other over the past two years. Ryabkov even admitted to journalists on Nov. 10 that [the Foreign Ministry had been in contact with the Trump campaign](#) during the presidential race.

But now that Trump has won the presidential contest, the Kremlin is faced with the task of managing a relationship with the most unpredictable administration in U.S. history. And it will be a significant challenge, say several foreign policy experts interviewed by The Moscow Times.

The Kremlin anticipated squaring off against Hillary Clinton, says Stanislav Belkovsky, director of the National Strategy Institute.

"Putin is, of course, a winner here," he says. "Not because Trump won, but because it proved the U.S. establishment does not control its own country." But the "defeat of Obama's platform" is a fleeting victory for Putin: "No one knows what Trump's real policies toward Russia will be."

This lack of clarity is both a serious challenge for the Kremlin and an opportunity to revive cooperation.

For more on the fallout from the U.S. elections, see: [What Trump's Unexpected Victory Means For U.S.-Russia Relations](#)

Moscow's move should be to demonstrate a readiness for dialogue, says Andrei Sushentsov, a program director at the Valdai International Discussion Club.

If the Trump administration is willing to strike agreements on key issues like European security, missile defense, Ukraine, and Syria, the Kremlin should "create conditions in which these agreements won't look like concessions to the US," he wrote in a message to The Moscow Times.

Others are less sure Russia can cooperate with the United States.

"The U.S. is in a bit of a stupor, a crisis. There's a great deal of uncertainty," says Fyodor Lukyanov, editor of the Russia in Global Affairs journal. "It's better to see what's going to happen and not take initiative first."

Pavel Sharikov, a scholar in the Russian Academy of Science's Institute of American and Canadian Studies, believes setting reasonable expectations will be important. He emphasizes that, even if Trump's policy preferences are amenable to Moscow, the new president will still face opposition from Russia hawks within his party.

"Trump probably isn't going to be able to lift sanctions; not a single congressman wants to do that," he says. "And he absolutely will not accept Crimea [as Russian]."

Dmitri Trenin, director of the Carnegie Moscow Center think tank, echoes these sentiments. “We shouldn’t delude ourselves and expect Trump to make concessions [to Russia] on key issues,” he wrote in a Nov. 9 op-ed for the RBC news outlet.

“At the same time, there is now a chance that Russo-American relations can leave the danger zone. We must not miss this shot,” Trenin wrote. Still, he cautions, much will depend on Trump’s choice of advisors and cabinet members, given the businessman’s lack of foreign policy experience.

But Belkovsky insists the ball is in Kremlin’s court. In the next four years, relations will depend on Russia’s actions.

“Russia, not America, inspired the conflict in Ukraine, regardless of what Putin says about that,” he says. And, if faced with challenge from the Kremlin, “any American president will protect America’s interests – even Trump.”

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