

Trump and Putin: More Than a 'Reset'

For the first time in history the Russian and American presidents are truly on the same page.

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Trump's inauguration is set to launch a new era in Russia's relations with the United States. **Gage Skidmore / Kremlin Press Service**

Russian officialdom is saluting Donald Trump ahead his Jan. 20 inauguration. Meanwhile, the exiting administration has received an unprecedentedly rough farewell, with the Russian official press repeatedly calling Barack Obama's two terms ["a disgrace" at best](#).

These emotions are impressively genuine and overwhelming, but none of it is conceptually new. Much as the bread always lands butter-side-down, Russia welcomes every new president warmly, and U.S.-Russian relations tend to start promisingly – only to end poorly and then to begin anew.

Russia seemed to be getting along with George W. Bush – who once gazed into Vladimir Putin’s eyes and saw the Russian leader’s soul. But that relationship ended with an awkward confrontation after Russia invaded the Georgian provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in August 2008.

Then the “reset” initiated by presidents Dmitry Medvedev and Barack Obama seemed very real. The climate had changed. Russia had turned to the West with a friendly face.

But once Vladimir Putin was reelected as Russian president in March 2012, the “reset” was over. And three years later – after the annexation of Crimea, war in Ukraine, and a military campaign in Syria – the U.S. and Russia were a mere step away from direct confrontation, a situation reminiscent of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Relations had reached their lowest point since the Cold War.

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Now, it is starting over again. In the recent historical context, this may look like a routine cycle. In fact, it is very different – something the modern world has never before witnessed.

Since the end of the Second World War, every détente has been defined by the Russian leadership’s rapprochement with the West. It was Mikhail Gorbachev who brought down the Berlin Wall in 1989. It was Boris Yeltsin who led Russia to join the G8 in 1997 (until 2014, when Russia was thrown out of the club following the Crimea annexation). And in 2008, the “reset” was a key element of Medvedev’s modernization agenda (which, in other respects, looked like wishful thinking at best). Again, Moscow was declaring it wanted to be part of the Western world.

Now, with the official start of the Trump era, it’s the other way around. Praising Donald Trump, Russia’s leadership is celebrating a moral victory over the world’s liberal order and expecting its current values – [and interests](#) – to start expanding westward.

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In Trump, a populist who seems to be jettisoning Western values, Russian leaders may even see something more than a political ally or a vehicle for promoting their interests. They may see a soul mate.

The extent to which Donald Trump and Russian officials use the same language and phrasing is truly striking – as if they are quoting each other or part of the same team. It is hardly a coincidence that the American media are now placing Putin’s huge annual press conferences under a microscope and learning from Russia’s experience.

Vladimir Putin has a very different background and temper from that of Donald Trump. Indeed, what can a morose ex-Soviet intelligence officer and a “colorful” American businessman and showman have in common? Yet they seem to share the same worldview.

They both seem to believe that the world’s liberal order merely hides the Western establishment’s personal interests under a disingenuous mask of values. They both seem to base their views on a post-truth belief that the facts are, indeed, irrelevant. Politically, they are both opportunists who pursue short-term goals and lack a long-term agenda.

It is difficult, of course, to predict how Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump will get along in person. But as the Trump era launches, it looks like the start of a beautiful friendship.

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