

Kremlin Officials Hope Trump Will Hand Putin an Advantage in Ukraine – and Europe

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November 06, 2024



Evan Vucci / AP / TASS

While President Vladimir Putin has yet to officially congratulate Donald Trump on his victory in the U.S. presidential election, high-ranking officials in the Kremlin, the Russian government and the Foreign Ministry are expressing cautious optimism in private.

Moscow believes that Trump's return to the presidency could give Russia a boost in its nearly three-year war on Ukraine, a weakened European Union and partially restored relations with Washington, seven senior officials and three members of the Russian business elite told VPost.

All of these sources spoke on condition of anonymity as they are not authorized to give comments to foreign media.

“Until the inauguration, we will keep advancing [in Ukraine],” a Russian government official said. “It would be good to reach the administrative borders of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions by January, and then we will decide what to do with Kherson [the Kyiv-held capital of Ukraine's Kherson region, which Russia partially occupies].”

Should Russian forces continue to press forward in Ukraine, it would be logical and easy for the new U.S. administration to propose negotiations to stop the fighting, another official said, voicing the belief that Kyiv will also show more readiness to hold talks.

“As soon as Trump takes office and forms his team, then we can agree to start consultations. It will be convenient for him to negotiate. Right now, there's no one to even come to Moscow for talks, no one to talk to,” added another Russian official.

The majority of VPost's sources in the government and business agreed that there is a chance for the war to end in Russia's favor. For this to happen, “Ukraine will have to recognize the realities on the ground and do so with the help of the U.S.,” they suggested.

Russian diplomats predict that Trump will be “desperate” to find opportunities to negotiate in Ukraine and the Middle East, viewing them as potential foreign policy victories that can bolster his legitimacy — and ego.

“Trump will probably want to facilitate this, provided he is at the center of the entire process and can then claim his Nobel Peace Prize or make his mark in some other way,” a source close to the Foreign Ministry said. “His self-interest has always been important, and it always will be.”

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As the U.S. continued to tally votes for the presidential election on Wednesday, President Vladimir Putin oversaw the launch of the Chukotka nuclear icebreaker from his office via video link.

Kremlin spin doctors had designed this gesture to symbolize Russia's economic power, technological prowess and strong presence in the resource-rich Arctic. But by choosing to participate remotely rather than attending the event in northern Russia in person, the impact of Putin's PR move was diminished, a Kremlin-linked political analyst acknowledged.

Throughout the U.S. campaign, Putin repeatedly said that President Joe Biden would be the candidate most preferable for Moscow until Biden withdrew from the race.

Yet Putin, a seasoned intelligence officer, was merely attempting to [mislead](#) observers and politically harm the Democratic candidate, The Moscow Times previously reported. In reality, the Kremlin was pinning its hopes on a Trump victory.

Russian officials are especially pleased that, unlike his first term in office, Trump could face less opposition from Democrats, with Republicans winning control of the Senate and potentially the House of Representatives.

“With Republicans possibly holding both chambers, there will effectively be no divided

government, so there's no fear of sabotage from the Democrats," one source noted.

However, Russia sees the interim period before Trump's inauguration as a potentially risky time, with concerns that the outgoing Biden administration could use this time to take bolder actions against Moscow.

"As the Democrats have nothing to lose, they might make decisions that could complicate dialogue in the future. For example, they could authorize the use of American weapons for strikes deep into Russian territory," a diplomatic source told VPost.

Meanwhile, Moscow will be closely watching as Trump's administration takes shape in the months leading up to the inauguration and looking for potential areas for cooperation.

A Kremlin official said Moscow is particularly keen to see who will be named U.S. national security advisor, secretary of state, defense secretary, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CIA director — all of whom will shape U.S. foreign policy.

A Russian government official expressed confidence in Vice President-Elect JD Vance, saying: "If he becomes vice president and participates in forming the team, then at least some of the people involved will be rational."

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According to a Russian diplomat and a source close to the Foreign Ministry, bilateral dialogue between Russia and the U.S. is currently frozen.

"It's possible to cautiously predict that some contact will be restored," said the Russian diplomat, who also expects that Moscow will appoint a new ambassador to Washington — a seat that has been vacant for weeks — following Trump's inauguration.

However, Russian diplomats hold no illusions that this dialogue will be fully restored anytime soon, with American political inertia and bipartisan consensus on Russia posing significant obstacles.

"If it does start to erode, it will do so very slowly," a diplomatic source said.

At the same time, Moscow sees Trump's strategy of reducing U.S. involvement in European security as one that would play out in its favor.

"If he decides to leave the burden of European security to the Europeans, it would be a positive shift for us because Europe simply lacks the financial resources to handle it," the diplomatic source added.

In conversations with VPost, Kremlin officials expressed enthusiasm for Trump's victory but remained critical of the U.S. electoral process.

"One feels a human satisfaction because, back in 2020, they tried to take victory away from the guy by all means," one source said, echoing the conspiracy theory that the 2020 U.S. election was rigged against Trump.

He noted that Russia has often found it easier to find common ground with Republicans than Democrats.

"Republicans have an agenda that resonates with my personal views — issues like migration and traditional values. We Soviet people were fundamentally very similar to Americans during the Reagan era, even though there was mutual disdain and name-calling," a Russian official said.

Another official shared his view: "I'm an optimist — I hope for a normalization of the international situation. Clearly, Trump is also part of the system, and there won't be an immediate radical shift, but there's still hope for normalization. If Harris had won, the military-industrial and pharmaceutical lobbies would have continued their destructive activities under her watch."

But not everyone in Moscow shares this optimism.

"I don't believe in major breakthroughs, and there is no great euphoria in my circle of contacts," a senior executive at a major state corporation said. "But something interesting is definitely going to happen in the future."

A high-ranking government official added: "I am a bureaucrat, and I welcome it. Trump won despite the falsifications. I think his arrival will not affect Russia-U.S. relations in any significant way. However, the situation will likely intensify in the Middle East and the Taiwan Strait."

This article was first [published](#) by VPost.

Original url:

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