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What Trump Has Said About Ukraine Over the Years

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U.S. President-Elect Donald Trump has faced repeated scrutiny for what some consider being too soft on Vladimir Putin's Russia, and even outright accusations of collaboration with Moscow, since he announced his first run for the presidency in 2015.

In 2019, the U.S. Congress impeached then-President Trump for a phone call in which he pressured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to find damaging information about Joe Biden, Trump's likely presidential challenger at the time.

He has made several comments about Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine since 2022, alternating between voicing praise for Putin and lamenting the suffering caused by the war and claiming he would be able to end it.

The Moscow Times has collected some of Trump's comments on Ukraine from over the years.

March 2016: Candidate Trump told the Washington Post Editorial Board that NATO and the

countries surrounding Ukraine should be doing more to resolve the conflict:

"Look, I see NATO as a good thing to have – I look at the Ukraine situation and I say, so Ukraine is a country that affects us far less than it affects other countries in NATO, and yet we are doing all of the lifting, they're not doing anything. And I say, why is it that Germany is not dealing with NATO on Ukraine? Why is it that other countries that are in the vicinity of the Ukraine not dealing with — why are we always the one that's leading, potentially the third world war, okay, with Russia? Why are we always the ones that are doing it?"

And later on in the interview:

"I think NATO as a concept is good, but it is not as good as it was when it first evolved. And I think we bear the, you know, not only financially, we bear the biggest brunt of it. Obama has been stronger on the Ukraine than all the other countries put together, and those other countries right next door to the Ukraine. And I just say we have, I'm not even knocking it, I'm just saying I don't think it's fair, we're not treated fair. I don't think we're treated fair, Charles, anywhere."

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July 2016: When asked if he would consider recognizing annexed Crimea as Russian territory, Trump responded: "We'll be looking at that. Yeah, we'll be looking."

August 2016: Trump told a rally of his supporters that he did not support Ukraine attempting to retake Crimea because it might trigger "World War III":

"I said very simply: they're not gonna do it on my watch, essentially. I said Russia will not go into Ukraine. I said that. When I said, 'Believe me, Russia's not going into Ukraine, alright?' They're not going into Ukraine. The person said, 'But they're already in Ukraine.' I said, 'Well that was two years ago. 'I mean — do you want to go back? Do you want to have World War III to get it back?' That was during Obama's watch."

May 2017: President Trump tweeted photos of himself with the foreign ministers of Russia and Ukraine, along with a message for "peace."

Embed:

> Yesterday, on the same day- I had meetings with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and the FM of Ukraine, Pavlo Klimkin.#LetsMakePeace! pic.twitter.com/SPiIrJqI6G
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> — Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) May 11, 2017

July 2017: In a New York Times interview, Trump criticized former President Barack Obama's handling of Russia's seizure and annexation of Crimea:

“Crimea was given away during Obama. Not during Trump. In fact, I was on one of the shows, I said they’re exactly right, they didn’t have it as it exactly. But he was — this — Crimea was gone during the Obama administration, and he gave, he allowed it to get away. You know, he can talk tough all he wants.”

November 2017: Trump tweeted: "When will all the haters and fools out there realize that having a good relationship with Russia is a good thing, not a bad thing. There [sic] always playing politics — bad for our country. I want to solve North Korea, Syria, Ukraine, terrorism, and Russia can greatly help!”

Later that month, Trump had a phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, in which he said that they discussed Ukraine.

June 2018: Trump reportedly told G7 leaders that Crimea was Russian because every who lives there speaks Russian.

July 2019: In a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Trump pushed Zelensky to share damaging information on Democratic candidate Joe Biden.

Shortly before the call, Trump had blocked the release of military aid to Ukraine. A senior official later said that the release of this aid was conditioned on Zelensky digging up dirt on Biden.

This phone call would eventually lead to Trump’s first impeachment.

November 2019: Trump told Fox News that Ukraine was the “third most corrupt country in the world.”

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> ...lawyer has already stated that I did nothing wrong. John Bolton is a patriot and may know that I held back the money from Ukraine because it is considered a corrupt country, & I wanted to know why nearby European countries weren’t putting up money also. Likewise, I would....
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> — Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) November 26, 2019

February 2022: On Feb. 22, two days before Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Trump addressed Moscow’s military posturing toward Kyiv:

“If properly handled, there was absolutely no reason that the situation currently happening in Ukraine should have happened at all. I know Vladimir Putin very well, and he would have never done during the Trump Administration what he is doing now, no way!”

“The weak sanctions are insignificant relative to taking over a country and a massive piece of strategically located land. Now it has begun, oil prices are going higher and higher, and Putin

is not only getting what he always wanted, but getting, because of the oil and gas surge, richer and richer."

The same day, Trump praised Putin's recognition of Ukraine's separatist-held regions of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states in a radio interview with The Clay Travis and Buck Sexton Show:

"I went in yesterday and there was a television screen, and I said, 'This is genius.' Putin declares a big portion of the Ukraine — of Ukraine — Putin declares it as independent. Oh, that's wonderful. He used the word 'independent' and 'we're gonna go out and we're gonna go in and we're gonna help keep peace.' You gotta say that's pretty savvy."

Trump went on: "I knew that he always wanted Ukraine. I used to talk to him about it. I said, 'You can't do it. You're not gonna do it.' But I could see that he wanted it. I knew Putin very well. I got along with him great. He liked me. I liked him. I mean, you know, he's a tough cookie, got a lot of the great charm and a lot of pride. But the way he — and he loves his country, you know? He loves his country. He's acting a little differently, I think now."

On Feb. 24, Trump again praised Putin: "They say, 'Trump said Putin's smart.' I mean, he's taking over a country for two dollars' worth of sanctions. I'd say that's pretty smart. He's taking over a country — really a vast, vast location, a great piece of land with a lot of people, and just walking right in."

Related article: Trump Advisers Push to 'Freeze' War in Ukraine, Pause Kyiv's Bid to Join NATO – WSJ

March 2022: Former President Trump bragged about being the only American president in the 21st century on whose watch Putin has not invaded another country.

On March 27, he criticized the Obama administration for not sending lethal aid to Ukraine: "I was the one that sent the Javelins, not Obama. Obama sent blankets."

On March 28, he called Putin "smart," praising his "negotiating": "I said, 'That's a hell of a way to negotiate, put 200,000 soldiers on the border'."

May 2023: In an interview on CNN, Trump said that he would like for the war in Ukraine to end "so we stop killing these people and breaking this country [Ukraine]."

In the same interview, he claimed that he would stop the fighting in 24 hours: "If I'm president, I'll have that war settled in one day, 24 hours. I'll meet with Putin, meet with Zelensky... and within 24 hours, that war will be settled."

September 2023: In an NBC interview, the former president said that he would get the Ukrainian and Russian presidents together in a room and work out a deal.

January 2024: Trump praised himself for giving Ukraine lethal aid, saying: "Russia has gotten in deeper than they ever thought possible [in Ukraine, because of] the weapons that I gave and that the Ukrainians used so well."**April 2024:** On the Trump-backed social media site Truth Social, the former president criticized Europe for what he said was a lack of aid to Ukraine.

June 2024: Trump said he would pledge not to put boots on the ground in Ukraine if elected president.

July 2024: Following an attempted assassination, Trump thanked Zelensky on Truth Social for reaching out to him.

September 2024: During a presidential debate, Trump refused to say whether or not he wanted Ukraine to win, saying: "I want the war to stop. I want to save lives. I think it's the U.S.'s best interest to get this war finished and just get it done." He added: "I were president Russia would have never, ever ... gone into Ukraine and killed millions of people when you add it up. Far worse than people understand what's going on over there."

He also said the war was "dying to be settled."

This list was compiled based on research by Russia Matters

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