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Then and Now: Trump Cabinet Picks' Stances on Russia and Ukraine

November 16, 2024



From left: Senator Marco Rubio, former Representative Tulsi Gabbard, Pete Hegseth **AP / TASS / Terry Wyatt / GETTY IMAGES NORTH AMERICA / Getty Images via AFP**

President-elect Donald Trump's cabinet selections offered clues about the new administration's Russia policy, and potentially the future of U.S. support for Ukraine.

Here is an overview of where Trump's cabinet nominees stood on Russia and Ukraine just after Russia's invasion in February 2022 — and where they stand today:

Senator Marco Rubio, Secretary of State Nominee

March 29, 2022

- "Vladimir Putin's invasion is a shocking reminder of the cruelty and the atrocities that man is capable of in pursuit of that instinct towards conquest and ambition, and it's the opening chapter in the return of history. But it will neither be the last chapter, nor will it be the most dangerous one. For even as Putin is killing innocents, and destroying cities

in Eastern Europe, there is a greater challenge that awaits America and the world in the Far East. Right now, we're doing everything we can to help Ukraine repel and defeat criminal invaders. And still, as we talk about what can be done in Ukraine… our options seem constrained. And they're constrained for two reasons. First, because of Moscow's nuclear arsenal. Second, because Europe is heavily dependent on the choices they make on Russia's oil and gas."

November 2024

- Shortly after Trump's election victory, Rubio hailed a new era in U.S. foreign policy that departed from "idealistic fantasies" and was instead based on core U.S. interests.
- "Today we are in a world where China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran are increasingly cooperating with one another to undermine our interests in the world," he said in a Nov. 7 interview.
- He praised Ukraine for standing up to Russia, but said the U.S. is funding a deadly "stalemate war" that requires a "common sense" approach that needs to be "brought to a conclusion"
- "It's going to take 100 years to rebuild that poor country [Ukraine] with everything they are facing," he said on Nov. 6.
- "We're lying to people when we tell them you're going to be able to go to Congress and get $60 billion every 10 months. That's just not realistic," he told The World Over with Raymond Arroyo.

Former Representative Tulsi Gabbard, Director of National Intelligence Nominee

Feb. 27, 2022

- Shortly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Gabbard called on the presidents of the United States, Russia and Ukraine to "put geopolitics aside and embrace the spirit of aloha, respect and love" by agreeing that Ukraine would become a neutral country, not join NATO or form an alliance with Russia, an arrangement that she said would allow the Ukrainian people to live in peace.
- She has repeatedly said that the Biden administration and NATO failed to acknowledge Putin's "legitimate" concerns about security at the border of Russia in the lead-up to the invasion.

October 2022

- "This regime-change war that the United States and NATO are waging via their proxy in Ukraine didn't begin when Putin invaded Ukraine. They had their eyes set on this objective long before that. We saw that through Hillary Clinton and the Democratic Party, and how eager they were to start a new Cold War in 2016," she said on Oct. 18.
- Gabbard has said that under the Biden administration, the U.S. has continued to escalate a new Cold War with Russia and has brought the world to the precipice of nuclear conflict. Her views were partly shaped by the dramatic 2018 false alarm of warning systems that a ballistic missile was headed to Hawaii, which instructed people to take shelter immediately.

Nov. 9, 2024

- Among the reasons Americans elected Trump was to reject Harris' agenda of "... continuing to wage stupid, costly, and unnecessary wars that are counterproductive to the interests of the American people," Gabbard said in an interview on Fox News.

Pete Hegseth, Secretary of Defense Nominee

March 7, 2022

- [In response to a question about Russia attacking Ukraine] "What's at stake is repelling an authoritarian who basically is saying 'I want the Soviet Union back,' 'I want Ukraine back,' 'I want Kyiv back.' ...What's at stake is making sure we don't allow it to become an Article 5 larger, broader war. ..Equipping and supplying Ukraine with what it needs, faster than we have ... and the Biden administration hasn't been doing it fast enough... so that they can further bog Putin down and push him back. It's going to be long, it's going to be bloody, but I think those are the stakes for the United States of America."

Feb. 20, 2023

- "[Biden's] now spent more time... three times more time in Ukraine than he has at East Palestine [Ohio] and the border combined.... What's the mindset of that view? We're going to spend billions in Ukraine, but ignore our problems at home," Hegseth said on Hannity Special Fox News.
- "As someone who's spent some time in multi-decade wars in the Middle East, an end state needs to be clear. I don't want my kids fighting in Donbas."

Nov. 7, 2024

- [On military structure and capability, training and standard shortfalls] "When you talk to the guys on the bases and in the units they say 'We are definitely not ok.' I've got people that I'm in touch with in the DMZ in North Korea and they're like 'we have basically enough artillery for three days. The rest of it's in Ukraine'," Hegseth said in an interview on the Shawn Ryan Show podcast.
- "This feels like a Putin 'getting-my-s***-back' war. It feels like ...'you've been pushing pretty hard, and we used to have the former Soviet Union, and we're pretty proud of that, and Ukraine was a part of it, and all these other countries, and 'I want my shit back'.... and I'm at the right time where I'm powerful enough to do it, and you're not quite on my border yet, and Biden's AWOL, so I'm going for it. Just like I did under my minor incursion under Obama. I got what I could. I got Crimea. I waited under Trump."
- "I think he probably knows enough to know that he's probably not going much further than Ukraine... If Ukraine can defend themselves ... great, but I don't want American intervention driving deep into Europe and making him feel like he's so much on his heels... because early on, he was talking about nukes."

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