

Kremlin Courts Trump Behind the Scenes as His Foreign Policy Rhetoric Rattles U.S. Allies

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Face masks depicting Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin are displayed for sale at a souvenir market in St. Petersburg. **Anatoly Maltsev / EPA / TASS**

The Kremlin has been in direct contact with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump's team in the lead-up to his Jan. 20 inauguration, Russian government officials told The Moscow Times.

The previously unreported communication between the Kremlin and individuals representing Trump — who remain private citizens until the inauguration — raises questions about U.S. national security and its loyalty to its allies.

At the same time, officials in Moscow have been closely watching Trump and his associates' controversial statements about Greenland, Panama, the U.K., Germany and Canada — and hope to capitalize on the tension between Washington and its allies that these comments have

created.

President Vladimir Putin and Trump's teams were in contact in November and December 2024, two Russian government officials involved in Kremlin foreign policy told The Moscow Times. They did not specify how many times the two sides have made contact.

The officials also confirmed that Putin and Trump have spoken directly, despite the Kremlin's [denials](#) of reporting by The Washington Post that the two spoke by phone following Trump's Nov. 5 election victory.

Both officials, like other Russian officials quoted in this article, spoke on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

The Republican president-elect, whose first term was overshadowed by allegations of Russian election meddling, has repeatedly voiced his admiration for President Vladimir Putin, and pledged to end Moscow's three-year war on Ukraine upon taking office, even though he has not yet detailed how.

The Kremlin and Trump's team have deliberately refrained from publicly disclosing their communications over the past two months to shield Trump from pressure within the American political establishment.

"Both our [the Kremlin] and Trump's team have learned lessons from the past, when imprudence and insufficient restraint led to the scandal of election interference accusations, which ultimately greatly restricted Trump's freedom of action," one Russian official told The Moscow Times.

Related article: [Kremlin Officials Hope Trump Will Hand Putin an Advantage in Ukraine – and Europe](#)

Last week, the Kremlin [acknowledged](#) that Putin was open to meeting Trump after his inauguration after Trump claimed that preparations for such talks were underway.

A source in Russia's Foreign Ministry told The Moscow Times that these contacts can be disclosed without risk after Jan. 20, and that dialogue is expected to increase significantly from there.

"Psychologically, it will be easier for us to interact with this team," one Russian diplomat said.

"Trump and his team never insulted Putin and Biden did. But whether the resumption of contacts will lead to any significant positive shifts is an open question," the diplomat added.

In its final months, the outgoing Biden administration — Ukraine's biggest supporter in its three-year war against Russia's full-scale invasion — has taken several steps to deal a parting blow to the Kremlin.

These include allowing Kyiv to strike deep into Russian territory with long-range missiles, allocating additional funds to support Ukraine and imposing budget-straining sanctions on

Russia's shadow fleet and oil and gas companies.

Trump's criticism of outgoing President Joe Biden's support for Ukraine has raised concerns in Kyiv that Washington might suspend arms deliveries, potentially weakening Ukraine's defense against invading Russian forces.

Following Trump's election victory, the Kremlin and Russia's Foreign Ministry started selecting candidates to serve as Moscow's chief negotiator with the incoming U.S. administration. Because Putin is expected to personally choose this official, the shortlist prepared by the Foreign Ministry and Putin's aides in the Kremlin is not final.

The Moscow Times' source in the Foreign Ministry expects Putin to appoint someone from his inner circle as the primary "workhorse" counterpart to Keith Kellogg, Trump's likely point man on Ukraine and Russia.

"The principle is clear. The shortlist includes top figures from the Foreign Ministry, the Russian presidential administration, or, quite likely, someone high-ranking from the intelligence services," said the source. Most importantly, this person must be loyal to Putin and enjoy his complete trust — and as a result could be someone who Putin has known since his time in the KGB.

The Kremlin is also closely monitoring Trump's foreign policy rhetoric, which, along with statements from associates like billionaire Elon Musk, has raised eyebrows worldwide.

Trump's remarks about acquiring Greenland, a territory of Denmark, and questioning the U.S.'s alliances with Canada, the U.K. and Germany have unsettled Washington's allies.

"These statements create anxiety in Denmark and Canada, which are traditionally among Washington's most loyal partners. Of course, it also creates some tension in other European capitals. This all plays into our hands," said a Russian government official.

"Putin enjoys this immensely because it creates additional points of tension between the U.S. and its allies. And it's also a great narrative for Putin to justify his actions with these double standards," Alexander Gabuev, director of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center in Berlin, told The Moscow Times.

Russian propaganda has seized on Trump's statements to justify the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine.

"This [rhetoric] allows us to say that anything is possible, the old rules no longer work. Just look: even the U.S., which sets these rules, isn't willing to abide by them," a Russian diplomat told The Moscow Times.

Boris Bondarev, a former Russian diplomat in Geneva who resigned in protest of the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, [warned](#) that Trump's rhetoric could ultimately reduce support for Ukraine and destabilize other parts of the world.

"It could force European U.S. allies to decide where to direct their not-so-abundant resources — to support Ukraine or to keep them for themselves, just in case. This could affect the course of the war in Ukraine. Moreover, countries like China and India are watching this closely.

There are plenty of people in the world ready to redraw their borders if given the chance,” Bondarev told the Breakfast Show YouTube channel.

Everything that Trump’s team has done so far is further confirmation of the “multipolar” world order that Putin espouses, a Russian government official told The Moscow Times.

“We view all of this very positively,” the official said.

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