

Kremlin Eyes Grand Bargain as Trump Pushes for Rushed Ukraine Peace Deal

By [Pyotr Kozlov](#)

February 18, 2025



Kremlin foreign policy advisor Yuri Ushakov and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov arriving for talks with U.S. officials in Saudi Arabia. **Russian Foreign Ministry Press Service**

Russian officials hope to take advantage of President Donald Trump's eagerness to end the war in Ukraine to secure the most favorable deal for Moscow possible, Russian government and diplomatic sources familiar with the matter told The Moscow Times.

In a stunning diplomatic turn three years after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine effectively froze relations with Washington, senior U.S. and Russian officials held marathon talks in Saudi Arabia on Tuesday.

Beyond the war in Ukraine, the delegations [discussed](#) a possible summit between Trump and President Vladimir Putin as well as potential improvements in bilateral relations that Moscow is keen to explore.

Putin has instructed his envoys to “demonstrate the most amicable and, in some aspects, complimentary attitude toward their American counterparts and President Donald Trump personally” in order to extract maximum benefits from the upcoming summit, a Russian diplomatic source told The Moscow Times.

"Our delegation was tasked with negotiating — not arguing — to a certain extent," the Russian diplomat said.

"The instructions were to combine flexibility and toughness in our approach to negotiations," another Russian diplomat told The Moscow Times.

These sources, like others cited in this article, spoke on condition of anonymity in order to disclose details about sensitive, high-level talks.

Two sources close to the Kremlin suggested that the list of Russian negotiators may be much longer than those who attended Tuesday's meeting in Riyadh.

Among the key figures expected to participate are Foreign Intelligence Service chief Sergei Naryshkin (for negotiations on intelligence sharing and counterterrorism), Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov (arms control and strategic stability) and Putin's Middle East envoy Mikhail Bogdanov.

However, billionaire Roman Abramovich, who was previously involved in peace talks in 2022, is unlikely to play a role this time, sources said.

"[Abramovich's] strength was his direct access to both Putin and President Volodymyr Zelensky, but the Kremlin is no longer interested in engaging with the Ukrainian president," a Russian official said.

Expectations

The Moscow Times spoke to several Russian officials and diplomats to gain insight into the Kremlin's goals and expectations for Trump.

The Kremlin believes the Trump administration is focused on securing quick and dramatic foreign policy victories — achievements that, in their view, “are not always carefully thought through.”

Trump, officials believe, is looking for a symbolic moment that would allow him to claim he personally ended the war in Ukraine. Moscow, in turn, sees this as an opportunity to secure long-sought advantages.

At the same time, they acknowledge that the American position could evolve as negotiations progress and working groups are formed following the Riyadh meeting.

Related article: [Zelensky Slams U.S.-Russia Talks, Urges 'Fair' Negotiations](#)

For Russia, the priority is restoring full bilateral dialogue with Washington, expanding discussions far beyond Ukraine to allow the Kremlin to reassert its national interests on the

world stage — a long-standing ambition of Putin's.

Among Moscow's key demands is the full restoration of diplomatic operations, including regaining access to Russian [diplomatic compounds](#) in Maryland and New York. The Obama administration seized these properties in late 2016, citing concerns that they were being used for intelligence gathering.

Russia also seeks to revive frozen communication channels on issues such as arms control, nuclear nonproliferation and strategic stability.

Additionally, the Kremlin is pressing for partial sanctions relief, including lifting restrictions on specific Russian officials and unfreezing Russian assets. Since the start of the invasion, the U.S. has blocked at least \$6 billion in Russian foreign currency reserves.

"Trump doesn't publicly discuss these matters — he doesn't seem particularly interested in them — but they are crucial for Putin. There's a belief that agreements on such matters could be achievable," one source said.

The Kremlin is counting on the personal "chemistry" between Trump and Putin to work in its favor, sources said.

Related article: [Can Putin Afford to Walk Away from Ukraine Peace Talks?](#)

Ending the war in Ukraine is a central issue on the summit agenda. Moscow hopes to secure a settlement on terms similar to those it demanded before launching its invasion: Ukraine's non-aligned status, the installation of a pro-Russian government, a drastic reduction of Ukraine's military forces, and official recognition of Crimea and the Zaporizhzhia, Kherson, Luhansk and Donetsk regions as Russian territory.

"Ukraine, territorial recognition, 'demilitarization,' 'denazification' — including elections that bring pro-Russian figures to power — and lifting sanctions. That's the minimum that Putin would like to have," said former Russian diplomat Boris Bondarev, who resigned from Russia's diplomatic mission to the UN in Geneva in protest against the invasion.

In a potential bargaining move, the Kremlin may attempt to convince Trump that Moscow is willing to scale back its ties with China in exchange for concessions from Washington, Bondarev told The Moscow Times.

"The Americans will be strung along with talk about a potential reassessment of Moscow's relationship with Beijing," Bondarev said.

'Multiple possible outcomes'

Several Russian officials and diplomats expressed cautious optimism after Tuesday's talks in Riyadh.

"I've waited so long for this! Finally. What a wonderful gift for my upcoming anniversary," one Russian government official told The Moscow Times, adding that he is hopeful about the negotiations' outcome.

"It's clear that our American partners are eager to wrap up the Ukraine war — and quickly. Trump, in particular, is motivated," a retired Russian diplomat said.

This urgency explains the rapid pace of engagement following Trump's January inauguration compared to the protracted preparations for the 2021 Geneva summit between Putin and President Joe Biden.

"I remember how that meeting was prepared — it took months of intense work at different levels, including missions and exchanges of position papers. Trump wants to move much faster and, at this stage, seems unconcerned with the details," a Russian diplomat said.

"Whether this approach will hold when we reach substantive discussions remains unclear. There are multiple possible outcomes — including ones that are less favorable for us," he added.

Trump has never been known for resolving complex international conflicts. Attempting to settle the contentious and intricate war between Ukraine and Russia through a rapid "blitz" approach rather than detailed negotiations could end in failure, [warned](#) Mikhail Korostikov, an expert at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center.

Sooner or later, the West and Ukraine may need to reconsider their strategy for ending the war, Korostikov argued.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/02/18/kremlin-eyes-grand-bargain-as-trump-pushes-for-rushe-d-ukraine-peace-deal-a88065>