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Trump Tower Moscow, Rare Earths and Geopolitical Perks: How the Kremlin Plans to Bait Trump Into a Grand Bargain

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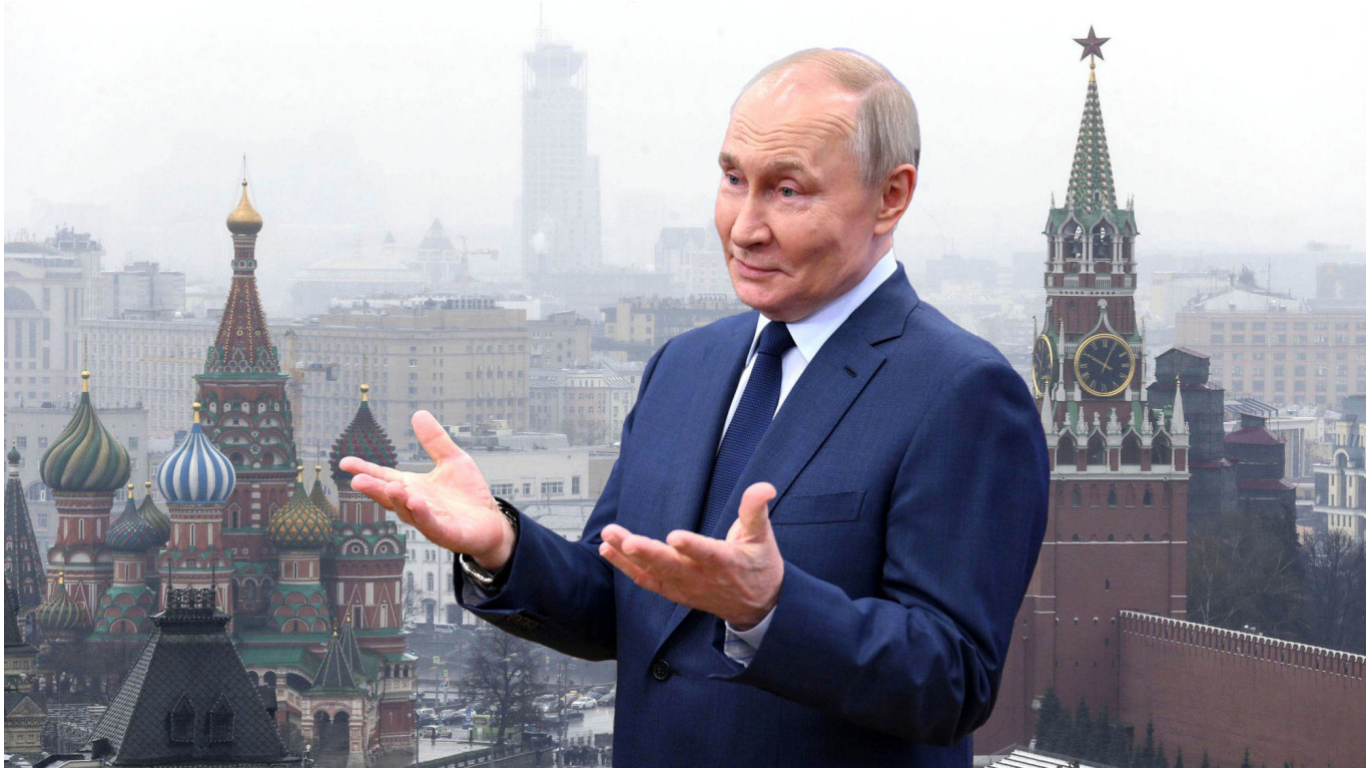

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As Moscow prepares for possible negotiations with Washington aimed at ending its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it is seeking a far more ambitious outcome than a mere ceasefire: a global reordering of spheres of influence.

In the Kremlin's view, such an agreement would effectively mean U.S. recognition of Russian dominance in the post-Soviet space — including Ukraine — and, to some extent, an acknowledgment of its influence in Europe.

To secure that goal, the Kremlin is now scouring for incentives it believes can catch and hold President Donald Trump's attention, ranging from rare earths deals and geopolitical leverage in Iran and North Korea to a long-dreamed-of Trump Tower in Moscow.

Five current Russian government officials, including two diplomats, three sources close to the Kremlin and employees of three major state-owned companies confirmed this to The Moscow Times, all speaking on condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

“The main thing is that they [the Americans] don't interfere in our affairs and don't tell us how to live,” said a senior Russian official familiar with the Kremlin’s negotiating logic. “That they don’t hinder us in doing what we are doing.”

Some in Moscow also envision symbolic gestures of recognition as part of a potential agreement, such as President Vladimir Putin visiting Washington and meeting Trump in the White House.

“If our boss [Putin] occasionally comes to Washington to meet with Trump — that would also be nice,” a current government official said.

Still, officials acknowledge that the era of major summits like those during the Cold War or the early post-Soviet years is over.

“It’s hard to count on that now,” the government official said.

Searching for leverage

The Kremlin, recognizing the limitations of its negotiating position, has tasked officials and experts with analyzing and identifying all possible incentives that could grab Trump’s interest and keep the talks from narrowing to a limited agenda.

Following Trump’s election victory in November, the Kremlin ordered major corporations to prepare detailed proposals for economic cooperation with Washington.

“Work was in full swing in the government, ministries and major corporations, including at night and on weekends: proposals were being prepared across key economic sectors,” a current government official told The Moscow Times.

“Rosatom and Rosneft presented their initiatives, and [gold producer] Polyus sent fresh intelligence on gold deposits to the Kremlin. Rusal and other entities joined in,” the official said, adding that deputy head of the presidential administration Maxim Oreshkin and Putin’s special envoy Kirill Dmitriev were among those coordinating these efforts.

Employees at three major state-owned companies and a source close to the Kremlin confirmed this.

This new approach reflects the collapse of the previous model of U.S.-Russia relations.

During the Cold War, the superpowers practiced “linkage,” in which seemingly unrelated issues became concessions within a larger negotiating framework.

“You give us grain, we’ll give you fewer radicals in Latin America. You give me aspirin, I give you Valocordin,” said a senior Russian diplomat.

If you have a wide range of issues on the table, it is easier to find trade-offs and balance

asymmetries, the diplomat noted.

But unlike the Cold War era, Russia now holds far fewer cards. Strategic arms control treaties that once structured dialogue, from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty to New START, are unraveling. With New START set to expire in February 2026, talks on its extension have not even begun.

“We used to hold summits, sign treaties — first Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT), then the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START). A whole ecosystem of consultations and joint mechanisms was built around that,” recalls a current Russian diplomat. “This launched mechanisms of cooperation between Moscow and Washington across various fields.”

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Today, this architecture no longer exists, and arms control only interests Trump in the context of his competition with China. As a result, Moscow and Washington increasingly see each other as rivals rather than partners.

“We compete in hydrocarbon markets in Europe, food markets and arms sales. And this confrontation will only intensify,” said a Russian government official.

Ukraine as a bargaining chip

With few remaining levers, Moscow sees the war in Ukraine as its most potent bargaining chip, and officials hope to take advantage of Trump’s eagerness to secure a ceasefire.

“We need to milk Trump as much as possible, dangling the possibility of a ceasefire like a carrot before him,” one participant in the discussions said.

There is little illusion about the fragility of this opportunity.

“The window may slam shut. Trump could lose interest or, worse, bear a grudge,” diplomats and officials who spoke to The Moscow Times agreed.

However, many in the Foreign Ministry and the Kremlin hold a different view.

"We are on the right track. The priority is to recalibrate relations with the United States — a task that is anything but simple — while keeping dialogue on Ukraine alive,” one Russian diplomat said. “From there, the situation on the ground will dictate the next moves. Ultimately, it’s all about time, patience and staying the course."

Formally, the Kremlin has signaled a willingness to make concessions.

Following a call with Trump in March, Putin said he agreed to observe a 30-day moratorium on strikes against Ukrainian energy infrastructure. While Ukraine said separately that it would back the ceasefire, no formal agreement between the two sides was ever signed. Ukrainian officials have accused Moscow of violating the pause multiple times since.

“Under these circumstances, talking about a ceasefire at this stage is simply unrealistic,”

Vasily Nebenzya, Russia's permanent representative to the UN, said in early April.

Officials see two main scenarios. The first is to agree to a Trump-brokered ceasefire in exchange for concessions like limitations on U.S. weapons deliveries to Ukraine.

"Though this doesn't mean weapons won't still come in via Europe," one Russian diplomat cautioned.

The second: if talks collapse, blame Kyiv.

"If Russia refuses a ceasefire, we must be ready to once again face a united Western front, and in an even less favorable configuration for us," another official warned.

Setting the bait

Many ideas have been floated as possible incentives to lure Trump into a deal, from mediating U.S.-China negotiations to joint missions to Mars. But the Kremlin has few real trump cards.

Economic proposals look weak. Even in their best years, U.S.-Russia trade barely reached $45 billion. In 2024, it plunged to just $3.5 billion, its lowest level since 1992.

Today, Moscow can offer only a few commodities the U.S. still needs: titanium for aircraft manufacturing, uranium for nuclear energy and heavy crude oil for refineries along the Gulf Coast. But as one official put it, these "won't save the American trade balance, and thus have no value for Trump."

Russia is a major supplier of rare earth metals like scandium, yttrium and lanthanum, essential for electronics and defense systems. But these, too, are seen as insufficient to unlock major political concessions.

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Regional initiatives are also limited. Washington would like Russia to halt its arms shipments to North Korea and comply with UN sanctions. But Moscow, having invested in a growing alliance with Pyongyang, has no intention of rolling back its cooperation.

Iran has also been floated as a possible channel for engagement, given Russia's role in managing Tehran's spent nuclear fuel and support for its peaceful nuclear program.

"There is a belief that Trump has a certain reverence for Putin. And that Putin's word could influence an American decision [on Iran]," said a Russian government official.

But even Russian diplomats admit that Moscow's role in U.S.-Iran talks would be marginal at best.

"Tehran has always wanted to talk directly to the Americans and has also feared being 'sold out' by us in a grand bargain," said one Russian diplomat.

More realistic proposals involve energy coordination and symbolic gestures. One suggestion:

a humanitarian mission in Gaza leveraging Russian-built infrastructure in Syria. Another would see informal cooperation on oil markets involving the U.S., Russia and Saudi Arabia.

“Here, three great statesmen could take the stage: the leaders of the U.S., Russia and Saudi Arabia,” noted one Russian diplomat.

And then there’s the idea of a Trump Tower in Moscow. Officials have brainstormed building a 150-story Trump Tower in Moscow City, the capital’s business district. The project could be quickly launched, and Trump himself could participate in the groundbreaking.

“Speed, impact and showiness: those are things Trump intuitively values,” said a source close to the Kremlin. This all the more so given that Trump’s team and Russian officials had discussed this project in the past, he added.

Africa, long peripheral to U.S. foreign policy, is seen as unlikely to capture Trump’s interest. Nor is a joint Mars mission considered realistic.

Across all of these proposals, the Kremlin is guided by a single axiom: initiatives must be personally tailored to Trump, achievable within a single term and offer strong media appeal.

“Without that,” said a senior Russian official, “it’s naive to expect any progress.”

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