



Russia Responds to the Results of the U.S. Election with Caution

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Russia is hoping to enter into talks on Ukraine with the new U.S. administration following Donald Trump's victory in the U.S. presidential election. Vladimir Putin will exploit Trump's scepticism about Ukraine to force it to accept unfavourable ceasefire conditions. Russia's most desirable scenario, involving social and political destabilisation in the U.S. due to the undermining of the election results, has not materialised.

What was Russia's reaction to Trump's victory?

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov was quick to announce that Putin would not be congratulating Trump on his victory. He made it clear that he viewed the U.S. as an unfriendly state and that it was indirectly involved in a war against Russia. Nevertheless, on 7 November, during a meeting of the Valdai Club in Sochi, Putin congratulated Trump on his success. He also spoke positively about Trump's reaction to the assassination attempt on his life, which was likely an effort to gain his personal favour in the event of talks on Ukraine.

The Russian government's reaction to Trump's victory was notably more subdued than after the 2016 election. From a Russian perspective, Trump's presidency provides an opportunity for dialogue at the highest level. This would have been more difficult if Kamala Harris had won. However, there is a risk of unpredictability in the returning president. The Russian government has adopted a wait-and-see attitude, leaving the initiative to the U.S. side. However, Putin still counts on internal destabilisation in the U.S. The most favourable scenario for Russia, in which there would be political paralysis in the U.S. as a result of the undermining of the election result, has not materialised. Nevertheless, Russia will continue its efforts to deepen polarisation in American society.

What will Russia's approach be to possible ceasefire negotiations?

The Russian government has signalled that it is open to talks with the new U.S. administration, but has made it clear that it is not willing to compromise. Russia will use Trump's announcement that he would "end the war in 24 hours" to put pressure on him during possible negotiations. Putin could obtain favourable ceasefire terms, given Trump's need for quick success and transactional approach to negotiations.

Russia has no intention of achieving lasting peace in Ukraine because its final goal is to fully subjugate the country. The Russian Foreign Ministry made its intentions clear after the U.S. election results were announced, reiterating in the official communiqué its willingness to pursue the stated objectives of its operation in Ukraine. However, the Russian government is ready for a temporary ceasefire if the international community allows Russia to remain in control of the federally incorporated oblasts (which currently constitute an area larger than that actually occupied by Russian troops), obliges Ukraine to remain a neutral state, its NATO membership is blocked, and Western military aid is withheld. Furthermore, Russia will seek to undermine Trump and the incoming administration's support for the Ukrainian side by conducting increased disinformation activities aimed at portraying Ukraine as unreliable and uninterested in reaching an agreement.

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What other goals might Russia try to achieve with a change of power in the U.S.?

Russia is not formulating far-reaching expectations of Trump, but is first trying to discern the future shape of his foreign policy. Among other things, this will depend on how the key positions in the new U.S. administration are filled. The U.S. and Russia continue to see each other as strategic adversaries, so no significant improvement in relations between the two countries is to be expected. Above all, Putin hopes to weaken the U.S. commitment to European security.

To this end, Russia will try even harder to strengthen the isolationist stance in U.S. policy. A Russian Foreign Ministry communiqué has already stated that Americans are tired of

President Joe Biden's international engagement and expect Trump to take a greater interest in domestic issues, especially the economy and the fight against irregular migration.

Putin will also seek to deepen divisions between the U.S. and European countries and the EU. Among other things, this is intended to weaken cooperation within NATO, including slowing or halting the Alliance's adaptation to the Russian threat, with the prospect of reducing the number of U.S. forces deployed in countries bordering Russia. By exploiting politically and economically motivated tensions between the U.S. and Europe, the Russian government could make it more difficult to formulate a unified Western position on Russia and limit the effectiveness of the sanctions regime.