

Will a Second Trump Presidency Reshape U.S.-Russia Ties? Experts Weigh In

By [Moscow Times Reporter](#)

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Alex Brandon / AP / TASS

Donald Trump's sweeping presidential election victory over Vice President Kamala Harris was [welcomed](#) by Russian officials on Wednesday, with many expressing cautious hope for better relations with Washington under the new leadership.

Unlike incumbent Joe Biden, who has been one of Ukraine's staunchest allies in its fight against the full-scale Russian invasion, Trump has built a personal relationship with Vladimir Putin, staying in contact with the Russian leader even after his first term in the Oval Office ended, [according](#) to a recent book by U.S. investigative journalist Bob Woodward.

Trump's personal history with Putin — and the complex policy mix of friendly rhetoric and strict sanctions that his administration adopted toward Russia in his first term — have

already sparked discussions about how he might approach Moscow this time around.

To understand how Trump's new term could reshape U.S.-Russia relations, The Moscow Times takes a look at his past promises and recent expert forecasts:

Will there be a fresh start?

American politics expert Alexandra Filippenko said that Trump's coming into office will undoubtedly impact bilateral relations between Moscow and Washington, which in recent years have fallen to their lowest point since the height of the Cold War.

Filippenko said that Moscow's [decision to relieve](#) Anatoly Antonov from his post as Russian ambassador to the U.S. a month before the election — and subsequent delay in appointing his replacement — should be interpreted as “a symbolic gesture” showing that the Kremlin “is awaiting positive changes in relations with Washington.”

“This doesn't mean that sanctions would be lifted or that Trump and Putin would be photographed shaking hands — that shouldn't be expected,” Filippenko told The Moscow Times.

“Instead, we can expect that the *process* of mending bilateral relations will commence, which could not be imagined under Kamala Harris,” she added.

Natasha Kuhrt, a specialist in Russian foreign policy and senior lecturer at King's College London, believes a “reset” in relations to be “unlikely at this point in time,” pointing to what she called the Obama administration's [“disastrous and poorly conceived”](#) Russian reset policy.

What about Ukraine?

“Assuming Trump carries out his pledge to end all defense assistance to Ukraine, then clearly his victory would be a disaster for Ukraine,” Kuhrt told The Moscow Times.

“Biden could try to draw up an assistance package before leaving office, but whether Trump would have to stick with that is unlikely given the predominance of Republicans in both the House and the Senate,” she added.

Trump has pledged to quickly end the war in Ukraine if elected, although he has yet to detail how he plans to achieve this.

The Washington Post [reported](#) in April that Trump's proposal involves pressuring Kyiv to cede the annexed Ukrainian territories to Russia, according to people who discussed it with Trump or his advisers and spoke on the condition of anonymity because those conversations were confidential.

Trump privately said that he believed both Russia and Ukraine “want to save face, they want a way out” and that residents of the annexed territories would be okay with being part of Russia, The Washington Post said, citing a person who has discussed the matter directly with Trump.

“While it might seem as if Trump and Putin's views on the war align, at the same time Trump is quite unpredictable and Moscow probably finds this difficult to deal with,” noted Kuhrt.

Expert Filippenko echoed this view.

“Trump is accustomed to achieving what he wants by all possible means and is ready to exert any kind of pressure to reach his goals, meaning he could pressure Moscow by supplying Ukraine with all kinds of weapons it asks for,” said Filippenko, noting that Trump could also use arms delivery to Ukraine as a political tool to pressure both Putin and Zelensky into negotiations.

“Trump will do that if he really wants to earn the laurels of the ‘world’s greatest peacemaker’,” she added.

What does this mean for Western allies?

Trump has repeatedly voiced grievances with NATO over the years, openly questioning its necessity for a modern world order and complaining about the U.S.'s disproportional financial contribution to its budget compared to the alliance's European members.

In 2020, Trump ordered the withdrawal of around 10,000 U.S. troops from Germany, underscoring Washington's [waning commitment](#) to European defense.

“How does NATO survive as a meaningful alliance when the leadership of its dominant member is compromised by relations with its primary adversary?” Ruth Deyermond, a senior lecturer at the Department of War Studies at King's College London, [wrote](#) on X.

“Many people are rightly saying that Europe needs to quickly increase defense spending. But governments are...going to look at the way that economic discontent seems to have fueled a Trump victory and worry that spending on non-domestic issues will do the same here,” she added in a thread published Wednesday.

This sentiment was also voiced by political analyst Dionis Cenuşa, who forecasted new ups and downs in transatlantic dialogue during Trump's second term.

“Crises are possible if personalized relations with Putin resume and trade antagonism with Xi recur. The EU, and thus Ukraine, is likely to remain more on its own than in strategic alliances with the U.S.,” Cenuşa [wrote](#) on X.

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