

RUSSIA ATTEMPTS TO COLLECT ITS WINNINGS

Russia has been engaged in a good deal of dick-wagging with Trump since the election.

After Trump won, Russia did not call to congratulate – at least as far as we know (though Viktor Orbán seems to be Trump's handler and he did).

Putin did, on Thursday, butter up Trump, calling his response to being shot courageous and claiming interest in a deal. Putin did what he always does with Trump: he played to his narcissism.

On Friday, though, one of the most popular TV shows in Russia used a different approach (as made available by Julia Davis' Russian Media Monitor) – airing Melania's nude photos in the guise of noting that she was years ago photographed with a US seal, as if someone knew she would be First Lady.

Monday morning, WaPo published an exclusive claiming that in his first call with Putin, Trump warned Putin not to escalate in Ukraine.

During the call, which Trump took from his resort in Florida, he advised the Russian president not to escalate the war in Ukraine and reminded him of Washington's sizable military presence in Europe, said a person familiar with the call, who, like others interviewed for this story, spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive matter.

The two men discussed the goal of peace on the European continent and Trump expressed an interest in follow-up conversations to discuss "the resolution of Ukraine's war soon," one of the

people said.

In the aftermath of the claimed call, Russia escalated strikes.

Russia has also deployed 50,000 troops, including some from North Korea, to attempt to expel Ukraine from Kursk.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said Monday Russia has deployed nearly 50,000 troops to Kursk, the southern Russian region where Kyiv launched its surprise counteroffensive in the summer.

Ukrainian troops “continue to hold back” the “nearly 50,000-strong enemy group” in Kursk, Zelensky said in a post on Telegram after receiving a briefing from General Oleksandr Syrskyi, the Commander-in-Chief of Ukraine’s Armed Forces.

Kyiv launched its incursion into Russia’s Kursk region in August, taking by surprise not just Moscow, but also its allies. It said at the time, that the operation was necessary, because Russia had been planning to launch a new attack on Ukraine from the region. It said it was aiming to create a “buffer zone” to prevent future cross-border attacks.

The Kursk offensive, the first ground invasion of Russia by a foreign power since World War II, caught Moscow completely unprepared.

Meanwhile, Russia denied WaPo’s report. There was no call, Putin’s spox said. Putin has no plan to call.

“It is completely untrue. It is pure fiction; it is simply false information,” the Kremlin spokesperson, Dmitry Peskov, said when asked about the call. “There was no conversation.

"This is the most obvious example of the quality of the information that is being published now, sometimes even in fairly reputable publications."

Peskov added that Putin had no specific plans to speak to Trump.

Peskov is probably lying. But the US can't debunk him because (according to WaPo) Trump is, once again, going it alone.

Trump's initial calls with world leaders are not being conducted with the support of the State Department and U.S. government interpreters. The Trump transition team has yet to sign an agreement with the General Services Administration, a standard procedure for presidential transitions. Trump and his aides are distrustful of career government officials following the leaked transcripts of presidential calls during his first term. "They are just calling [Trump] directly," one of the people familiar with the calls said.

Later in the day, Nicholay Patrushev implied that Trump had made commitments to get elected – commitments he was obliged to keep.

In his future policies, including those on the Russian track US President-elect Donald Trump will rely on the commitments to the forces that brought him to power, rather than on election pledges, Russian presidential aide Nikolay Patrushev told the daily Kommersant in an interview.

"The election campaign is over," Patrushev noted. "To achieve success in the election, Donald Trump relied on certain forces to which he has corresponding obligations. As a responsible person, he will be obliged to fulfill them."

He agreed that Trump, when he was still a candidate, “made many statements critical of the destructive foreign and domestic policies pursued by the current administration.”

“But very often election pledges in the United States can [d]iverge from subsequent actions,” he recalled.

Republican Donald Trump outperformed the candidate from the ruling Democratic Party, Vice President Kamala Harris, in the US elections held on November 5. Trump will take office on January 20, 2025. During the election campaign Trump mentioned his peace-oriented, pragmatic intentions, including in relations with Russia.

Trump is going to be a tool of Russia. In one of his first personnel moves, he humiliatingly killed Mike Pompeo’s bid to be Defense Secretary; Pompeo, like Nikki Haley, supports Ukraine. Reportedly Trump made that decision with the counsel of Don Jr – Trump’s soft-underbelly – and Tucker Carlson.

My guess is their primary concern is *when* he will do that.

He promised to deliver peace on Day One. Seven days later, he hasn’t delivered, nor said he would. The shape of the capitulation Trump is discussing – basically a freeze of the status quo and a withdrawal of funding for Ukraine – is far less ambitious than what Russia intends, which is to conquer all of Ukraine.

While Trump has appointed white nationalists – Tom Homan and Stephen Miller – to run his mass deportation program, his national security appointments, thus far, were once normal people before they capitulated to Trump: Elise Stefanik at UN Ambassador, Mike Waltz at National Security Adviser, Marco Rubio at Secretary of State, and Kristi Noem at Homeland Security (it’s unclear who thinks will manage the House

as it awaits special elections to replace two newly elected members; the GOP will win the majority but with a thinner margin than they had).

But Patrushev is correct: Russia did, overtly, help Trump win, and there may have been far more useful covert assistance we don't know. Early in the year, they set up yet another attack on Hunter Biden as a way to attack his father. They released a series of videos targeting Harris and manufacturing claims about migrants voting. Those videos likely involved John Mark Dougan, a former Palm Beach sheriff who fled to Russia in 2016. While it's not yet clear whether bomb threats to Springfield, OH and on voting locations were *from* Russia, they were routed via a Russian email domain.

A far bigger question is whether the decision by a bunch of tech oligarchs, most notably Elon Musk, to support Trump came with the involvement of someone either formally working for or just actin as an epic useful idiot of Russia. Did Trump install JD Vance as part of a deal for support from Elon? And what should we take from all the Russophile nutjobs that Trump plans to install in his administration?

To a great degree, Trump will be opening up his Administration to Russia, and doing so via wildly ignorant or crazy people. Russia will get what it wants under a Trump Administration. It just might take awhile.

So why the dick-wagging?

Probably, Russia is engaging in this game for two reasons. First, while the infusion of North Korean soldiers has helped its cause and it is making advances in Ukraine, it is doing so at great cost. And Ukraine still manages some attacks deeper in Russia.

An average of around 1,500 Russian soldiers were killed or injured per day in October – Russia's worst month for casualties since the beginning of the invasion, according to Britain's Chief

of the Defense Staff Tony Radakin.

"Russia is about to suffer 700,000 people killed or wounded – the enormous pain and suffering that the Russian nation is having to bear because of [President Vladimir] Putin's ambition," Radakin told the BBC on November 10.

Moscow does not reveal the number of its war casualties.

Radakin claimed Moscow was spending more than 40 percent of public expenditure on defense and security, putting "an enormous strain" on the country.

Meanwhile, the Russian Defense Ministry claimed on November 10 that its forces had captured the town of Voltchenka in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, where Russian forces have been making advances in recent weeks.

Ukraine launched dozens of drones targeting Moscow, forcing the temporary closure of three of the capital's airports, Russian officials said on November 10.

With Trump's victory, Russia is in a strong position, but it faces immediate challenges. So it would prefer, I'm sure, immediate action.

More importantly, Russia has a history with Trump, where he deferred action until he was inaugurated, and then failed to deliver.

Robert Mueller never charged Trump with entering into a quid pro quo in 2016. It may have happened, but would have required the cooperation of people Trump later pardoned to prove it. But Russia had every reason to expect that Trump might end sanctions and recognize Crimea after he was elected with their help the first time. During that transition, Russia *did* reach out to Trump, first with a congratulatory Putin call, and then with discussions via Mike Flynn.

On December 29, 2016, Flynn reached out to Sergey Kislyak and asked Russia to do no more than match Barack Obama's sanction, so as not to set off an escalation. At that point, Russia undoubtedly had every expectation they'd see sanctions removed. Instead, over the course of the Administration, more were imposed, with Biden adding an entire new sanctions regime in the wake of the Ukraine invasion.

That is, Trump has a history of making commitments to Russia he didn't deliver, couldn't deliver after installing grown-ups in his Administration.

So Russia appears to be doing what every other entity that helped Trump get elected is doing, as they try to collect on their support: exerting what levers of pressure they have to get their objectives.

It turns out they likely have more levers of pressure – some of which are more powerful now, before Trump's win is certified – and larger demands than most of the people who helped Trump get elected.

Trump proved unreliable in 2016. Russia has good reason to want to demand better this time around.