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Trump, Putin Agree to Normalize US-Russia Ties

By Jason Ditz
November 14, 2016

Officials have confirmed that Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President-elect Donald Trump spoke on the phone on Monday evening. Putin is said to have called Trump to congratulate him on winning last week's presidential election.

The two are said to have agreed on the need to resolve "extremely unsatisfactory" Russo-American relations, planning for a personal meeting and joint work toward the normalization of ties between the two major nations. According to the Kremlin, the agreement was for a dialogue "on the basis of equality, mutual respect, and non-intervention in each other's domestic affairs."

Such a productive first phone call is unsurprising, as during the campaign Trump had talked of improving relations with Russia, and since the election Russian government officials have said they saw the election of Trump as America's rejection of Hillary Clinton's calls for further hostility toward Russia.

This is the first major attempt to improve relations between the two sides since the 2009 “reset,” which came in the wake of President Obama’s election. That reset was mostly forgotten by the late years of the Obama presidency, with the US launching a massive military buildup along Russia’s border in Eastern Europe, and the two sides engaged in a virtual proxy war in Syria.

While the 2009 “reset” was mostly aimed at getting access to Russian airspace for supply shipments for the Afghan War, the Trump normalization effort is likely to be much more ambitious, with Trump expressing his aversion to hostility toward nuclear-armed Russia, and already talking about a dramatic shift in Syria policy which would see the US ending support for the rebellion against Syria, a key Russian ally.

All conversations between Putin and Trump are likely to be heavily scrutinized, however, as the Clinton campaign didn’t just campaign on its own hostility toward Russia, but accused Russia of plotting to get Trump elected. With post-election acrimony within the US still high a week later, those allegations are likely to remain a talking point for many opposed to normalization.