
TRUMP AND PUTIN PUSH FOR BETTER US-RUSSIA TIES

- 30.01.2017

Financial Times, 29 Jan 2017

Donald Trump held a series of telephone calls on Saturday with world leaders, including Russian president Vladimir Putin, as the new US president starts to forge his foreign policy amid concerns about the direction in which he plans to take America.

Sign up By signing up you confirm that you have read and agree to the terms and conditions, cookie policy and privacy policy.

The Kremlin said the two men planned to meet soon to discuss joining forces in the Syrian conflict and partnering to solve global issues. The White House made no reference to a meeting, but said the positive call was a significant start to improving the relationship between the US and Russia that is in need of repair.

The Kremlin and White House statements made no reference to a possible easing of US sanctions on Russia over the Ukrainian conflict. But Moscow said the two leaders agreed on the importance of restoring mutually beneficial trade and economic links.

Mr Trump also held his first conversations as president with German chancellor Angela Merkel and French president François Hollande. He also talked to Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe, whom he invited to visit the White House in early February.

The US president also continued to issue a raft of executive orders. One of the most important decrees restructured the White House National Security Council. The move elevated Steve Bannon, a controversial former conservative media executive who is becoming increasingly powerful in the White House, to the principals committee.

The committee, which includes the secretaries of state and defence, is one of the most powerful groupings in Washington since it debates key policy issues. In an unusual move, the order said the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff and the director for national intelligence would only be included on relevant issues. The move underscores the increasingly powerful role that Mr Bannon, the former head of Breitbart News, is playing in the close circle of aides surrounding Mr Trump.

During their hour-long conversation on Saturday, the leaders spoke in a positive and businesslike manner aimed at stabilising and developing Russo-American co-operation, according to the Kremlin. The descriptions of the call by both the White House and the Kremlin pointed to a different tone to relations between Russia and the US during the Obama administration. The US intelligence community has accused Russia of interfering in the US election through a series of cyber attacks.

Donald Trump asked to convey wishes of happiness and prosperity to the Russian people, pointing out that the American people are kindly predisposed to Russia and her citizens, the Kremlin said, before adding that Mr Putin replied by saying that Russians hold similar feelings about Americans and now looks at the US as an extremely important partner in combating international terrorism.

In recent days, reports had emerged that Mr Trumps team had drafted an executive order to lift sanctions on Russia, something that many Republicans in the US Congress oppose.

On Friday, Kellyanne Conway, a top White House aide, said it was possible that Mr Trump and Mr Putin would discuss sanctions being lifted during their call. But the Kremlin spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, denied that the issue of sanctions had come up.

The phone calls with foreign leaders came on a day that saw Mr Trump widely criticised for his temporary ban on immigrants and refugees from seven Muslim countries. In a call with Mr Hollande, the French president warned Mr Trump against protectionism and implicitly criticised his decision to refuse entry to refugees.

"In an unstable and uncertain world, isolation leads to a dead end," said the Elysee. Mr Hollande urged his US counterpart to respect the founding principles of western democracies, "in particular the welcoming of refugees.

In their call, Ms Merkel and Mr Trump emphasised the fundamental importance of Nato for transatlantic relations and the maintenance of peace and stability, according to chancellors spokesman. He said they also expressed their intention over the coming years to deepen our already excellent bilateral relations.

The first contact between the leaders had been anticipated after Mr Trump criticised Ms Merkel for her refugee policy, which he said was a catastrophic mistake.

The spokesperson for Mrs Merkel said Mr Trump accepted an invitation to attend the G20 summit in Hamburg in July, while the president invited Ms Merkel to the US. The White House said that the leaders agreed on the Nato alliances fundamental importance to the broader transatlantic relationship and its role in ensuring the peace and stability of our North Atlantic community.

In language that echoed comments by Theresa May, the UK prime minister, during her visit to Washington, the White House said Mr Trump and Ms Merkel recognised that Nato must be capable of confronting 21st century threats and that our common defence requires appropriate investment in military capabilities to ensure all allies are contributing their fair share to our collective security. During the campaign and since his election, Mr Trump had angered allies in Europe by suggesting that Nato was obsolete.

Kaynak/Source: