DONALD TRUMP · OCTOBER 11, 2026

Trump and Russia: a timeline of the most criticised pro-Moscow moments, February 2017 to October 2026

Dated chronology across both Trump terms, from the Flynn resignation and O'Reilly interview (Feb 2017) to the Russian diesel deal (9 Oct 2026), with the counter-evidence: sanctions on Rosneft/Lukoil, the Budapest cancellation and the September 2026 sanctions law.

9 min read · 17 sources · Updated Oct 11, 2026

2026 Putin Russia Ukraine foreign policy sanctions timeline

CONTENTS

First term, 2017: the opening episodes 2
- Flynn and the Kislyak calls (December 2016 – February 2017) 2
- The O'Reilly Super Bowl interview (5 February 2017) 2
- Hamburg and the undisclosed conversation (7 July 2017) 2
- Comey firing, then Lavrov in the Oval Office (May 2017) 2

First term, 2018–2020: Helsinki to the bounties 3
- Helsinki (16 July 2018) 3
- Concealed meetings and a distant G-20 (late 2018 – January 2019) 3
- G7 invitation and the bounty reports (June 2020) 3

Second term, 2025: from UN votes to Alaska 4
- Voting with Russia at the UN (24 February 2025) 4
- The Oval Office confrontation (28 February 2025) 4
- Alaska summit (15 August 2025) 4
- The 28-point plan (October–November 2025) 4
- The counter-movement: Budapest cancelled, Rosneft and Lukoil sanctioned (22 October 2025) 5

2026: sanctions law, then the diesel deal 5
- The Graham sanctions act (18 September 2026) 5
- The Russian diesel deal (9 October 2026) 5

How to read the pattern 6

Bottom line 6

Sources 7

This is a dated chronology of episodes in which Donald Trump's words or actions toward Russia drew bipartisan criticism, covering his first term (2017–2021) and his second (2025–present). "Bizarre" is a judgment, so each entry says what happened, who objected, and where relevant what Trump or his allies said back. The record is not one-directional: his second term includes real sanctions and a cancelled summit, and those are logged too. The most recent entries are only days old, so they may be revised.

Feb 2017	16 Jul 2018	93 votes	9 Oct 2026
O'Reilly 'so innocent' interview	Helsinki press conference	UN General Assembly majority the US voted against (24 Feb 2025)	Russian diesel deal announced

First term, 2017: the opening episodes

Flynn and the Kislyak calls (December 2016 – February 2017)

Michael Flynn, Trump's first national security adviser, later admitted he lied to the FBI about two December 2016 conversations with Russian ambassador Sergey Kislyak. In one, on 22 December, he asked Russia to delay or defeat a UN Security Council resolution on Israeli settlements, at the direction of a "very senior member" of the transition team. In the other, on 29 December, the day the Obama administration announced sanctions over election meddling, he asked Russia not to escalate and to respond only reciprocally[8]. Flynn resigned in February 2017 after it emerged he had misled officials, including the vice president, about the calls[8]. He pleaded guilty on 1 December 2017[8]. The calls happened while Flynn was a private citizen, which is the central point of dispute over how improper they were.

The O'Reilly Super Bowl interview (5 February 2017)

In a Fox interview aired before Super Bowl LI, Trump said he respected Putin. When Bill O'Reilly said "Putin's a killer," Trump answered:

> *"There are a lot of killers. We've got a lot of killers. What, do you think our country's so innocent?"*[1]

Equating US conduct with that of a leader accused of killing opponents was widely criticised at the time.

Hamburg and the undisclosed conversation (7 July 2017)

At their first meeting, at the G-20 in Hamburg, Trump and Putin talked well past the scheduled 35 minutes. Tillerson said Trump asked Putin twice about election meddling and Putin denied it both times. A later conversation at the leaders' dinner went undisclosed at the time; only Putin's interpreter was present, there was no formal readout, and the travelling press was not told[2].

Comey firing, then Lavrov in the Oval Office (May 2017)

The day after Trump fired FBI Director James Comey, he hosted Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Kislyak in the Oval Office (10 May)[10]. The Washington Post reported on 15 May that Trump revealed highly classified information to the two men, jeopardising a source of intelligence on Islamic State[3]. The New York Times later reported he told them that firing Comey, whom he called a "nut job", had eased pressure on him over Russia; I could only see the headline of that piece, so treat that detail as reported, not verified here[10].

First term, 2018–2020: Helsinki to the bounties

Helsinki (16 July 2018)

At a joint press conference Trump appeared to accept Putin's denial of 2016 interference, which US intelligence had concluded was real, to the alarm of lawmakers and intelligence officials. The two leaders had first spoken alone for about two hours with only interpreters, and Trump was seen winking at Putin at least twice[2]. His words on the record:

> *"My people came to me — Dan Coats came to me and some others — they said they think it's Russia. I have President Putin; he just said it's not Russia. I will say this: I don't see any reason why it would be."*[7]

The next day Trump said he had misspoken and meant "wouldn't", accepting the intelligence assessment but adding it "could be other people also", a claim not backed by evidence[2][7].

Concealed meetings and a distant G-20 (late 2018 – January 2019)

The Washington Post reported in January 2019 that Trump had concealed details of his face-to-face encounters with Putin from senior administration officials[2]. At the Buenos Aires G-20 (30 November 2018), as the Russia investigation escalated, Trump largely kept his distance[2].

G7 invitation and the bounty reports (June 2020)

In June 2020 Trump floated readmitting Russia to the G7, which had expelled it in 2014. Reporting then said White House officials had known since 2019 that Russian military intelligence (GRU) officers allegedly offered Taliban fighters cash for killing US troops. Reports had initially said Trump learned of it only in March 2020. Trump denied knowledge, tweeting "Nobody's been tougher on Russia than the Trump Administration"[6].

- Feb 2017 — **Flynn resigns; O'Reilly interview**
  Flynn quits over misleading officials on Kislyak calls; Trump says US has 'a lot of killers'
- 7 Jul 2017 — **Hamburg G-20**
  First meeting runs long; undisclosed dinner conversation with only Putin's interpreter
- 10–15 May 2017 — **Lavrov in the Oval Office**
  Day after Comey firing; classified-information report follows
- 16 Jul 2018 — **Helsinki summit**
  Trump questions US intelligence on 2016 interference, then reverses next day
- Jun 2020 — **G7 floated; bounty reports**
  Trump suggests readmitting Russia; denies knowing of alleged GRU bounties

Second term, 2025: from UN votes to Alaska

Voting with Russia at the UN (24 February 2025)

On the third anniversary of the full-scale invasion, the US voted against a European-backed UN General Assembly resolution condemning Russia and backing Ukraine's territorial integrity. It sided with Russia, North Korea, Belarus and others; the resolution passed with **93 votes** and 65 abstentions. At the Security Council the US then passed its own resolution calling for an end to the conflict without criticising Russia (10 votes, with the UK and France abstaining after their amendments were vetoed)[4]. Republican Senator John Curtis said he was "deeply troubled" by a vote "which put us on the same side as Russia and North Korea"[4]. Ukraine's former economy minister said the choice was deliberate, "no longer just rhetoric or political theatre"[4].

The Oval Office confrontation (28 February 2025)

CNN described a "wildly tense public confrontation" between Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky in February, during a period when Trump had pledged to end the war on "Day One" and had yet to extract concessions from Moscow[5]. I did not read a full account of the later aid pause, so it is not detailed here.

Alaska summit (15 August 2025)

This was the first in-person Trump–Putin meeting since the 2022 invasion. Trump waited on a red carpet and clapped as Putin approached, and Putin rode in Trump's armoured limousine to the venue. BBC's assessment: "In a short six months Putin has gone from being a pariah of the West to being welcomed on US soil like a partner and friend"[9]. The talks ended early with no ceasefire and no press questions. Putin gave a short history of Alaska's Russian past and said the "root causes" of the conflict must be eliminated, a phrase associated with maximalist Russian demands[9]. Putin also invited Trump to Moscow ("Next time in Moscow?")[9]. Zelensky and European leaders were at the White House days later[2].

The 28-point plan (October–November 2025)

A draft peace plan leaked in November 2025. Per Bloomberg reporting summarised by a fact-check site, it was shaped in the end of October by Kirill Dmitriev, Putin's envoy, and Steve Witkoff, Trump's envoy. It would have had Ukraine withdraw from parts of Donetsk, recognised Crimea, Luhansk and Donetsk de facto as Russian, capped Ukraine's army at 600,000, barred NATO membership and staged sanctions relief for Russia[11]. A leaked 14 October call transcript showed Witkoff advising Putin's aide Yuri Ushakov on how Putin should pitch Trump; Trump called it "standard negotiation"[11]. Republicans including Roger Wicker and Don Bacon objected. Bacon said "the first to surrender was America"[11]. This source is a secondary analysis of Bloomberg reporting (and notes AI assistance), so check primary reporting before quoting.

The counter-movement: Budapest cancelled, Rosneft and Lukoil sanctioned (22 October 2025)

After a planned Budapest summit with Putin fell apart, Trump cancelled it ("It didn't feel like we were going to get to the place we have to get"). Treasury sanctioned Rosneft and Lukoil, the first new Russia sanctions of his second term [12].

- 24 Feb 2025 — **UN votes**
  US votes with Russia against Europe's Ukraine resolution
- 28 Feb 2025 — **Oval Office clash with Zelensky**
  Public confrontation
- 15 Aug 2025 — **Alaska summit**
  Red carpet, no ceasefire, no questions taken
- Nov 2025 — **28-point plan leaks**
  Developed with Putin's envoy; bipartisan criticism
- 22 Oct 2025 — **Rosneft and Lukoil sanctioned**
  Budapest summit cancelled

2026: sanctions law, then the diesel deal

The Graham sanctions act (18 September 2026)

Trump signed H.R. 5334, the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026. It requires blocking sanctions on Sberbank, VTB and Gazprombank, bans new US investment in Russia's energy sector, and directs tariffs of up to **500%** on Russian goods and up to **100%** on countries buying Russian oil or gas. Measures are due within 30 days (by **18 October 2026**), but the president may waive them by certifying national interest [13]. The New York Times reported the same day that Trump was also weighing enticements to Russia; I could not open that article [14].

The Russian diesel deal (9 October 2026)

After a phone call with Putin, Trump announced on Truth Social that Russia would supply diesel to the US and global markets, saying lower prices for farmers, ranchers and truckers was his "greatest priority" [15]. Al Jazeera reports the figure as more than 300,000 tonnes [16]. The context is a fuel price spike tied to the US war with Iran and the closure of the strait of Hormuz; diesel hit a record **$6.52** in September, ahead of November's midterms [15].

Reaction:

- Zelensky called it "a weak decision by strong partners" and said Ukrainian negotiators in Miami were being used as a "smokescreen" [15] [17].
- Schumer, Shaheen and Warren called it a betrayal. Republican Don Bacon said "We need moral clarity not moral ambiguity" [15].
- Democrats said it undercut the sanctions law signed three weeks earlier [15].

- The UK said it would keep up pressure through its sanctions regime [16].

Within hours Putin told Trump that peace talks with Kyiv were unlikely to resume immediately, blaming Ukrainian drone attacks on Moscow during parliamentary elections [16]. The Guardian also reported Witkoff and Jared Kushner meeting Ukrainian officials in Florida the same day [17].

CAUTION

The diesel deal is one to three days old at the time of writing. Volumes, sanctions waivers and legal mechanics have not been fully reported, and the 18 October implementation deadline for the sanctions act has not yet arrived.

How to read the pattern

PERIOD	TYPICAL CRITICISM	TYPICAL COUNTER-EVIDENCE
2017–2018	Deference to Putin's denials; undisclosed meetings; classified disclosures	Trump says he accepted intelligence findings after Helsinki [2]
2020	Floating G7 readmission; response to bounty reports	Trump: "Nobody's been tougher on Russia" [6]
2025	UN votes; red-carpet Alaska summit; Kremlin-shaped peace plan	Rosneft/Lukoil sanctions; Budapest cancelled [12]
2026	Diesel deal amid peace talks	Sanctions act signed, with waiver power [13]

KEY FINDING

Critics and supporters read the same facts differently. Supporters see transactional dealmaking and tough steps such as the October 2025 sanctions. Critics point to a repeated sequence of warmth, concessions and reversal. The Washington Post noted that by August 2025 Trump had also grown frustrated with Putin and threatened more sanctions [2].

Bottom line

The record shows recurring moments in which Trump publicly sided with or softened toward Moscow: the 2017 "so innocent" remark, Helsinki, the 2025 UN votes, the Alaska welcome, the Kremlin-influenced 28-point plan and the October 2026 diesel deal. It also shows episodes of pressure: the Budapest cancellation, the Rosneft and Lukoil sanctions and the signing of the Graham Act. Whether the diesel deal means weaker sanctions will depend on how the Graham Act's waivers are used after 18 October 2026. Several first-term items above rely on headlines or snippets of paywalled articles and are flagged as such.

▼ **Terms used in this document (3)**

- **GRU** — Russia's military intelligence agency.
- **Hormuz** — The Strait of Hormuz, a shipping choke point for about 20% of global oil supplies before the Iran war.

- **Kislyak** — Sergey Kislyak, Russian ambassador to the US during 2016–2017.

SOURCES

1 Asked about Putin, Trump says U.S. isn't 'so innocent' (PBS/AP)
https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/asked-putin-trump-says-u-s-isnt-innocent

2 Putin and Trump have met before. Here's how those encounters went (Washington Post)
https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2025/trump-putin-meetings-timeline/

3 Trump revealed highly classified information to Russian foreign minister and ambassador (Washington Post)
https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/trump-revealed-highly-classified-information-to-russian-foreign-minister-and-ambassador/2017/05/15/530c172a-3960-11e7-9e48-c4f199710b69_story.html

4 US sides with Russia in UN resolutions on Ukraine (BBC)
https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c7435pnle0go

5 Timeline: Trump administration's approach to Russia-Ukraine peace talks (CNN)
https://www.cnn.com/politics/trump-timeline-russia-ukraine-putin-zelensky-dg

6 White House Knew of Russia Bounties in 2019, Before Trump's G7 Invite to Putin (Newsweek)
https://www.newsweek.com/white-house-knew-russia-bounties-2019-before-trumps-g7-invite-putin-1514259

7 Trump: 'I don't see any reason why' Russia would have interfered (Politico, snippet)
https://www.politico.com/story/2018/07/16/trump-putin-meeting-election-meddling-722424

8 Michael Flynn's Russia Timeline (FactCheck.org)
https://www.factcheck.org/2017/12/michael-flynns-russia-timeline/

9 Five takeaways after Trump and Putin's Alaska summit (BBC)
https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gj9er0x0zo

10 Trump Told Russians That Firing 'Nut Job' Comey Eased Pressure (NYT, headline only)
https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/19/us/politics/trump-russia-comey.html

11 Behind the 28-Point Ukraine Peace Plan: A Fact-Check (Wichita Liberty)
https://www.wichitaliberty.org/politics/behind-the-28-point-ukraine-peace-plan-a-fact-check-of-trumps-negotiations-with-russia/

12 In Trump first, US sanctions Russia's oil giants Rosneft and Lukoil (Kyiv Independent)
https://kyivindependent.com/us-imposes-sanctions-on-russian-oil/

13 President Trump Signs Graham Sanctions Act (Baker Botts)
https://www.bakerbotts.com/thought-leadership/publications/2026/september/president-trump-signs-graham-sanctions-act-expanding-russia-sanctions-and-tariff-authorities

14 Trump Signs a Sanctions Bill Targeting Russia, but Pursues Deals Too (NYT, snippet)
https://www.nytimes.com/2026/09/17/us/trump-putin-russia-sanctions.html

15 Zelenskyy furious as Trump announces deal to buy Russian diesel (Guardian)
https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2026/oct/09/trump-putin-russian-diesel-ukraine

16 Putin tells Trump peace talks are unlikely (Al Jazeera/Reuters)
https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/10/10/putin-tells-trump-peace-talks-are-unlikely-cites-ukraine-drone-attacks

17 Ukraine war briefing: Kyiv blasts peace talks as 'smokescreen' (Guardian)
https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/oct/10/ukraine-war-briefing-trumps-russian-diesel-deal-derided-as-weak-and-a-betrayal-of-ukraine-and-us-national-security

Researched and written with claude-sonnet-5-5, from the sources listed above. Figures are as reported by those sources. Exported November 29, 2026 from https://intel.innerpulse.net/doc/trump-and-russia-a-timeline-of-the-most-criticised-pro-moscow-moments-february, where the current version lives.