

Trump Is Twisting Putin's Arm Through Belarus' President Lukashenko

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The US has more or less succeeded in convincing Belarus to “defect” from Russia and pivot to the West, which therefore puts Trump in a prime position to twist Putin’s arm through Lukashenko as he attempts to squeeze seemingly endless strategic concessions out of Moscow, but it remains to be seen whether this geopolitical blackmail will actually work.

The Crisis That’s Being Kept Under Wraps (For Now)

There’s a serious crisis brewing in Europe but barely anyone has noticed because the relevant Great Powers have self-interested reasons in staying silent about it. Unbeknownst to many, Russian-Belarusian relations are rapidly transforming before the world’s eyes and potentially becoming a game-changer in the [New Cold War](#) after Minsk [shut down](#) Moscow’s oil transit through its territory and just unprecedentedly got Putin to replace his ambassador to the country after less than a year on the job following controversial comments that he recently made about his host country. His remarks weren’t all that inflammatory but they got Lukashenko to issue a [thinly veiled demand](#) to Putin that he punish his envoy, which the Russian leader [ultimately acquiesced to](#) because he really had no choice if he wanted to de-escalate this worsening crisis and carry out much-needed “damage control” for his country’s image.

Denying Reality Doesn’t Change It

Russia [officially denied](#) that these developments indicate a crisis between the two Eurasian Union and CSTO allies, but then again, it’s understandable why it would want to downplay this drama in order to avoid the attendant disaster that it would be for its soft power if the international audience realized that this “fellow Slavic Orthodox country” is following in Ukraine’s footsteps by “defecting” to the West.

The US, which has been [successfully courting](#) Lukashenko [since 2014](#), is aware of just how sensitive of an issue this is for Russia in all respects, which is why it’s keeping quiet about it in order to cut a deal with Moscow behind closed doors that would give Putin a “face-saving” defeat and avoid the loud domestic criticism that he’d come under if he was blamed for “losing Belarus”.

Simply put, despite their asymmetries in geographic and demographic sizes, Belarus is much more important to Russia than the reverse because Minsk can always replace the role that Moscow plays in its economy by embracing the West, an “inconvenient fact” that few in the Kremlin cared to recognize due to the hubris that’s pervaded within its walls since Putin restored the country’s Great Power status. Taking its alliance with Belarus for granted, Russia [imposed a tax](#) on its oil exports at the beginning of the year that Minsk said would

cost it hundreds of millions of dollars a year but which Moscow claimed was necessary to stop the billions of dollars that it's been bleeding to subsidize its neighbor's economy.

Everything snowballed from then on out until the geopolitical avalanche finally happened and Belarus cut off Russia's energy exports to Europe on the pretext that [\\$2.7 billion in tainted oil](#) was recently pumped through the Druzhba (ironically, "Friendship") Pipeline. Moscow maintains that an act of sabotage might have been responsible for contaminating its oil exports while there are those who suspect that it might have been a "plausibly deniable" way to punish Minsk for its pro-Western pivot even though this speculatively "clever plan" ended up backfiring in the worst way possible. Either way, there's no avoiding the fact that Russia stands to lose untold billions in current and future revenue from this oil crisis alone, to say nothing of its long-term geostrategic consequences in the economic and military spheres vis-a-vis the Eurasian Union and the CSTO.

Catastrophic Strategic Consequences

This isn't mere "fearmongering" either since the EU just announced that "there are no market barriers to US LNG coming to Europe" during the [1st EU-US Energy Council Business To Business Energy Forum](#) that took place on Thursday and saw the attendance of US Energy Secretary Rick Perry. Seeing as how energy-hungry Europe can no longer depend on the reliability of Russia's overland pipelines through Ukraine and now Belarus, it makes sense why it would seek to replace the sudden drop in Russian exports with American resources instead. This will have the inevitable effect of hitting the Russian budget at its most sensitive moment when the country is racing to implement Putin's landmark "[Great Society](#)" socio-economic development strategy and preparing for the impending change of power that will finally happen in 2024 (PP24, "Post-Putin 2024").

Russia literally can't afford to lose the revenue that it receives from its energy exports to Europe (especially those through Belarus) given the aforementioned domestic context and the ongoing [Arms](#) and [Space](#) Races with the US, though Moscow can conceivably take advantage of the US' anti-Iranian sanctions regime to replace Tehran in the growing Chinese and Indian marketplaces and recoup some of its losses at its "partner's" expense. Even so, the fact of the matter remains that Belarus is disproportionately more important to Russia than the reverse, and Minsk's "defection" to the West and its stunning turning of the strategic tables on Moscow carry with it very serious security implications for the larger of the two countries that are also immensely embarrassing for its international image, hence why its media has been conspicuously mum about these developments.

As horrifying of a scenario as many in [Alt-Media](#) will undoubtedly consider it to be, objective observers can't discount the possibility of Washington using Minsk to geopolitically blackmail Moscow,. Instead of publicly humiliating Russia by openly flaunting this and risking the chance that international awareness about it could trigger an "unpredictable reaction" from Putin in order to "save face", however, Trump wants to first try reaching a deal behind closed doors and only then would he openly throw this in his counterpart's face if he fails to reach one on America's terms. It's with this in mind that the [upcoming Lavrov-Pompeo meeting in Finland](#) next week takes on a completely new significance because it might lead to the US requesting Russia to do something for it in Syria in exchange for not weaponizing Belarus more intensely than it already has.

The Real "Deal Of The Century"

Russia is already doing its utmost to pressure Syria into initiating Iran's [dignified but "phased withdrawal"](#) from the country by [refusing to provide](#) it with energy relief during the ongoing fuel crisis, attempting to ensnare it in a [strategic trap](#) through the Tartus port deal, and [speaking on its behalf](#) by provocatively misrepresenting Damascus' position towards Idlib and "[Israel](#)" until it gets what it wants, but its efforts might take on a renewed urgency if the US demands that this be done by next month to coincide with its [expected unveiling](#) of the so-called "Deal of the Century" at the end of Ramadan. It remains to be seen whether Russia can succeed within such a short timeframe considering that it's been trying to achieve this for roughly a year already, but it might nevertheless still try.

In any case, Moscow would be sorely mistaken if it thinks that Washington would stop geopolitically blackmailing it with Belarus in the event that Russia does the US a favor in Syria because Trump has succeeded in reversing the power dynamics between Lukashenko and Putin and won't hesitate to repeatedly play this hand as he seeks to advance America's grand strategic interests. [What the US really wants from Russia](#) is for Moscow to slow down the pace of its [Belt & Road Initiative](#) (BRI) integration with Beijing, but that's politically impossible for Putin to do after he proudly committed his country to this global series of megaprojects during his [keynote speech](#) at last week's BRI Forum. As such, the US will probably try to transform Belarus from a thorn in Russia's side to a spear that strategically strikes the Great Power's Heartland.

What's meant by this is that the US has the potential to seriously damage Russia's soft power by propagating global awareness of Belarus' pro-Western pivot and then instrumentalizing it in such a way that it renders the much-touted Eurasian Union and CSTO post-Soviet integration frameworks useless, especially if Washington is able to convince Minsk to sign an EU Association Agreement and strengthen its ties with NATO through the [ongoing "Partnership for Peace" negotiations](#). Under those very probable scenarios, Russia would have no choice but to either cut a deal with the US and/or Belarus, buy off Lukashenko (if it's even still possible), or take him out, the latter choice of which the US has been [deviously preconditioning](#) the international community to expect ever since the beginning of the year in order to raise suspicions about Moscow's geopolitical motives.

Concluding Thoughts

There should be no doubt by now that Trump is getting ready to twist Putin's arm through Lukashenko as he attempts to squeeze seemingly endless strategic concessions out of Moscow, but there's no telling whether or not he'll succeed in getting what he wants out of Russia since its leadership might have foreseen this dark scenario and has backup plans to implement for when it happens. In the event that Russia refuses to enter into a series of behind-the-scenes deals with the US in exchange for preventing Washington from propagating the embarrassing crisis in Russian-Belarusian relations across the world and irreversibly damaging Moscow's soft power, it'll have to accept the consequences to its international image and the post-Soviet integration structures that it leads. Strategically reorientating itself eastward towards China and southward through the "[Ummah Pivot](#)" could help lessen the blow, but nothing would ever be the same again if Russia "loses" Belarus for good.

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