

# Congress can give Trump the leverage to coerce Putin

Instead of negotiating peace with President Donald Trump, Russian leader Vladimir Putin is escalating his attacks against innocent Ukrainian civilians. “He’s sending rockets into cities and killing people,” Trump said this week, “I don’t like it at all.”

It is clear that Putin does not want peace; he has to be forced to end the war. To do that, Trump needs greater leverage. Congress can give it to him by passing the Sanctioning Russia Act, a bipartisan effort led by Sens. Lindsey Graham (R-South Carolina) and Tom Cotton (R-Arkansas).

The bill, which has a whopping 82 co-sponsors in the Senate, would impose “bone-crushing” sanctions on Russia. Right now, Russia is suffering double-digit inflation, skyrocketing interest rates and catastrophic labor shortages. The only thing keeping the country’s economy from collapse is revenue from oil and gas exports. This legislation would shut off the most important source of cash for the Kremlin by barring energy transactions with sanctioned Russian banks (which President Joe Biden allowed to continue), and imposing a 500 percent secondary tariff on any country that purchases Russian-origin uranium, oil, natural gas, petroleum, or petroleum products and petrochemical products. This would give Trump the power to effectively drive Russian energy sales from the global market, which would crush the Russian economy and deny Putin the funds to continue his aggression against Ukraine.

Most important, it would provide Trump with strong bipartisan backing as he tries, one last time, to persuade Putin to stop his massacres of Ukrainian civilians and negotiate a permanent end to his brutal, senseless war.

Signing the bill does not mean Trump has to implement the sanctions immediately. The proposed sanctions take effect only after the president issues a formal determination that Putin is engaging in



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sanctionable acts as described in the bill, such as “refusing to negotiate a peace agreement with Ukraine.”

If Trump is not comfortable making that determination, there is another option: He does not have to sign the bill immediately after Congress approves it. Once a bill is sent to the president, he has 10 days to sign or veto it. But nothing requires Congress to send the president a bill it has passed. Indeed, after it is approved in the House and the Senate, Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-South Dakota) can hold the bill at the desk indefinitely, rather than sending it to the White House — giving Trump as much time as he needs before signing it.

There is precedent for this. In 1998, both the House and Senate both approved Sen. Jesse Helms’s (R-North Carolina) legislation paying U.S.

arrears to the United Nations in exchange for reforms. But President Bill Clinton threatened to veto it over some modest pro-life policy provisions in the bill. Helms had the bill held at the desk, hoping to convince Clinton to change his mind. When Clinton refused, Helms waited for months and had it sent it to the president for his promised veto at the most embarrassing moment — the day he addressed the U.N. General Assembly.

Thune could use the same procedure to hold the Russia sanctions bill at the desk after both houses pass it, this time sending it to Trump at the most opportune moment.

This would dramatically increase Trump’s leverage with Putin, giving him a sword of Damocles to hang over the Russian leader’s head — backed by an overwhelming, bipartisan majority in Congress. It would empower Trump and strengthen his hand in the negotiations, by giving him the power to inflict crippling, sanctions against Russia at a moment of his choosing. And it will underscore that the United States is united politically with Trump

in backing the approach.

The bill’s passage would make Putin’s choice clear: Agree to peace or suffer the most destructive sanctions ever imposed by the United States — sanctions that would send his already struggling economy into a tailspin. It would also create an incentive for China, India and other countries that would be subject to secondary tariffs to press Putin to agree to peace.

Indeed, Congress could give Trump even more leverage by adding a provision to the sanctions legislation that would authorize the sale of U.S. weapons to Ukraine, using Foreign Military Financing (FMF) direct loans, like those we provide to our allies and partners around the world. Such loans would cost taxpayers nothing — indeed they would earn a profit, because the loans come with interest that must be paid to the U.S. government. Congress could also create a transfer authority that permits frozen Russian assets to be used by Ukraine to buy U.S. weapons.

The combination of sanctions and arms is precisely what Trump promised he

would do if Putin did not agree to peace. In March, he declared: “If Russia and I are unable to make a deal on stopping the bloodshed in Ukraine, and if I think it was Russia’s fault. ... I am going to put secondary tariffs on oil, on all oil coming out of Russia.” And in an interview with me last year at Mar-a-Lago, he said that if Putin refused his peace efforts, he would give Ukraine more weapons than they’ve ever gotten before.

Right now, Putin is hoping that Trump will grow frustrated with the peace process, throw up his hands and move on to other things — leaving Putin free to prosecute his brutal war without the United States supporting Ukraine or penalizing him. This misperception by Putin is one reason Trump has not been able to persuade Moscow to agree to a ceasefire. Putin appears convinced that all he has to do is sit tight, agree to nothing and the U.S. will reward him by giving him a free hand.

Putin needs to be disabused of this notion, and shown that if Russia says “no” to peace, but Ukraine says “yes,” Trump will punish Russia and arm Ukraine. Approving a bill to do just that would make clear to Putin that rejecting Trump’s peace efforts is not an option he wants to choose - and provide a demonstration of political consensus and resolve that will, hopefully, enable Trump to finally negotiate the peace he seeks.

Trump has been right to give Putin time and make every effort to negotiate a voluntary end to the war. But Putin has made it abundantly clear that he won’t stop his conquest willingly; he needs to be coerced. A bipartisan majority in Congress stands ready to give Trump the tools to coerce Putin, and impose severe consequences on Russia if Putin still refuses. The votes are there. All Trump has to do is give Congress the green light.

Marc Thiessen is a national columnist whose work is published regularly in the Grand Forks Herald.

## AMERICAN OPINION

# More money for trade schools is a good idea

## DETROIT NEWS

President Donald Trump is threatening to strip Harvard of \$3 billion in critical research dollars and redirect the money to trade schools unless the university complies with his executive orders dealing with campus policies and practices.

It’s a bully tactic that puts at risk both scientific progress and free speech, and one the president should end. But the second part of his threat, to shift more federal grant money to trade schools throughout the country, is a solid idea, and one that could be implemented without weakening the nation’s leadership position in science and

research.

Just as the nation needs scientists and doctors, it needs carpenters, technicians, truck drivers, high-tech manufacturing workers and medical support staff. The bloated federal education budget could be easily cut to create funding to support both priorities.

The skilled labor market in the United States is facing incredible pressure, and Michigan is ground zero for the crisis. There are roughly 725,000 job openings for skilled tradesmen in the United States , according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics . That number has remained consistent since the disruption of the pandemic.

The scarcity of trained workers has heightened the competition for talent. The sectors’ average wages have increased by more than 20% since the first quarter of 2020, according to a 2024 McKinsey & Co. report.

An aging workforce is adding to the shortage. By 2027, the ratio of post-working-age individuals to those of working age will have risen by about 75% — to 3.5 individuals out of every 10 people from 2 out of every 10.

In Michigan , businesses need highly skilled workers in nearly every industry, from agriculture to construction, but particularly in manufacturing. There is an enormous

dearth of talent to fill critical positions in the state’s key industries. Skilled trades are expected to account for 47,000 annual job openings a year in Michigan through 2028, according to the Michigan Department of Labor and Economic Opportunity .

And yet Michigan’s unemployment rate is the second-highest in the nation at 5.5% — up from 4.2% year-over-year. Clearly there is a mismatch between the individuals in the workforce and the type of skilled workers so many businesses need — particularly in Michigan .

Both the state and the nation must rapidly train skilled workers. Bolstering trade

schools, community colleges and apprenticeships will help achieve the goal.

Meeting this urgent need shouldn’t get caught up in Trump’s petty war with Harvard and other universities.

To keep pace with other nations in an increasingly competitive world economy, the U.S. must aggressively fund both the quest for scientific breakthroughs and the training of workers to build the laboratories where they are hatched.

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— First Amendment of the United States Constitution

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