

Kremlin “Pleased” with Helsinki summit, US and Western Intelligence assesses

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Russian officials were “pleased” with the Helsinki summit between Presidents Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin, US and Western intelligence agencies have found, according to two intelligence sources with knowledge of the assessments.

The assessments, based on a broad range of intelligence, indicate that the Kremlin believes the July 16 summit delivered a better outcome than it had expected, but that Moscow is perplexed that Trump is not delivering more Russia-friendly policies in its aftermath.

The intelligence sources say the Russians were particularly satisfied with the press conference the two leaders gave in Helsinki after Trump and Putin met for about two hours without staff and accompanied only by translators. In the 45-minute press conference, Trump discredited US intelligence and American policies more broadly, saying “the United States has been foolish” about ties with Russia, a country that has engaged in ongoing attacks on US democracy.

A spokesperson for the Office of Director of National Intelligence declined to comment, and the White House did not respond to request for comment.

The administration’s decision last week to impose sanctions on Russia for the poisoning of former Russian spy Sergei Skripal and his daughter left Russian officials puzzled that the President is not delivering more favorable policies.

Trump has repeatedly called for warmer relations with Moscow, but the Kremlin is neglecting to factor in the considerable role that Congress and others play in US policy-making, a Western intelligence official said.

Putin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov’s comments last week reflected the deflated Russian hopes for improved ties with Washington or at least less punitive US policies.

“President Putin said in Helsinki that Russia still has hopes for the creation of a constructive relationship with Washington...We are sorry that often we are not met with cooperation on this account,” Peskov said Aug. 9 in a regular press call with reporters.

Peskov’s comments contrasted sharply with the evaluation Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov offered immediately after the summit, when he said that the talks had been “better than super.”

Trump’s performance in Helsinki sparked unusually public criticism, even from within his own party.

The administration’s decision to impose the sanctions followed a July 26 letter from GOP Congressman Ed Royce, the Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, urging the White House to comply with a law requiring the US to levy sanctions against countries that violate the 1991 Chemical and Biological Weapons and Warfare Elimination Act.

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