

Here's How to Force Moscow's Hand If Trump-Putin Talks Fail

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Russia is Winning the Numbers Game – the West Must Break its Backbone Now

Al Capone once said, “Wars are bad for business — unless they are won.” Few mottos could better describe Vladimir Putin’s unrelenting approach to Ukraine: a costly and brutal campaign that is all about territorial expansion and economic profit.

Although President Trump regrouped with President Zelenskyy and key NATO Europe allies after his summit with Putin in Alaska in an effort to strengthen their solidarity, the Russian dictator is notoriously wily. Putin has built his strategy on outlasting the West and exploiting its divisions, and unless Trump wields stronger leverage, the Russian leader may simply stonewall negotiations and wait for Ukraine to break.

For all the comforting talk in Washington and Brussels about sanctions, attrition, and an inevitable Russian economic collapse, the battlefield reality is clear: Moscow is gaining territory, strengthening its war machine, and positioning itself to emerge from this war not weaker, but stronger. That is why the West needs a plan to force Putin's hand sooner rather than later if diplomacy stalls.

Numbers Don't Lie

Russia is not winning through tactical brilliance — it is winning by basic arithmetic.

When the war began in February 2022, Russia deployed 150,000 troops. Today, it fields over 600,000 soldiers along the front, rotating units to keep them combat-effective and improving their tactics. Losses are replaced from a population more than three times Ukraine's, meeting roughly 85% of recruitment targets month after month. Its factories produce more artillery shells annually than the United States and Europe combined.

Ukraine, by contrast, is running out of both men and time. Of one million personnel on paper, only about 300,000 are effective frontline troops. Casualties are about 1,200–1,400 troops per day. Desertion rates are rising. Public resistance to mobilization is growing. Meanwhile, Russia will continue to expand its military force, throwing new brigades, potentially supplemented once again by North Korean units, into the fight creating a grinding pressure that is bound to eventually crack the Ukrainian frontline.

Although increasing Ukraine's supply of weapons such as tanks, howitzers and other manned platforms remains important, this approach has diminishing returns because Ukraine is not generating enough troops to man them. Thus, this approach is not a decisive solution for Kyiv to defend its territory.

The Collapse Myth

Western pundits insist that even if Russia “wins” militarily, it will face long-term economic ruin. Not necessarily.

Russia is a petrostate: historically, over half of federal revenues came from oil and gas, and even today the sector still accounts for roughly one-quarter of the budget. Despite the impact of increasingly stringent sanctions and threats of increased tariffs, the determination of nations such as China, India, and others to continue buying Russian energy means that Russia’s economy might be weakening but is by no means on the verge of collapse. If Moscow secures its military gains and faces no sustained economic assault, it will stabilize, modernize, and convert battlefield victory into greater geopolitical leverage.

A victorious Russia could emerge with:

- Secured, resource-rich Ukrainian territory
- Renewed leverage in international energy markets
- A hardened, wartime-integrated military
- Emboldened that it “won” against NATO

Economic collapse is not a given as far as the Kremlin is concerned. On the current path, Russia could exit this war with a sense of superpower momentum.

Two Strikes to End the War

Victory requires hitting two critical pillars: Russia’s military logistics and its oil revenue.

1. Missile Offensive

We estimate that Ukraine needs to receive roughly 3,100 precision-strike weapons in the coming months, and the sooner the better. These figures are not arbitrary. They are based on an analysis of Russia's critical logistics nodes — rail hubs, fuel depots, command centers, and production facilities — numbering well over a thousand fixed targets across occupied Ukraine and Russian territory. Standard military planning assumes that each node must be struck multiple times to achieve a lasting effect, especially against an adversary skilled at dispersal, deception, and rapid repair. This calculation produces a requirement in the range of 2,500–3,500 weapons.

Independent Ukrainian military analysts who reviewed these estimates confirmed that the scale of demand is consistent with their own assessments. Several noted that the baseline requirement should be increased by at least 20 percent to ensure sustained pressure and to compensate for attrition. They also emphasized that deliveries should be structured in a controlled, phased flow rather than a single surge, to minimize the risk of Russian strikes destroying stockpiles before they can be deployed.

To put a finer point on what this requirement looks like, we have outlined a theoretical ideal arsenal — a balanced mix of systems with the range and precision necessary to dismantle Russia's logistics and command backbone:

1.

- **ATACMS (MGM-140 Block IIA):** 400–600 long-range missiles (USA)
- **Storm Shadow / SCALP-EG:** 250–300 long-range missiles (France–Britain)
- **GLSDB:** 1,000–1,500 small-diameter bombs (USA–Sweden)
- **LORA tactical ballistic missiles:** 200–300 units (Israel)
- **PrSM:** 200–400 long-range missiles (USA)

2. Oil Price Offensive

Missiles alone won't end the war. If the money keeps flowing, Russia can still rebuild. In the same vein, and to illustrate the fiscal pressure required, we modeled a theoretical stress-test scenario focused on oil revenues.

Alongside existing price caps on Russian oil, the energy strategy objective should be to engineer a sustained global oil surplus of two-three million barrels per day (mb/d) for at least six months, scalable to 3.5 mb/d if inventories fail to build. This surplus could be generated through existing spare production capacity in Saudi Arabia, the UAE and others, and temporary tariff waivers for sanctioned producers.

Such a coordinated push could drive Brent benchmark crude prices materially lower — potentially into the \$40 per barrel (bbl) range, with an aggressive downside case approaching \$30/bbl — forcing Urals crude into the \$20s price range or lower, far below Russia's initial budgeted oil price of \$70/bbl, which it has since had to revise downward. With oil and gas currently providing roughly one quarter of federal revenue, a 70–75% collapse in these receipts would cut total state income by about 18–19%, before factoring in ancillary effects to the non-oil tax base and currency.

If combined with stricter enforcement against Russia's "shadow fleet" of tankers and secondary sanctions as Trump has threatened to apply on purchasers of Russian oil, the fiscal squeeze would be acute. Russia's liquid sovereign reserves, estimated at around \$40 billion, would cover only part of the gap. With a \$4–6 billion monthly shortfall, these reserves could be largely depleted within a year absent heavy borrowing, deep spending cuts, or new revenue measures.

Lower oil prices will hurt U.S. producers but as part of the U.S. policy of "energy dominance" this approach could be framed as part of an overall national security strategy requiring certain

sacrifices that are balanced by all the domestic policy reforms the Trump Administration is implementing that benefit the oil industry financially.

In addition, cutting back further on the EU's purchases of Russian LNG and pipeline gas and replacing it with U.S supplies, for example, would put an even more severe dent in Russia's energy export revenue.

The Russian Market Share Prize

Securing cooperation from Persian Gulf producers could spark the largest energy market restructuring opportunity in decades. Russia currently exports 4-5 million barrels per day of crude oil, generating \$200+ billion annually. A sustained price crash wouldn't just hurt Moscow fiscally—it could permanently destroy Russia's market position. At \$15-20 per barrel for Urals crude, Russian production starts to become uneconomical while sanctions make recovery almost impossible. Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and others can permanently capture this 4-5 million barrel daily market share, worth \$100+ billion annually at post-war oil prices. Unlike higher-cost Western production (which recovers when prices normalize), sanctioned Russian capacity stays offline indefinitely, especially if the “shadow fleet” can be diminished.

When the prize is capturing a market rival's entire export market forever, temporary revenue sacrifice becomes a secondary consideration. Moscow built its petrostate through its own form of energy dominance and customer dependence — and the Gulf producers can inherit that empire.

Execution Under President Trump

An oil price campaign should begin with intense diplomacy behind the scenes, market signaling, then scale up to create as much oil supply surplus as possible once allies are on board and in a position to act. Under President Trump, this ambitious plan has teeth. Putin will not dismiss

Trump's threats as the U.S. president has demonstrated he can be very decisive at crucial moments, such as the recent U.S. strikes on Iran's nuclear facilities.

Just as importantly, Trump has already proven he can break diplomatic deadlocks others considered impossible — most recently, brokering a peace deal between Armenia and Azerbaijan in Russia's backyard. That same willingness to bypass conventional methods is exactly what's needed to coordinate Gulf overproduction, fast-track arms flows, and strengthen NATO cohesion.

The Strategic Choice Needs to Be Made Now

If the U.S. and the West continue with today's incrementalism, then the West will be forced to accept Ukraine's defeat or risk direct confrontation with Russia.

But if they start acting now — cripple Russia's logistics, collapse its oil revenue, and give Ukraine the right resources --- they will give Kyiv the breathing space to win. President Trump is positioned to tell his Russian counterpart that he will break Russia's revenue spine which can end this geopolitical confrontation faster and with less risk than military escalation.

And here's the real advantage: this strategy may not even have to run to completion. If the offensive is credible — and visibly underway — the shock to Moscow's war financing and supply chains could force Putin to recalculate well before the strategy reaches full scale. Although one should not be naïve and underestimate the Kremlin's resolve and ingenuity, sometimes the threat of losing your war chest is enough to bring even the most entrenched strongman to the table.

Destroy Russia's backbone, and its war machine falls with it. Fail, and the Free World will face a Russia not just undefeated, but stronger and more dangerous than ever before.

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