

# Trump Administration and Moscow Shoot Down Bipartisan DASKA “Sanctions Bill from Hell”

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*In August of 2018, **Senators Lindsey Graham** (R-S.C.) and **Robert Menendez** (D-N.J.) first introduced what Graham referred to as a “sanctions bill from hell” targeting Russia and **President Vladimir Putin** and making it harder for the United States to leave NATO. Despite bipartisan grievances with Moscow the bill didn’t gain much traction.*

The measure to push President Trump to take a tougher stance against Russia over alleged election interference, aggression towards Ukraine and involvement in Syria’s proxy war is titled the [Defending American Security from Kremlin Aggression Act](#) (DASKA) and would impose strict and broad penalties.

In February of this year, DASKA was reintroduced with Senator Graham stating the following,

“Our goal is to change the status quo and impose meaningful sanctions and measures against Putin’s Russia,” and “He should cease and desist meddling in the U.S. electoral process, halt cyberattacks on American infrastructure, remove Russia from Ukraine, and stop efforts to create chaos in Syria.”

During a Senate Floor [speech](#) on February 7th, Senator Menendez even went as far as saying that he speculated whether President Trump “is an asset of the Russian government” and concluded his speech by saying, “this Administration’s deference to the Kremlin demands Congress be proactive in shaping U.S. foreign policy toward Russia, especially with respect to sanctions.”

Fast forward to last Wednesday when the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee advanced the bill with a 17-5 vote. The next step is for the legislation to pass the full Senate and House of Representatives before it can be brought to President Donald Trump to sign into law or veto.

However, the White House has already stated their opposition to DASKA, which targets Russian banks, Russia’s cyber sector, new sovereign debt, and would impose measures on its oil and gas sectors. The bill also imposes several requirements on the State Department including generating reports investigating President Putin’s wealth, opposition figure Boris Nemtsov’s 2013 assassination and whether to designate Russia as a state sponsor of terror.

As for NATO, DASKA would ensure that without approval from a Senate supermajority the United States can not leave. This is in response to President Trump’s various comments about wanting to leave and criticism of other NATO members for not spending enough on defense.

The Trump administration and Moscow are on the same page when it comes to DASKA. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov called DASKA “senseless” and in a 22-page letter to Congress it was referred to as “unnecessary” and in need of “significant changes”. Although the administration stated that they too want to deter and counter Russian subversion and aggression they strongly oppose the bill in its current form.

It seems rather unlikely that this bill will pass and in the very slight chance that it does these sanctions will not deter Moscow or bring about any significant change in their domestic and foreign policies.

**Robert Legvold**, the Marshall D. Shulman Professor Emeritus of Post-Soviet Foreign Policy at Columbia University, stated

“As has been the experience since the first U.S. and EU sanctions in 2014, the effect on Russian foreign policy behavior will almost certainly be close to zero—other than perhaps encouraging initiatives that the Russian leadership believes may be disruptive in U.S. relations with its European allies.”

Although Democrats and some Republican’s such as Senator Graham sometimes manage to inadvertently bring the Russian and American heads of states together on some issues such as DASKA and President Trump’s impeachment, those moments are usually short lived. As we saw a few days ago, President Trump signed the [2020 National Defense Act](#) with a \$738 billion budget which included legislation imposing sanctions on firms laying pipe for [Nord Stream 2](#), an \$11 billion gas pipeline project meant to double gas capacity along the northern Nord Stream pipeline route from Russia to Germany, upsetting all parties involved.

Germany firmly rejected the US sanctions and referred to them as incomprehensible as they affect Berlin and other European companies as well. The imposition of sanctions against EU companies who are conducting legitimate business is rejected by the European Union as well. Russia stated that they would stick to the schedule and carry out their projects regardless of sanctions.

The current and previous White House administrations opposed this project over claims that it would embolden President Putin’s influence by increasing his political and economic sway in Europe. With the United States currently ranked as the world’s top oil and gas producer, it’s clear to see that sanctions such as these are meant to influence European allies to buy American instead of Russian oil and products.

On Friday, Allseas the Swiss-Dutch company contracted to do the work announced that it had suspended pipe-laying activities in anticipation of the enactment of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). On Saturday, Allseas stated, “Completing the project is essential for European supply security. We together with the companies supporting the project will work on finishing the pipeline as soon as possible.

Russian FM Lavrov met with President Trump at the White house earlier this month and mentioned that they covered at least a dozen substantial issues, and that both the White house and Russia are interested in dialogue. It will be interesting to see if President Trump can successfully balance his desire to expand trade ties and continue dialogue with Russia, by pushing back legislation from Congress to increase sanctions under DASKA, all while sanctioning Nord Stream 2 under the NDAA. What level of chess would that be?

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