

Russia's response to the US strike on Iran: normalising relations with the US remains a priority

Witold Rodkiewicz

Russia has sharply condemned the US strike on Iranian nuclear facilities. On 23 June, Vladimir Putin said the attack was an unprovoked act of aggression for which there is no justification. On 22 June, the Russian Foreign Ministry described the US decision to carry out the strike as irresponsible, and the strike itself as a flagrant violation of international law. It also accused Washington of undermining both regional and global security, and of breaching the nuclear non-proliferation regime. At a UN Security Council session convened on 22 June, Moscow's representative accused the US of 'gambling with the security and prosperity of all humankind', claiming that the American strike could bring the world to the brink of nuclear disaster. Russia's diplomatic service, together with China and Pakistan, submitted a draft resolution calling on Israel and the United States to immediately cease their attacks and urging all parties to exercise restraint and resume negotiations on Iran's nuclear programme. Meanwhile, Dmitry Medvedev, Deputy Chair of Russia's Security Council, stated in a series of posts on X on 22 June that the US strike had been ineffective, and declared that a number of countries were prepared to supply Iran with nuclear warheads. He argued that the Iranian regime had been strengthened, while the United States had become entangled in a regional war and exposed itself to criticism from the vast majority of countries. On 23 June, Putin received Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi at the Kremlin, assuring him that Moscow was 'making efforts to assist the people of Iran'. However, the meeting concluded without the release of any joint communiqué or even individual statements. During its public portion, the Russian president stated that the meeting will provide an opportunity to jointly consider how to resolve the current situation.

Russia's response seeks to reconcile three separate objectives. First, it aims to conceal its inability to prevent US and Israeli military actions against a state that is among the few to have provided Russia not only with diplomatic support but also with military assistance in its war against Ukraine. Second, it seeks to demonstrate solidarity with Iran in order to gain favour among Global South countries and further reinforce the prevailing wave of anti-American and anti-Western sentiment there. Third, it is seeking not to alienate President Donald Trump and to preserve the prospect of normalising US–Russia relations. This final objective is a priority for the Kremlin, meaning that Russia will not provide significant support for Tehran, particularly of a military nature.

Commentary

- **The US strike on Iranian nuclear facilities forced the Kremlin to adjust its rhetoric regarding the Iran crisis.** Following the launch of Israeli airstrikes on Iran on 13 June, Moscow's primary objective was to ensure that the escalation did not jeopardise the prospect of normalising relations with the Trump administration. As a result, Russia limited itself to criticising Israeli actions while refraining from any negative assessment of US policy. It sought to maintain contact with all parties involved in the conflict and offered to mediate. Moreover, it argued that resolving the crisis would require consideration of Israel's security interests. Moscow also openly admitted that it was not providing Tehran with any military assistance, explaining that Iran had not requested such support. At the St Petersburg International Economic Forum on 18 June, President Putin gave evasive answers when questioned by journalists about Washington's rhetoric and actions towards Iran, as well as Russia's support for Tehran. Instead, he emphasised the need for the Kremlin to take into account the fact that Israel is home to a significant Russian-speaking diaspora.
- **Moscow's condemnation of the US airstrikes on Iran is primarily directed at countries of the Global South, which are typically critical of US policy.** Due to Western sanctions, the Kremlin is forced to rely on these states' willingness to engage in economic cooperation with Russia. Against this backdrop, it is also seeking to capitalise on the rise in anti-American sentiment following the US strike on Iran. At the same time, Moscow's response has been limited to rhetoric and diplomatic initiatives within the UN framework, lacking any practical impact.
- **At the same time, Russia continues to pursue the normalisation of relations with the United States, which it treats as a strategic priority.** Following President Putin's meeting with the Iranian Foreign Minister, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov emphasised that differences over the Middle East conflict had not affected Moscow's commitment to restoring ties with Washington, and that dialogue with the US regarding Iran was ongoing. In criticising the strike on Iran, President Putin avoided directly naming the United States. His assurances of support for Tehran were also phrased in a way that implied humanitarian aid rather than military assistance. This reflects the Kremlin's intention to manipulate President Trump in order to advance its broader strategic objective of deepening divisions within the West.
- **Russia's position on the conflict between Israel, the United States, and Iran is unlikely to change.** Moscow will continue to avoid any steps that could lead to direct confrontation with Washington. Accordingly, it is not expected to provide Iran with assistance such as military equipment deliveries – possibly with the exception of spare parts, components, and similar items. In particular, the possibility of Russia supplying Iran with nuclear weapons should be considered highly improbable. Dmitry Medvedev's recent posts were widely overinterpreted by commentators as implying such an intention, prompting a critical response from President Trump himself. In response, Medvedev clarified that Moscow had no such intentions.