

## Trump and Zelensky: Is the damage irreparable?



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US President Donald Trump and the Republicans gave many indications that they were not fans of the Biden-era foreign policy towards Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which was sticking with Ukraine for "as long as it takes." Before his second inauguration, what Trump would do with US military support for Ukraine was a tense topic under his "America First" transactional foreign policy. Then it really exploded, much beyond the worst nightmare of European leaders. Vice-President JD Vance and Trump attacked Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, with Trump going on to accuse Zelensky of playing with "World War III." During the internationally televised meltdown, the message was clear, if it had not been before: in the current US foreign policy, the US is only interested in supporting Ukraine if it serves the current president and his administration's broader political goals.

Underpinning what was largely an unstrategic—not to mention immoral—and ill-tempered treatment of the Ukrainian leader, is Trump's larger vision that the post-World War II era geopolitics is one that has led to what he calls "America's decline." For Trump, it's always, "What's in it for me?" And that policy is framed as "America First." But Trump's notions about what is to his advantage remains questionable. He believes that his country has the power to secure any deal under him, similar to Zelensky's foe, Russian President Vladimir Putin. Trump has broken ranks with European leaders on Putin. Before Zelensky's visit, he called the Ukrainian leader a dictator, and said Putin should be allowed to return to G7, from which he was expelled in 2014 after annexing Crimea.

On Monday, the US president paused all military aid to Ukraine, as reported by Bloomberg. Prior to the news, Trump had again taken to social media to chide Zelensky's assessment of the war with Russia. In a social media post, pointing to recent comments in which Zelensky said the end of his country's war with Russia remains far off, Trump said the US "will not put up with it for much longer," adding that Zelensky's assessment was "the worst statement that could have been made." To reporters on Monday afternoon, Trump continued to suggest that Zelensky "doesn't want to make a deal," and that one could "be made very fast." Trump went on to say he believed that "Russia wants to make a deal," and that "certainly, the people of Ukraine want to make a deal. They've suffered more than anybody else."

The warnings from the meltdown—and

the clear fact that Trump openly dislikes Zelensky—extended to Europe. Zelensky left early; the deal to offer Ukraine's rarest minerals to the US remained unsigned on the table. European leaders have stepped up, and the UK has taken on an urgency to seize the moment. The UK signed a \$2 billion deal with Ukraine and paved a way for the country to tap into Russian frozen assets, which have been under Europe's jurisdiction. The deal will allow Ukraine to use export finance to buy more than 5,000 air defence missiles, which will be made in Belfast.

On Monday, while Trump continued to sideline Ukraine, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer also declared a four-point plan for Ukraine, which included a "coalition of the willing" that would come together to draw up a peace plan to end the war. He said he would present it to the US president for his support. Unlike NATO and other alliances, "a coalition of willing" is designed to be palatable to the US president in the sense of nation-states that are willing to join in by not sending in their troops. The UK and France have mentioned that they are willing to commit troops in the event of a peace deal.

Starmer, European leaders, and Zelensky reiterated that the success of a peace deal would need strong US backing. Starmer told the UK members of parliament that Trump's commitment to achieving peace in Ukraine is "sincere." As the British prime minister spoke of the "heavy lifting" that Europe would have to do but reiterated the need for US support in the House of Commons, the US president posted on social media, saying, "Europe... stated flatly that they cannot do the job without the US—probably not a great statement to have been made in terms of a show of strength against Russia. What are they thinking?"

Trump's strangely antagonistic statements towards Europe on the issue of Ukraine, along with the bullying of Zelensky, has generated rifle speculations of US military aid cuts in the media. According to analysts, large spending cuts would definitely result in greater loss of life and could easily result in Ukraine losing the war.

The war is currently stalemated, but Russia has the initiative. Ukraine's defences on the eastern front are weak, though not breaking; it retains an enclave in Russia's Kursk region. Russia has made small but continuous gains in Ukraine's east since the Ukrainian counteroffensive halted in November 2023, but at a high cost. In 2024, the Russians suffered more than 420,000 casualties, and

the combat losses since 2022 are set to cross one million by mid-year, and Putin has not yet called for a second mobilisation. The US provides Ukraine with the full spectrum of equipment that a military needs.

To understand the importance of the US, militarily for Ukraine: the packages run the gamut from heavy weapons to munitions—artillery shells and air defence missiles—to medical equipment and cold weather

12, Donald Trump said Ukraine would not recover all its territories or join NATO, and said he would meet with Russian strongman Vladimir Putin. On February 13, Trump broke ranks with G7 leaders, who expelled Russia after it annexed Crimea in 2014, and said Putin should be allowed to return. For Trump, his path to "peace" between Russia and Ukraine is an image of himself standing between the countries. He has not agreed to provide any

reconsider the US as a steady ally, the prospects for Ukraine remain as bleak as ever. Trump continues his divisive language, but as we have seen before, his actions are often divorced from his words. US relations with Russia have always enjoyed a rare bipartisan consensus, even during recent times, despite talk of aid cuts. But the current atmosphere seems to have upended the earlier equation—for now. After the fiery meeting that drew



US President Donald Trump, along with Vice-President JD Vance, meets with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House in Washington, DC, US on February 28, 2025.

PHOTO: REUTERS

gear supplies. According to the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), recent packages appear to provide the monthly production of equipment that is in short supply in the US, such as artillery shells, air defence systems, and anti-tank weapons. Around a dozen HIMARS to boost Ukrainian firepower and a dozen National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) for air defence were contracted in 2022 and will soon appear on the battlefield in Ukraine.

The focus on military equipment should not discount the "soft" support—training and intelligence data, for example—that the US provides. Although such support cannot be counted in the same way that equipment can, it has been critical in building Ukraine's military capabilities, and Europe cannot replace the same intelligence as to when Russia would attack or not.

Trump's approach to the so-called "peace deal," which he keeps referring to, has so far included dialogue with Putin. On February

security guarantees that Starmer has spoken of, and solely focused on the deal to open up Ukrainian minerals to US companies, arguing that the presence of US workers in Ukraine itself would discourage Russia from attacking or encroaching on the Ukrainian territory.

But if Trump's ultimate goal is normalisation with Moscow, and he is willing to make that deal, where is the line where he would settle with Putin? Vladimir Putin is not a reliable ally, with the robust track record of turning back on agreements, and if Trump wants to rewrite the history of the US and Russia, what are the concessions he would be willing to settle on with Russia? If those concessions come at the cost of Ukraine's sovereignty, neither Ukraine nor Europe would be onboard. On Monday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters, "We see that the collective West has begun to partially lose its unity."

While Zelensky has said the US-Ukraine relationship is salvageable, and Europe refuses to—on the diplomatic front—

backlash, Trump's cabinet, such as Secretary of State Marco Rubio and others, continue to back him and have vaguely said that the efforts to end the war need a "reset." It is unclear whether the entire administration remains aligned with Trump on whatever position he has on normalising relations with Russia, but his critics have accused him of essentially selling out Ukraine.

In the coming days, the best case scenario would be the continuation of US and European aid to stabilise front lines, defend Russian attacks, and find a footing for a negotiated settlement, and perhaps Russia would be more willing to make a deal as its cost of war piles up, as casualties are looking to surpass a million. What will happen is frankly too soon to tell, but the way the meeting-turned-shouting match between Zelensky and Trump blew up on live television—juxtaposed with the new tone of US foreign policy—the writing is on the wall: expect the unexpected.

## Why Palestinians are now worried about the ceasefire



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In nearly eight decades of negotiating history between Israel and the Palestinians, the rule is enshrined that the weapon of the Palestinians' in the negotiations is their right and the paper that establishes it, and that Israel's weapon is the power of fire. In other words, we always find ourselves with the narrative that Israel is doing completely contrary to what was agreed, and that very dynamic also refers to the US, which is always accused of double standards; first, ensuring the interest of Israel in full, and second, ignoring rights for the Palestinians, which they claim to stand for, in engineering

Take for example, the Oslo Accords, signed in the White House and the aftermath that saw its promise utterly left unfulfilled for the rights of the Palestinians. Palestine is at an immensely fragile position, where the ceasefire deal—a deal largely made by the US—could bring us back to square one. As widely known, the deal came in three stages: the first has advantages for both parties, and the second has more advantages for the Palestinians, in that it includes a more permanent withdrawal of Israeli troops and authorities' presence in Gaza, which they destroyed.

**We have seen this game before: postponing the negotiations which save Trump's ally Netanyahu the precious time he needs to rearrange his cards in the Israeli political arena to remain in power. As long as the war continues, even in parallel with the temporary truce and exchange, Netanyahu will remain the ruler in Israel until the last day of his term, with renewed chances of reaching another term.**

agreements throughout the years.

The judgement in this equation is always power in all its military, economic and alliance components.

In all the agreements and understandings reached, Israel was exercising its commitment to them on the measure of the gains it has achieved for Israel, and the harm inflicted on the Palestinians by dispensing with them.

Israel's fascist Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office came minutes after the first phase ended, and as talks have begun on starting the second phase that's aimed at ending the war and seeing all remaining living hostages in Gaza returned home, he issued a statement describing a US proposal—a ceasefire extension through Passover, or April 20. On the first day,



Israel blocked food and fuel from entering Gaza after the ceasefire's first phase expired on the night of March 1.

PHOTO: REUTERS

half the hostages, alive and dead, would be released. The rest would be released if agreement is reached on a permanent ceasefire. The extension would provide Israel with its desired advantages to continue illegal occupation, and the fate of the second and third phases are becoming determined, according to the unequal equation based on Israeli military force, which, even if not exercised, remains threatening enough.

Since the beginning of the first phase, Israel has been thinking, planning and working on how to defer the second phase and continue to deprive the Palestinians of its advantages, benefiting from the fact that the exchange will reduce the pressure from the Netanyahu government to bring home the Israeli hostages, and neutralise the hate against them, while also benefiting from the time factor that gives it valuable opportunities to officially and actually

abolish the second phase.

The Palestinians and Arabs can now admit that what is happening now is a lack of even the minimum balance that came from Washington—the American position under the Biden administration was characterised by a synthetic duality. Now, it is to unconditionally give Israel everything it needs and beyond more than the means of war, and giving the Palestinians in return—very limited drops of financial support to beat all the lingering traumas from the atrocities they have witnessed, and lived through. The Trump administration has unequivocally moved the already-lopsided equation between the US and Israel in another direction, as the US is no longer a mediator but rather a direct party by giving Israel an open mandate to do by the Palestinians whatever it wants.

Recent events in other parts of the world also indicate it could get much more frightening and worse for the Middle East. The kind of US government which staunchly supported Ukraine against Russian invasion, selectively following international law, is also vanishing from Washington. Ukrainian President Zelensky's humiliation in the White House should be understood as greater and deeper than a verbal quarrel between two presidents. It established the beginning of a dangerous era in which the creditor is a master and the debtor is a slave. Countries, including the Arab states, who could also be candidates for similar insults—as would be Europe—have the actual potential to save themselves and their prestige before the axe falls on the head. It is incumbent upon nations that still have power against Donald Trump to act before things take a turn for the worse.

We are already witnessing a pattern of behaviour in what is happening about Gaza, where the stages of the agreed deal are slyly being turned into one stage—which is only to be extended until the recovery of all Israeli hostages, living and dead, and then we will see everything that had nothing to do with what is written on the paper. We have seen this game before: postponing the negotiations which save Trump's ally Netanyahu the precious time he needs to rearrange his cards in the Israeli political arena to remain in power. As long as the war continues, even in parallel with the temporary truce and exchange, Netanyahu will remain the ruler in Israel until the last day of his term, with renewed chances of reaching another term.

The papers of agreements and understandings from the beginning of the Palestinian cause to the present day, have been burning in all rounds of its right struggle with the Israeli fire, to enshrine an equation that says: "What can the ink, paper, signatures, mediators and witnesses do with the fire other than burning and turning into ashes?"