



By: *John Sipher*

# Does Trump even have a plan for Ukraine?



During the Cold War, academics and analysts practiced Kremlinology, meticulously scrutinizing scant evidence to interpret Soviet politics. Observers dissected font choices in media reports and speculated on the significance of Politburo members' positions at official events.

Early efforts to decipher Donald Trump's plans to end the war in Ukraine mirrored this exercise. Analysts parsed the backgrounds and remarks of mid-level officials in his administration, devising strategies to shape Trump's stance on the conflict. Foreign policy experts and Atlanticists hoped the tea leaves left open an opportunity that a peace deal that would not amount to surrender.

In hindsight, these efforts proved futile. Friday's **grotesque** display of public bullying in the Oval Office shattered the hopes of those looking for signs that the new administration was committed to the Atlantic alliance.

Trump has once again reverted to his longstanding admiration for Vladimir Putin, the Kremlin's bloody tyrant. Trump wants to normalize relations with Russia, and his vision for "peace" in Ukraine is clearly skewed to benefit Moscow.

## U.S. stance will make war more likely, not less

The events of recent weeks mark the most consequential political shift in decades. The Trump administration's actions challenge America's commitment to Europe and NATO, signaling a potential restructuring of the global order.

While the administration's focus has largely been on Europe, its actions will have worldwide implications. Many experts fear that the shifting U.S. stance will make war more likely, not less, and could encourage more countries to pursue nuclear weapons. Friday's events portend a more dangerous world.

Prior to the Friday blow up between Trump, U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance and Ukrainian President Zelensky, Trump's comments on Ukraine were widely reported.

He falsely labeled Ukrainian President Zelensky a dictator and blamed Ukraine for starting the war with Russia. His negotiators met with senior Russian officials in Saudi Arabia to **discuss** a potential peace deal—excluding Ukraine and Europe from the discussions—raising fears that the U.S. intends to strike a deal with the Kremlin over their heads.

### Friday's Oval Office debacle suggests that appeasement has become official U.S. policy

On the third anniversary of Russia's invasion, the U.S. even voted against a U.N. resolution condemning the Kremlin, aligning itself with Belarus, North Korea, and Iran. Additionally, Elon Musk and Vice President Vance brazenly interfered in the recent German elections by openly supporting the right-wing, neo-Nazi AfD party.

Many feared that Trump's pro-Russian and anti-Ukraine stance could lead to an agreement skewed against Ukrainian and European interests.

EU foreign policy chief and former Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas **warned** that recent U.S. actions risk "giving the aggressor what he wants" before negotiations even begin, arguing that appeasement will "only invite more aggression."

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## Trump has no concrete plan

There are, of course, compelling reasons to seek an end to the war. Hundreds of thousands have been killed or injured, including as many as 700,000 Russian

casualties. Over 10 million Ukrainians have been displaced, and Ukraine has suffered severe economic, personal, and cultural devastation. The front lines have barely moved since 2022, with 20% of Ukraine still under Russian control.

Despite interest in negotiations, any agreement remains months away. The warring nations hold fundamentally different views on what terms should be on the table.

Since his election in November, Trump has repeatedly vowed to end the war—at times even claiming he would do so on his first day in office. He is clearly impatient with the conflict and does not want it lingering over his administration.



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However, he has no concrete plan. His administration has sent a series of mixed and uncoordinated signals, leaving U.S. allies and adversaries alike confused and concerned.

The only constant has been Trump's preference for engaging with Vladimir Putin. Trump has embraced the Kremlin's narrative that Ukraine cannot win, despite Russia's military being weak and unable to achieve its initial objectives. Nevertheless, Trump sees Ukraine as an easier target for pressure than Russia.

The administration's attempt to coerce Zelensky into **granting** the U.S. access to Ukraine's mineral resources as "payment" for military aid reflects its pattern of inept arm-

twisting.

The White House dispatched a swarm of emissaries with conflicting messages, each attempting to strong-arm Kyiv into a deal. However, the terms constantly shift, and all proposals appear punitive rather than practical.

One observer on social media quipped, "Does the Administration want the minerals delivered every Wednesday in a paper bag to the White House service entrance?"

Critics view this initiative as outright extortion—an old-fashioned colonial-era shakedown, where the strong exploit the weak. Zelensky himself **remarked**, "When the United States sells arms to Israel, Qatar, the Emirates, Saudi Arabia, do they demand a 100% surcharge? I'm not signing something that 10 generations of Ukrainians will have to pay for."

While Ukraine managed to water down the final agreement, allowing Trump to claim a victory, the deal holds little real significance. The entire fiasco was more reminiscent of The Godfather than Metternich, serving merely as a spectacle to appease a thin-skinned President eager to showcase his "strength" to his domestic political base.

## Fundamental security issues

On fundamental security issues, Ukraine and Russia remain deeply divided. Ukraine will not sign an agreement that merely freezes the conflict, allowing Moscow to regroup and invade again in the future.

Consequently, Kyiv insists on security guarantees from the West, with NATO membership as its primary goal. However, Russia views Ukraine joining NATO as an existential threat, and Trump has dismissed the idea. In reality, it is not NATO's military presence but the encroachment of Western democratic values that Putin fears most.

## If NATO membership remains off the table, Ukraine will instead seek U.S. or European troops on its soil as a security guarantee

If NATO membership remains off the table, Ukraine will instead seek U.S. or European troops on its soil as a security guarantee. This request stems from the failure of the United States and Britain to uphold their security commitments under the Budapest Memorandum, signed when Ukraine surrendered its Soviet-era nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile, Russia demands control over Kherson, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk, Luhansk, and Crimea, despite not fully occupying all these regions. Zelensky has suggested trading 200 square miles of Ukraine-controlled land in Russia's Kursk region for Ukrainian territory currently occupied by Russia, but the Kremlin has rejected the offer.

Additionally, Moscow wants to limit the size of Ukraine's military and ban foreign troops from the country. Putin has also persuaded Trump that any deal must include the removal of Zelensky from power.

## Putin's ambitions extend beyond Ukraine

Putin's ambitions extend beyond Ukraine—he seeks to force the West into accepting a new European security order. Ultimately, his goal is to dismantle NATO.

Past negotiations have revealed the Kremlin's broader aim of erasing Ukrainian identity altogether. More importantly, Putin's track record suggests he rarely honors agreements.

Despite successfully influencing Trump's White House, Putin faces his own challenges. A peace deal carries risks for him as well.

Russia's military progress has been abysmal—at its current pace, capturing the rest of Ukraine could take nearly a century.

The human and material losses have been catastrophic.

## Ending the war would force Putin to demilitarize the economy, risking widespread unemployment

Russia's daily **casualties** often exceed total U.S. losses from 20 years in Afghanistan. Equipment shortages are so severe that front-line troops are using WWII-era tanks and donkeys to transport supplies. Even with North Korean reinforcements, Russian forces have failed to push Ukrainian troops out of Kursk.

Economically, Russia is teetering. Inflation nears 10%, interest rates exceed 20%, and military spending consumes nearly 40% of the national budget. Ending the war would force Putin to demilitarize the economy, risking widespread unemployment. Although he rules with an iron grip, even a subdued public will see through any attempt to frame this as a victory.

## Trump follows his instincts rather than accepts advice

Trump wants the war to end, but a rushed deal favoring Moscow could have political repercussions similar to Biden's chaotic withdrawal from Afghanistan. Trump already made a weak deal with the Taliban—another concession to the Kremlin may backfire domestically.

More importantly, a radical shift away from the decades-long U.S. political consensus of supporting democratic allies in favor of a closer relationship with Moscow, represents a tragic strategic error.

Reducing support for Ukraine is one thing—America has a long tradition of isolationism. However, aligning with Russia is both reckless and dangerous. Russia is a threadbare expansionist empire that has

orchestrated campaigns to intimidate its neighbors and engage in subversion and sabotage abroad. As a diminished power on the world stage, it seeks to disrupt the global order.



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Despite its weakness, Trump has embraced the false narrative that Russia's power is overwhelming and that Ukraine has no choice but to submit. Political observers have noted that much of Trump's worldview is rooted in the 1970s.

Rather than recognizing present-day Russia as a pariah with a weak economy, Trump seems to view it as a nuclear superpower capable of resolving world problems through "summit" meetings between Moscow and Washington.

Simultaneously, Trump moved to normalize relations with Moscow and **praised** his relationship with Putin, even as he orchestrated the public humiliation of the Ukrainian President in the Oval Office.

On the same day, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth reportedly ordered U.S. Cyber Command to halt all planning against Russia, including offensive cyber actions.

## Trump perceives a world divided into predators and prey

Friday's events starkly reveal Trump's worldview - that powerful nuclear states can

dictate terms and bully smaller nations. He perceives a world divided into predators and prey.

This perception will prompt U.S. allies, who have long supported Washington both politically and militarily, to reconsider their trust. Trump's disparaging remarks about Ukraine, Greenland and Denmark, Canada, Panama and Gaza send a troubling signal to both allies and adversaries.

As a result, smaller nations may feel compelled to develop nuclear weapons as a safeguard against potential exploitation and vassal status.

**U.S. allies, members of Congress, and even some within Trump's own administration will likely push for continued support of a strong, democratic Ukraine**

Abandoning allies while appeasing aggressors projects an image of weakness, emboldening adversaries like China, which may seek to exploit this power vacuum by targeting Taiwan and other vulnerable states.

The success of any ceasefire depends on how much Trump concedes to Putin. U.S. allies, members of Congress, and even some within Trump's own administration will likely push for continued support of a strong, democratic Ukraine.

The right path seems clear. Yet, after Friday's episode, it is evident that America is heading in a different direction.