

# Before Trump, no one had a plan to bring Ukraine war to a conclusion

By Conrad Black

In the aftermath of the rather acrimonious meeting in the White House on Friday between President Zelensky of Ukraine and the president and vice president of the United States, it is easy to lose sight of the progress that has been made in the strategic matters and specifically over the Ukraine War in just six weeks since President Trump's real inauguration. Prior to his return to office, there was no known consideration being given by any party with any standing to bring that very nasty war to a satisfactory conclusion. It has now continued for almost as long as the Korean War and 70 per cent of the length of World War I, and has claimed at least 1.25 million casualties, probably more than half of those deaths. There had not been a peep of serious discussion of peace terms during the Biden administration. The Western policy was to provide enough weapons and munitions to prevent Ukrainian defeat but not permit Ukrainian victory for "as long as it takes," (until there would no longer be enough live Ukrainians to continue the war). This was not a serious exit strategy.



Trump, the only man with a plan. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

President Trump's plan was to leave Russian President Putin with enough of his ill-gotten gains to claim a partial victory and territorial conquests that adequately represent the ancient Russian interest in Ukraine, a country that was never a defined jurisdiction until established by Lenin as a Soviet Republic in 1919, and one which Russia had occupied for over 300 years, where approximately one sixth of the population is Russian-speaking. Mr. Trump calculated that in all of the circumstances, this would be an acceptable arrangement for Ukraine, as its sovereignty would be universally acknowledged and accepted to be legitimate. While the United States was prepared to acquiesce in Russia's insistence that Ukraine not join NATO, since many NATO countries do not wish it in NATO and that was therefore not a practical option anyway, Ukraine's security would be amplified in three important respects. There would be long term peacekeeping missions stationed in Ukraine, including British and French forces (both nuclear powers and intimate allies of the United States), and the strategic minerals extraction agreement which

had been devised by Zelensky himself, which would put significant numbers of important American personnel durably in Ukraine, and in the event that Russian action caused an exchange of fire with the NATO peacekeepers in Ukraine, the United States would continue to be a subscriber to Article 5 making such action an attack upon all of NATO.

The US president naturally assumed that this level of security coupled with a durable cease-fire and a very generous reconstruction and development aid package from the Western countries would constitute an acceptable end to the war for Ukraine. Once that threshold had been reached, there cannot be much doubt that the Trump plan would be to advise the Russian government that if it did not accept these terms, the United States would provide Ukraine with weapons that would make that war as disagreeably familiar to the civilian population of European Russia as it had already become to the civilian population of Ukraine. The basic strategic point is that the United States possesses the ability to muscle both sides into a compromise peace, and no one else does, including the two combatants, as long as the West and especially the Americans, continue to supply Ukraine.

It is difficult to imagine what motivated president Zelensky to defer the signing of the strategic minerals agreement from US Treasury Secretary Bessent's visit to Kiev several weeks ago, to the Munich Security Conference a week later, to Washington last week, and then deliberately to blow up the signing with a laborious lecture that the Ukrainian leader knew perfectly well raised points unacceptable to the American administration. But the return of Zelensky to Europe and the London NATO meeting which resulted, along with the recent German election, in the sharpest commitment to increased defence spending for deterrent capacity that Europe has had in nearly 60 years, since the Berlin crisis, the rearmament of West Germany, and the return to office of General de Gaulle in Paris, must also be considered solid progress for the West.

While it is undoubtedly true that Putin would have enjoyed aspects of the acerbities in the Oval Office on February 28, he sees that the United States is dangling in front of Ukraine security assurances perfectly adequate to deter Russia, and at the same time the European powers in NATO are escalating their defence budgets. And it would also be unwelcome news in the Kremlin that Germany has definitively rejected the (former chancellor Angela) Merkel policy of German energy vassalage to Russia, by moving toward other sources of energy while increasing the military capability of the German armed forces.

Presumably, since only the United States possesses the ability to herd both sides into an agreement, Zelensky will give himself a brief cooling-off period and then tacitly accept the American proposals, perhaps slightly sweetened for face-saving purposes; the strategic minerals agreement will be signed and the European NATO powers will confirm the enhancement of their defence capabilities and Trump will advise Putin to accept terms which he has apparently practically accepted, or face an escalated and much more difficult and costly war. Peace should result; Ukraine will be secure and legitimate within revised borders, and it will be possible to negotiate a nonaggression agreement between NATO and Russia and begin the process of the repositioning of Russia out from under the smothering wing of China and back to a satisfactory working relationship with the West. Unseemly though it was, nothing that occurred at the White House last Friday significantly compromises any of this.

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