

J.D. Vance has plenty to learn – about manners, statecraft, and Russo-Ukrainian culture

By Lev Tsitrin

A mere 3 weeks ago President Trump was asked, [by a FOX reporter](#), a seemingly tricky question: “Do you view Vice President J.D. Vance as your successor? The Republican nominee in 2028?” Trump’s answer? “No, but he’s very capable. I think you have a lot of very capable people. So far, I think he’s doing a fantastic job. It’s too early. We’re just starting.”

The [video of the bizarre scene](#) in the White House of the argument between Trump, Vance, and Zelenski, I regret to say, fully vindicated Trump’s assessment of his Vice-President’s immaturity.



Zelenski came to an immensely important meeting that was long in preparations – the meeting in which Ukraine was supposed to sign a hugely adventitious for the US deal giving it control of Ukraine’s deposits of rare earths – a matter of strategic importance for both countries, ensuring that US industry is well supplied with the minerals indispensable for high

technology and defense, and that the resulting Ukraine ties to the US would provide a measure of guarantee what Russia won't re-invade, so the death and mayhem in Ukraine could stop.

And – courtesy of the Vice President Vance – the whole thing got derailed.

Both Trump and Zelenski were involved in an entirely relevant discussion of Putin's trustworthiness – Zelenski enumerating the instances of lack thereof while Trump arguing that all those occurred while he wasn't in the White House. Zelenski, blood and death of the thousands of Ukrainians weighing on his shoulders, was earnestly trying to make a point that, without a firm US security guarantee, Putin will go back on his word; Trump, clearly enjoying this back-and-forth about realpolitik, argued that he won't.

And then, J.D. Vance threw in a monkey wrench: "Why are you disrespectful, President Zelenski?"

This was not a realpolitik argument. Moreover, it was not factually true – there is no disrespect in bringing a contrary factual argument, and insisting it must be taken into consideration. And it wasn't polite – Zelenski was a guest, and should have been treated as such.

And then, there is a whole separate cultural factor which, I am sure, J.D. was not aware of, but which made me – an ex-Soviet – instantly recoil. "Do you respect me?" is, in Russian (and I am sure Ukrainian) culture a proverbial pretext for a fight among the low-lives over a refusal to participate in what Russians call "crushing a bottle" – finding three passerbys to pool their change to buy, and then drink in some dark alleyway, a bottle of cheap wine. The Russian phrase "do you respect me?" has no other connotations, and is only used to express contempt. How does it feel when the Vice President of the United States uses it towards a head of a foreign state in a White House?

This – by any measure cheap – pseudo-argument broke the deal that is literally a matter of global life-or-death, leave alone making America a laughing stock both in Russia and Ukraine.

I do not know whether, when the guests were gone, President Trump boxed J.D. Vance's ears. Perhaps not – but the young man clearly has plenty to learn – not least, not to interrupt a strategically important discussion with nonsense. He should have sat straight, and quietly absorbed how geopolitics is done by grown-ups. His immaturity and discourtesy to a guest will unfortunately cost lives.

When I was a little kid going to a Soviet school, we had a big slogan on the wall that read "Study. Study. Study. V. I Lenin." I am no fan of that guy, but this is a sound advice – not just to a little kid, but a political figure, too.

President Trump had the grace to end it all with a remark that the whole episode will make for a good TV. That it surely was – but the harm was done.

And it was also a warning to America – a warning that J.D. Vance – who is surely good for typical vice-presidential ribbon-cutting jobs, or delivering official eulogies at state funerals – is nowhere near ready for the prime job.

Stay well, President Trump. We really need you. J.D. is no substitute.

And do give J.D. a good dressing-down for what he's done – so he starts to learn.