

# The Peace Process on Ukraine Is Likely To Resume Sooner Rather Than Later, Despite the Meltdown in the Oval Office Last Week

By Conrad Black

The speed and the glee with which the most febrile surviving Trump-haters among Democratic officeholders and the press have accused President Trump of ambushing and bullying President Zelensky, deserting the forces of freedom, and confirming again that Mr. Trump is a puppet of the Mephistophelean reincarnation of Stalin in the Kremlin, Vladimir Putin.



President Trump, center, Vice President Vance, right, and President Zelensky, left, at the Oval Office on February 28, 2025. Andrew Harnik/Getty Images

n before the Ukrainian president involuntarily departed the White House on an empty stomach to seek luncheon elsewhere, the noisier jackals of Trump-hate, punch-drunk though they have been for several months, were screeching from the playbook of John Brennan and James Clapper that Mr. Trump is a Kremlin asset.

It is clear from a careful examination of the entire known exchange between Messrs. Zelensky and Trump at Washington on Friday that while it is true that the party that must be most satisfied by the diplomatic shambles that occurred is undoubtedly President Putin, it is equally true that the Ukrainian president has himself to blame for the significant setback to the Ukrainian national interest that he caused.

Treasury Secretary Bessent went to Kiev several weeks ago to sign the strategic mineral agreement that was Mr. Zelensky's own initiative: American extraction of rare-earth and other strategic minerals from Ukraine in exchange for sophisticated weaponry and redevelopment assistance. Mr. Zelensky declined to sign the agreement on that occasion and said that he would do so at the Munich Security Conference.

He did not and the meeting in Washington was requested for that purpose. Mr. Trump greeted him most cordially at the main entrance to the White House, and the opening dialogue between them was convivial. Mr. Trump referred to French and British peacekeepers in a postwar Ukraine and possibly American peacekeepers as well.

Mr. Zelensky did not take up on this. Mr. Trump referred to the existence of an extensive and sophisticated American mining operation in Ukraine under the minerals agreement as a commitment of American personnel to that country whose presence in itself would constitute a deterrence against Russian attack. Mr. Zelensky ignored that suggestion. Mr. Trump said that once a peace agreement was in place, further security measures could be taken.

This too was ignored. Instead, the Ukrainian president tediously repeated that Mr. Putin's promises were unreliable, a fact with which he knew his hosts to be familiar. As early as the confirmation hearings of Mr. Trump's first Secretary of State, Rex Tillerson, his current Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, then a senator, asked if Mr. Tillerson considered Mr. Putin, as Mr. Rubio implicitly did, to be a "war criminal."

This has been the general bipartisan view of Mr. Putin at Washington at least since the apparent success of his subversion of Ukraine in 2010. Mr. Zelensky knows perfectly well that there is among the European members of the North Atlantic Treaty substantial opposition to the admission of Ukraine to the alliance. Mr. Zelensky knows equally well that the United States wishes to revitalize relations with Russia sufficiently to induce it out of its present potentially constricting embrace of Communist China.

Mr. Zelensky must have some grasp of the existing correlation of strategic forces. Mr. Trump paid homage on Friday, as he has on other occasions, to the bravery of the Ukrainians and of Mr. Zelensky himself. He continued to be entirely courteous even after Mr. Zelensky implied that the strategic minerals agreement and any peace agreement to end the Ukraine War were contingent upon assurances of security in advance from the United States itself that President Trump made it clear would not be forthcoming.

Plus, Mr. Zelensky repeatedly spoke over his host and the vice president when he joined the conversation and ensured the complete and acrimonious breakdown of the discussions. He showed no recognition whatever of the fact that in trying to broker a peace – astonishingly, something that no one with any standing has attempted before in the three years of this nasty war – Mr. Trump has to be an honest intermediary and not just a powerful echo of the demands of Kyiv, however well-founded most of them may be. What was underway until Friday was a peace process, not an international propaganda exercise.

Not since the French revolutionary ambassador Edmund Charles Genet defied President Washington by commissioning commercial raiders to violate American neutrality legislation and attack British shipping in 1793 has an official foreign visitor to the United States behaved so outrageously and challenged the incumbent president for the support of American public opinion.

Washington demanded Genet's recall but when the new and more radical French government issued a warrant for his arrest which would likely result in his execution on the guillotine, Washington granted him asylum. The Frenchman subsequently married the daughter of America's fourth vice president, General George Clinton. This aspect of the precedent is unlikely to be emulated in the case of Mr. Zelensky.

No one should buy into the hysterical Democratic claptrap that there will never be peace or that Mr. Trump has handed Russia victory in this war. Unless Mr. Zelensky suddenly becomes a stark raving lunatic, there will be a minimum cooling-off period, perhaps as short as a week, with supportive therapy if necessary from the French president and the British prime minister who preceded Mr. Zelensky to the Oval Office earlier in the week. Then the minerals agreement will be signed by authorized officials, the cease-fire will be fairly close to the present lines, anyone who wishes to leave the newly Russian sections of Ukraine or to move to them from elsewhere in Ukraine will be facilitated in doing so.

There will be a substantial military presence, led by the British and the French, of the major European NATO countries durably stationed in Ukraine, and in the event of any aggression against them America would remain subject to Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty. No one could reasonably ask for greater security and it will certainly be more than adequate to deter the Russians. Since Russia has a smaller gross domestic product than Canada, Mr. Trump may wish to offer Mr. Putin the right to become the 52nd state; it is a

much larger country than Ukraine, but it ceased to be a superpower 35 years ago. Its chief geopolitical significance is as a tool of Communist China.

If Mr. Zelensky can't figure this out within a short time, some other Ukrainian who can will take his place. If Mr. Putin tries to raise the cost of peace to Ukraine, Mr. Trump will escalate the lethality of military supplies to Ukraine. Peace may have been delayed slightly but it has not been derailed. It is worth remembering that nobody said a plausible or coherent word about peace in Ukraine until Mr. Trump returned to the White House. It was a concept that completely eluded the imagination of the Democrats until they set out to sabotage it last week. Their ululations of triumph are so absurd, they are hilarious.

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