

Trump's Ukraine Peace Plan Awaited With Mounting Curiosity as Biden Tries To Saddle President-Elect With an Escalating War

By Conrad Black

As the war in Ukraine escalates and the shambles of the Biden administration flounders to an end, the world awaits with mounting curiosity the disclosure by President Trump of his method for swiftly ending the war satisfactorily. As Joe Biden's presidency winds down, it is more clear than ever how inept its management of the Ukraine War has been.



President Trump, right, and President Putin, left, at Osaka, Japan, June 28, 2019. AP/Susan Walsh, file

Readers will recall that as President Putin's saber-rattling reached its noisiest point, almost three years ago, Mr. Biden said that America's response to a Russian invasion of Ukraine

would depend on whether it sought only the annexation of a few provinces or the conquest of the whole country.

This was Mr. Putin's invitation to invade. When he did so, the blunderbuss chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, sagely predicted that the Russians would occupy Kyiv within a few days and all of Ukraine within about a month, and Mr. Biden publicly offered President Zelensky and his family refuge when he fled his country.

Once it became clear that Ukraine possessed a serious army and was determined to fight for its independence with great tenacity, and the principal European powers responded positively to Ukraine's requests for help with armaments and munitions, America began a systematic policy of being a day late and a tank or missile short that it has pursued right up to election day.

America would give Ukraine enough not to lose, but not enough to win while Mr. Biden tediously repeated the language of attrition: "as long as it takes." In practice, this was a recipe for under-supplying Ukraine to its last man. And the policy was usually inarticulately explained by the laborious White House national security communications advisor, John Kirby, a retired rear admiral and former CNN commentator.

The outgoing administration is now shoveling all it can that has been approved by Congress on to Ukraine to try to saddle Trump with an escalating war. In a clear indication of his desperation, as Mr. Putin does not want to risk an anti-draft revolt by young Russian men, he is buying a North Korean expeditionary force, allegedly numbering 100,000, with oil shipments.

The Americans responded to this development by finally allowing the Ukrainians to use the longer-range missiles the United States has provided, to defend the modest incursion that the Ukrainians achieved in Russia and which the North

Koreans have been imported to reduce.

The British have done the same with the missiles that they have provided and Mr. Putin responded with a hypersonic intermediate missile, jubilating as he did so that Ukraine had no defense against such a missile and that this escalation was entirely the result of American aggression, as if it was the United States that had invaded the sovereign state of Ukraine in February 2022 and not Russia.

Mr. Putin's recourse to use of a hypersonic missile, which is completely unnecessary to strike a target only 500 miles away, is no more a sign of strength than the importation of North Korean mercenaries, though it does again highlight the incompetence of the recent American military high command, to have allowed Russia and Communist China to get ahead of the United States in this potentially important technology.

The ability of Ukraine to use American and British missiles to decimate the North Koreans is going to put a great strain on the involvement of that impoverished country very soon. No one ever knows what goes on in the Kimist totalitarian hermit kingdom of North Korea, where public opinion does not count for anything.

Yet squandering tens of thousands of lives in Ukraine in exchange for Russian oil shipments is not a policy that will ultimately strengthen the regime at Pyongyang. It enables Ukraine to escalate the war without giving Mr. Putin any reasonable grounds to escalate: the hypersonic episode was a recognition of Mr. Putin's vulnerability and not Mr. Zelensky's.

It is almost certain that Trump will be prepared to sponsor a peace in which some concessions of Ukrainian territory are made to Russia, provided that all of the population of the former Ukraine that wishes to remain Ukrainian, as well as any Ukrainian who wishes to become Russian, will be facilitated in

moving their residence.

Russia will then cease to debate or dispute the legitimacy of Ukraine as a sovereign state, Russia and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization will seriously (unlike previous occasions) guarantee Ukraine in its new frontiers, and Ukraine will be free to enter the European Union and NATO when it is ready. Those organizations will decide whom they will admit to membership and not the Kremlin or anyone else.

If Mr. Putin does not agree, it is a reasonable assumption Trump will sharply escalate the destructive power of weapons that America will supply to Ukraine and this intolerably one-sided game that Mr. Putin has played of raining destruction down on civilian areas of Ukraine with no possibility of effective retaliation will be over.

The world got an exhibition of the popularity of the Russian government when the Wagner forces defected from service to Russia and marched on the Kremlin and were greeted happily along the route. Because of the stupidity of the Pentagon, Russia and China have a few weapons more advanced than America but they are greatly inferior military powers and Russia is in most respects a paper tiger: a shrinking, alcohol-sodden, and sullen population with a gross domestic product smaller than Canada's.

Trump, though, is almost the only statesman who has seen that the other Western goal in the Ukraine war apart from preventing its takeover by Russia, is to end the war on terms that permit Russia to extract itself without embarrassment from its present standing as a virtual Chinese satellite not breathing freely in the embrace of the People's Republic. Ultimately, Russia is a Western country and not an Oriental one and we need it in the West.

It is not so powerful that we need to appease it, but it retains the vast Eurasian potential that makes it a strategic

necessity that it returns to the West. A Russian-NATO non-aggression pact could be possible. These appear to be the motives and policies of the incoming administration, and if administered with finesse they will be successful.

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