

US Effort to Craft Russia–Ukraine Peace Agreement Looks Highly Promising

By Conrad Black

The outline of a peace agreement for Ukraine is steadily emerging, given comments by President Trump and Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth.



U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth (R) speaks with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte (C) and NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Christopher Cavoli during a meeting at NATO headquarters in Brussels on Feb. 13, 2025. AP Photo/Geert Vanden Wijngaert

Hegseth was in Europe last week to meet with the [Ukraine Defense Contact Group](#) as well as with [NATO defence ministers](#). He was followed to Europe by Secretary of State Marco Rubio, while Trump had what

he described as an extensive and cordial discussion with Russian President Vladimir Putin. There has also been a good deal of activity by National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, while Middle East special envoy Steven Witkoff [has visited Moscow](#) and Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent [has visited Kiev](#).

President Trump has shown a much more sophisticated

recognition of the issues involved in the Russia–Ukraine war than did the preceding administration, which began with ambiguous statements about its possible response, followed with a gradual escalation of weapons shipments that permitted Ukraine to avoid defeat but withheld the necessary air and artillery support to win, while expressing a willingness to go on supplying Ukraine to the last Ukrainian. There was never a hint of an exit strategy.

What appears to be the basis of the Trump-sponsored peace agreement looks like an ingenious design to achieve American objectives while assuring the national security of an independent Ukraine in slightly diminished borders, and confirming some of what Russia has already attained in a way that will spare the Putin regime an intolerable humiliation.

Trump has been clear from the early days of the war that the West's objective must not only be to prevent the military reabsorption of Ukraine back into Russia where it was for over 300 years prior to the dissolution of the USSR—and thus to demonstrate that the West is not a paper tiger and that the Western victory in the Cold War was a durable geopolitical event—but also to end the war in a way that would permit the West gradually to entice Russia out of the smothering embrace of China and back into a constructive relationship with the NATO countries.

The geopolitical implications of Russia feeling itself rejected by the West would almost inevitably lead to a very uneven alliance with China, which might ultimately enable China to make an arrangement with Russia that would enable Beijing to use surplus population to exploit the natural resources of Siberia in exchange for a large royalty to Russia. This would relieve China of its present extreme scarcity of useful natural resources—a severe encumbrance to its great power ambitions—while putting it in effective control of the vast Eurasian landmass of Russia and China, and wrenching the distinguished culture of Tolstoy and

Tchaikovsky, the great literature and music and other cultural attainments of Russia, out of the West where they naturally belong.

Trump was thus putting his thumb on the scale in the long war for the heart and mind of Russia between the Western emulators like Peter the Great, Gorbachev, and Yeltsin, and the nativists like Solzhenitsyn. Tolstoy and Putin have oscillated between the two. Trump has realized that this is one of the decisive geopolitical questions of contemporary times that can now be peacefully settled, and there is no reason why the West could not, without compromising its principles or its interests, outbid China for the relative cooperation of Russia, a traditional ally of the West in the Napoleonic Wars and the world wars.

The outline of a possible agreement appears to be that Russia will retain the Crimea—one of the greatest conquests of Catherine the Great, the focal point of the Crimean War of the 1850s, and always Russian after it was taken from the Turks by Catherine until after the death of Stalin when Khrushchev, a Ukrainian, arbitrarily awarded it to Ukraine.

Russia will also probably retain most of the predominantly Russian-speaking areas that it has occupied in eastern Ukraine and along the Black Sea shore towards the isthmus to Crimea. But it may have to concede some of these territories, presumably in a general framework in which all of the population in the former borders of Ukraine will be free and will be materially assisted in moving according to their wishes out of or into the Russian or Ukrainian sections of prewar Ukraine according to their postwar preferences. Russians and Ukrainians who object to being cultural or ethnic minorities must be able to resolve that concern for themselves.

Putin may be satisfied regarding his insistence that Ukraine does not join NATO, but he will have to accept the postwar

inviolability of Ukraine as an independent and sovereign country that will become a cardinal interest of the NATO powers. Ukraine will be free to negotiate a defensive alliance with a consortium of European NATO powers, which will include Poland, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom. France and the UK are nuclear powers, and the economic and conventional military strength of just those NATO members considerably exceeds that of Russia.

In addition, while President Trump has made it very clear that he considers the postwar security of Ukraine to be a matter for the Western European governments to address in terms of possible direct military intervention in a defensive alliance with Ukraine, the United States will be prepared to sell advanced weaponry to Ukraine in the future, [which can be paid for](#) from Ukrainian deposits of rare earth and other strategic minerals. This is an imaginative method of disarming in advance Republican critics of costly arms shipments to Ukraine, while assuring whatever flow of sophisticated weapons to Ukraine the strategic facts may require, but without overstraining the limited ability of Ukraine to buy such weapons from its existing or foreseeable financial resources

If such an agreement is reached, there is no obvious reason why an early sequel could not be a comprehensive non-aggression agreement with further provisions for economic reciprocity between all of NATO, Russia, and the former Soviet Republics, whether Russia still influences them (e.g., Belarus) or not (e.g., Ukraine and the Baltic countries).

There are signs that an [agreement is close](#), and Trump has indicated that in informal responses to the media. Such a peace formula as that described appears to check all the boxes: Ukraine has slightly diminished borders but is no longer a nebulous member of what the Kremlin refers to as “the near abroad,” and is a country whose sovereignty is universally recognized. It will also be free to join the European Union when it can meet the required standards for

admission.

Russia, meanwhile, can claim to have protected the Russian-speaking minority in Ukraine that wished protection, to have recovered Crimea and some territory, and to have assured that Ukraine will not join the whole Western Alliance. In turn, Europe will enjoy relative security and stability and a reviving relationship of comparative mutual confidence with Russia, while finally shouldering more responsibility for its own defence.

If all this works out, the United States will have brokered a satisfactory end to this nasty war that assures Ukrainian independence and security, recognizes Russia's special position in Ukrainian history while addressing its most urgent territorial ambitions, and provides an equitable demarcation between American and European security responsibilities. Meanwhile, the United States opens up an excellent source for vital strategic minerals that have been largely sourced by China—obviously an unsatisfactory arrangement.

Something like this—an outcome that would more or less satisfy all the major players involved—will bring a welcome end to this war that has already dragged on far too long.

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