

Jakub Bornio

## Diplomatic Manoeuvring over the Question of 'Peace' in Ukraine: The Trump–Putin and Trump–Zelensky Meetings

In August 2025, diplomatic efforts towards achieving a 'peace agreement' in Ukraine intensified. In the days following a remote meeting between European leaders and Donald Trump, a summit was held in Alaska between the US and Russian presidents. This was followed by a meeting in Washington between the US and Ukrainian presidents, with the participation of European leaders. Despite appeals for a bilateral meeting between the presidents of Russia and Ukraine, and even a trilateral meeting between the presidents of Russia, Ukraine, and the US, at this stage, the positions and objectives of these countries, as they may be presented during talks, seem irreconcilable.

**The Trump–Putin meeting.** On 15 August 2025, a meeting was held between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin at Elmendorf–Richardson Base in Alaska<sup>1</sup>. This marked the first meeting between the leaders of the two countries since the outbreak of large-scale war in Ukraine, which effectively meant a break with the West's diplomatic isolation of Putin<sup>2</sup> (['IEŚ Commentary', No. 540](#)), especially since the summit took place on US territory. In addition to the presidents, the talks between the two delegations were also attended by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Special Representative of the President Steven Witkoff on the US side, and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Presidential Adviser Yuri Ushakov on the Russian side. In the media and journalistic discourse, the course of the talks was overshadowed by Donald Trump's ceremonial treatment of Vladimir Putin (applause, rolling out the red carpet, a joint limousine ride, a joint press conference). While these elements were undoubtedly significant in Russia's propaganda strategy, they did not represent the primary focus of the event. The Trump administration's inclination to engage in dialogue with President Putin, and their attempts to facilitate a resolution to the ongoing armed conflict in Ukraine, have at times placed a higher priority on this meeting than on the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, and this can be interpreted as a clear indication of a shift away from a liberal conception of the international order towards a more realist policy approach, one that involves a willingness to 'accept' the existing state of affairs. This could also be interpreted as an attempt to redefine the nature of US–Russia relations, both within the context of Ukraine and on a global scale<sup>3</sup>. The post-summit conference, in addition to rhetorical figures, diplomatic exchanges of courtesies, and the still enigmatic statement that these and subsequent meetings were and will be aimed at 'peace' in an undefined form and under undefined conditions, did not reveal any new information to the public, in accordance with the rules of public diplomacy. Nevertheless, a noteworthy shift in Donald Trump's narrative post-summit merits attention. The US President's focus transitioned from a call for a ceasefire to the pursuit of 'peace' and the facilitation of bilateral negotiations between Russia and Ukraine, followed by trilateral negotiations involving Russia, Ukraine, and the United States. It is important to acknowledge that perceiving the ceasefire and 'peace' as alternatives is a misguided perspective. This approach enables Russia to prolong

<sup>1</sup> Joint Base Elmendorf–Richardson – a joint base of the Elmendorf Air Force Base and Fort Richardson Infantry Base.

<sup>2</sup> In the context of international relations, the significance of the meeting between Putin and the US president is indisputable. In comparison, previous meetings between Hungarian politicians and Putin, due to the relatively minor importance of Hungary, did not have such significant international implications or impact on international relations. See more ['IEŚ Commentary', No. 1160](#).

<sup>3</sup> Trump's conduct appears to lend support to one of the prevailing hypotheses concerning the rationale behind his policy toward Russia – namely, that he seeks to construct a new global trilateral configuration in the spirit of a "reverse Nixon". Such a configuration would enable the United States to counterbalance China with the assistance of Russia by means of a strategic system of checks and balances.



negotiations while concurrently engaging in military operations and achieving territorial gains. After all, these two options are not mutually exclusive.

In a post shared on the social media platform Telegram, Dmitry Medvedev, who occupies the position of Deputy Chairman of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, stated that during the meeting, Vladimir Putin had presented Donald Trump with the conditions for ending the conflict in Ukraine. In addition, Medvedev further reports that Trump did not set any preconditions for the talks and undertook to temporarily suspend pressure on Russia. The main outcome of the summit, as indicated by Dmitry Medvedev, was a decision to continue further negotiation efforts towards an agreement<sup>4</sup> (for further details on Russia's earlier demands, see ['IEŚ Commentary', No. 1351](#)). However, given the role of the former Russian President in strategic communication, it is important to consider his position in the broader context of Russia's foreign policy agenda. His post should not be understood as reflecting the full course of the talks, but rather as a means of presenting Russia's demands and wishes. It is highly likely that President Vladimir Putin presented President Donald Trump with his conditions for ending the conflict in Ukraine, and, more importantly, his vision of US-Russia relations in global terms. At this stage, however, Russia's main goal remains to prolong negotiations, break its diplomatic isolation, and present talks with the US as meetings between equal partners, which, given Russia's weaker position, both sides know are not based in reality.

**Consultations with the allies.** The summits and interactions between Trump and Putin can be interpreted as a strategic effort to redefine the scope of US-Russian relations, extending beyond the confines of Ukraine. Consequently, both parties are currently in the process of consulting their respective positions with their partners. In the case of the US, this process was initiated even prior to the summit in Alaska (see ['IEŚ Commentary', No. 1411](#)). Despite the fact that European NATO members and Ukraine are positioning themselves as petitioners rather than partners vis-à-vis the US, Trump still has to take them into account. It is evident that both Ukraine and the European part of NATO remain significant leverage for the United States in its relationship with Russia. It is not without reason that Trump is making efforts to persuade his European partners to take greater responsibility for the security of the region. Consequently, following the summit in Alaska, President Trump engaged in a telephone conversation with President Zelensky, which was subsequently joined by European leaders. Furthermore, President Putin also engaged in an extensive series of telephone conversations involving the leaders of several key nations, including the leaders of Kazakhstan, Belarus, South Africa, Brazil, and the Prime Minister of India. The bilateral consultations were primarily intended to create the impression that Russia was not isolated, although the talks with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi also had a practical dimension. As the second largest recipient of Russian oil, India plays a pivotal role in ensuring the stability of Russia's budget revenues. Recently, India has become the target of American pressure in the form of secondary tariffs, intended to force the country to limit its cooperation with Russia.

**The meeting between President Trump and President Zelensky accompanied by European leaders.** Following the summit in Alaska, the presidents of Ukraine and the United States initiated preparations for a subsequent bilateral meeting in Washington. In a strategic move, Zelensky meticulously coordinated his actions with European leaders, ensuring their presence during his visit to the White House. This was most likely associated with concerns regarding a recurrence of the scenario from the meeting with Donald Trump on 28 February 2025 (see ['IEŚ Talks'](#)), and also with the recognition that if any form of agreement is to be achieved, the European part of NATO will be required to maintain its involvement in its sustainability or potential peacekeeping guarantees. It is noteworthy that such guarantees, if anyone is really thinking of implementing them, would take the form of military assistance guarantees (training, materiel, financial, intelligence) to build the defence capabilities of the Ukrainian armed forces and prepare for a potential future escalation, rather than mutual guarantees similar to those that apply to NATO members. This scenario was articulated by French President Emmanuel Macron in an interview with TF1 television on 19 August of this year, wherein he also indicated that the deployment of armed forces is under consideration as a component of the guarantees, albeit not on the front line, but rather in

<sup>4</sup> [https://t.me/medvedev\\_telegram/602](https://t.me/medvedev_telegram/602)



the capacity to secure the land, air, and sea domains<sup>5</sup>. This deployment, if materialised, is presumed to be situated deep within Ukrainian territory, with the objective of safeguarding the stability of arms supplies and strategic flows. Consequently, the agenda of the public sessions of the meetings in Washington was dominated by the potential for guarantees for Ukraine and the prospect of trilateral Russia–Ukraine–USA negotiations.

The summit between Presidents Trump and Zelensky was held on 18 August 2025. The composition of the European delegation that travelled to support President Zelensky in his talks with Donald Trump was almost identical to that which participated in the online meeting with the US President on 13 August of this year (cf. [‘IEŚ Commentary’, No. 1411](#)), with the sole exception that on this occasion there was no representative from Poland. President Trump has been observed to adhere to a predetermined sequence of meetings, commencing with bilateral discussions with the Ukrainian President and subsequently transitioning to multilateral negotiations involving the entire delegation. This format was also utilised on 18 August.

**Conclusions.** Following the meeting in Washington, it became evident that the success of the ‘peace negotiations’ with Russia, as outlined by the President of Ukraine, was contingent upon potential security guarantees from Western countries, including the United States. It is highly improbable that Ukraine would acquiesce to a deal involving the exchange of territory for territory or territory for peace/a ceasefire – as was suggested by Donald Trump – unless specific assurances are received from the West. In the context of the present circumstances, the “demarcation line” separating the Ukrainian and Russian armies is of operational rather than political significance. Should Russian forces advance deeper into Ukrainian territory, there is a risk of a collapse in the defenders’ frontline. The precise configuration of prospective security assurances, a subject of deliberation among Western leaders, remains ambiguous. Ukrainian representatives appear to be establishing expectations at a notably elevated level; however, there appears to be a lack of political will on the part of the West – and, in the case of certain countries, an apparent absence of capacity – to provide Ukraine with guarantees analogous to those extended to NATO members. In addition, given Russia’s stated aim of achieving the complete neutralisation of Ukraine, as opposed to merely controlling part of its territory, it appears that the positions of the US, Ukraine, and Russia are currently irreconcilable. This has led to a lack of optimism regarding the potential outcomes of the proposed Putin–Zelensky or Putin–Trump–Zelensky talks.

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=flkaSo5JI0w>