

Zelensky to meet with Trump officials following Putin-Trump phone call

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Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is set to meet this week with several Trump administration officials, including Vice President JD Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Trump's special envoy for Russia and Ukraine, Keith Kellogg, at the Munich Security Conference from February 14-16.

The meeting between US officials and the Zelensky government will take place on the heels of Trump's surprise phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Following the call, Trump announced that the "lengthy and highly productive call" had resulted in the two sides agreeing to begin negotiations to end the over three-year-long NATO proxy war. According to Trump, he and Putin are to meet soon in person, likely in Saudi Arabia. There are no indications that either the EU or Ukraine will be directly involved in the negotiations.

Also on Wednesday, US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth declared that the war in Ukraine "must end." Hegseth ruled out NATO membership for Ukraine and dismissed a return to its pre-2014 borders as "unrealistic." Both demands have hitherto been central tenets of the policies of US imperialism and NATO more broadly in the conflict with Russia. Hegseth called upon the EU to secure Ukraine's "security." At the same time, he insisted that if NATO troops are deployed "as peacekeepers to Ukraine at any point, they should be deployed as part of a non-NATO mission, and they should not be covered under Article 5 [of the NATO treaty]." Article 5 stipulates that any attack on the territory or armed forces of a NATO member state constitutes an attack on all member states.

Thus far, the Zelensky regime has reacted to the Trump-Putin phone call by attempting to save face, portraying itself as an equal partner in the proposed negotiations. Zelensky stated on social media, "I had a long and detailed conversation with President Trump. I appreciate his genuine interest in our shared opportunities and how we can bring about real peace together. We discussed

many aspects—diplomatic, military and economic—and President Trump informed me about what Putin told him. We believe that America's strength, together with Ukraine and all our partners, is enough to push Russia to peace."

Despite its claims of being ready "to work with" the Trump administration, the recent turn of events has clearly deepened an already severe crisis for the Zelensky government.

On Tuesday, Ukrainian Defense Minister Rustem Umerov publicly contradicted Hegseth's statement that NATO was not in Ukraine's future. "You need to get used to any kind of statements. Our position is always unchanged. We want to be a NATO country. We will be a NATO country," Umerov emphasized.

Leading up to the call, Trump had made several demands for Ukraine to pay the US in the form of its "rare earth minerals" in exchange for continued US support of the ongoing NATO proxy war and the puppet Zelensky regime. On Tuesday, Trump announced that in addition to a Zelensky-Vance meeting, he would be dispatching Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to work out an official deal with the Zelensky government to secure "rare earth minerals" for continued US support.

As the WSWS has explained, to the extent that Trump and sections of the US ruling class seek a settlement of the conflict, it is because of tactical divisions over the focus of US war policy. Trump's stated aim is to "expand" the territory of the United States, including through the annexation of Canada and the seizure of Greenland and Panama in the Americas, and Gaza in the Middle East. In his justification for the grab for Greenland, Trump has bluntly stated that the Arctic is a central battleground in the US conflict with Russia and China. Within this context, any settlement of the war in Ukraine would be of a temporary and tactical character, aimed at ensuring a focus of US imperialism on other

battlefields in an emerging imperialist redivision of the world.

Trump's bold-faced attempt to seize control of Ukraine's mineral wealth is an open admission of the geostrategic and economic interests of US imperialism behind a war that has already claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands.

Ukraine reportedly holds Europe's largest reserves of titanium, along with significant uranium deposits. Zelensky also raised the prospect of using Ukraine's underground gas storage facilities to store US liquefied natural gas (LNG), which has been a central component of Trump's energy policy during both of his presidencies, as the US seeks to completely box out Russia from the European energy market while advancing its own interests in the LNG sector.

In an interview with Reuters last week, Zelensky responded positively to Trump's rare earth minerals demands, stating, "If we are talking about a deal, then let's do a deal. We are only for it." At the same time he is calling for "security guarantees" from Western imperialism as part of any deal to ensure the continued existence of the NATO-backed Kiev government.

Meanwhile, Trump has continued to publicly mock the Zelensky government and its portentous fate, stating in an interview with Fox News on Tuesday, "They (Ukraine) may make a deal, they may not make a deal. They may be Russian someday, or they may not be Russian someday."

In the same interview, Trump repeated his interest in obtaining the best possible return on the war for US imperialism, stating, "They have tremendously valuable land in terms of rare earth, in terms of oil and gas, in terms of other things. I want to have our money secured.

"I told them that I want the equivalent, like \$500 billion of rare earth, and they've essentially agreed to do that, so at least we don't feel stupid. Otherwise, we're stupid. I said to them, we have to get something. We can't continue to pay this money," he added.

Clearly attempting to adapt himself to the "deal maker" Trump, on Tuesday Zelensky announced that he was prepared to exchange territory with Russia as part of any potential negotiations.

Following its August incursion into Kursk, Ukraine has continued to hold onto Russian territory despite Russia's continued advances into Ukraine's own Donbass region and the failure of its own attempted offensives further into the Kursk region.

"We will swap one territory for another," Zelensky said in an interview with the *Guardian*. Zelensky declined to

acknowledge which territory he would potentially exchange, stating, "I don't know, we will see. But all our territories are important, there is no priority."

While internal polling has demonstrated an increasing willingness by Ukrainians to accept a negotiated deal to end the war, any loss of territory has long been staunchly opposed by the country's various far-right militias and fascist official military units, which are instrumental in conducting the war and propping up the Ukrainian government.

It is worth recalling that Zelensky faced protests by thousands of fascists in 2019 as soon as he attempted to move toward a negotiated settlement with Russia of the conflict in East Ukraine. Since then, these forces have only been emboldened through years of state and NATO backing.

The precarious position of the Zelensky regime was openly acknowledged this week by former Foreign Minister Dmitry Kuleba, who warned of both the political and literal death of any figure who attempts to give up "Ukrainian" territory.

Speaking with Ukrainian media last week, Kuleba—who is one of the longest-serving members of the Zelensky regime and was recently named Senior Fellow at the Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs at Harvard Kennedy School—warned ominously, "A person who signs a document renouncing NATO still has a chance to survive physically and politically, but a person who signs an agreement relinquishing territories will either be killed or ousted from politics.

"I see it as an extremely difficult task to find formulations that will describe the territorial issue in such a way that it will stop the war and at the same time not lead to an internal revolution," Kuleba added.



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