

Trump's Ukraine policy shift signals new phase of US global war

Andre Damon
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On Tuesday, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio held a formal meeting in Saudi Arabia with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, the first high-level summit between US and Russian officials since Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Following the meeting, Rubio announced that the US and Russia would work to restore diplomatic relations. He said the Trump administration aimed to “negotiate and work through the end of the conflict in Ukraine in a way that’s enduring and acceptable to all the parties engaged.” He added that the US would “examine both the geopolitical and economic cooperation” with Russia.

The meeting took place on a bilateral basis, excluding both Ukraine and the United States’ NATO allies. It was accompanied by formal demands on the part of the Trump administration that Ukraine hand over half of its mineral resources to the United States, under the pretense of seeking repayment for the military aid it received under the Biden administration.

No one should be under any illusion that in reopening diplomatic relations with Russia, the Trump administration is seeking peace in Europe, much less the world. Rather, Trump is seeking a redeployment of military resources from the European theater for use in the domination of the Americas and ultimately focusing on the central target of US military aggression: China.

Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth made this clear last week, speaking to the Ukraine Contact Group, the main body of imperialist powers funneling weapons to Ukraine. “Stark strategic realities prevent the United States of America from being primarily focused on the security of Europe,” he said. He continued, “We also face a peer competitor in the Communist Chinese with the capability and intent to threaten our homeland and core national interests in the Indo-Pacific.”

Hegseth’s remarks reflect a critique of Biden’s foreign policy developed in recent years by figures such as Elbridge Colby, Trump’s pick for Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, who has called for refocusing the US’s military resources for war with China.

In 2024, Colby argued the US lacked the resources to wage wars in both regions simultaneously, declaring, “America must

face reality and prioritize China over Europe.” He called it “strategic prioritization: grappling with the reality of scarcity and the need for hard choices, focusing resources and willpower where America’s most important interests are endangered—Asia.”

An aim of the Trump administration is to transform Ukraine into a semi-colony while escalating its trade war measures against the European powers and cutting them out from the spoils.

Biden’s escalation of war with Russia in Ukraine had the effect of economically weakening the European powers, while leaving them dependent on oil and gas imports from the United States—a policy expressed most aggressively in the US destruction of the Russo-German Nord Stream II pipeline.

In implementing his shift, Trump is dispensing with the lies used by the Biden administration to justify the US war with Russia in Ukraine. On Wednesday, Trump asserted that Ukraine “started” the war with Russia and accused Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky of ruling as a “dictator.”

Trump’s statements prompted howls of indignation from Democratic politicians and from the US media, which has for years promoted as dogma the claim by the Biden administration that Russia’s 2022 invasion was an “unprovoked war,” whose only underlying cause was the psychology of the Russian president.

“It was a striking distortion of reality,” wrote the *New York Times*. Zelensky “and his country were attacked, and only then did the United States under President Joseph R. Biden Jr. respond with expansive financial assistance.”

This narrative of the “unprovoked war” is a fraud. Ukraine, with the support of the US, provoked the invasion by establishing as state doctrine, in 2021, its intention to retake Crimea through military force and accelerating its moves to join the NATO alliance. In the aftermath of the 2014 coup in Ukraine, the US and NATO powers funneled billions of dollars into the country to build up its military. Biden expanded these operations as soon as he took office, with the aim of provoking a Russian invasion.

Trump is lying, however, when he claims Ukraine “played Biden like a fiddle.” It is not Ukraine that used the NATO powers, but the NATO powers that used Ukraine. For years,

NATO has demanded a “fight to the last Ukrainian” in the hope of weakening Russia.

Trump’s shift in US policy toward Ukraine is the only action of his presidency that has so far triggered any significant statements of political opposition from within the Democratic Party and its aligned media.

“Tuesday was a dark day for the United States,” proclaimed *Washington Post* columnist David Ignatius. He did not use similar language to describe any of Trump’s actions aimed at transforming the United States into a personalist dictatorship, laying off tens of thousands of federal workers, or slashing entitlement spending. Indeed, Ignatius admitted, “I normally ignore the daily presidential detonation. But this time was different.”

It is “different” because it pertains to critical geo-strategic interests of American imperialism, over which there are significant divisions. Dominant factions of the political establishment, and not just the Democrats, fear that by deprioritizing the war in Ukraine and effectively ceding ground to Russia, Trump is undermining US influence in Eurasia, which they see as critical to undermining China.

The *Wall Street Journal*, which has otherwise cheered on all of Trump’s illegal actions, openly denounced him for what it calls a betrayal in Ukraine. In a Wednesday editorial titled “Trump Tilts Toward a Ukraine Sellout,” the *Journal* wrote:

The US has a profound interest in denying Mr. Putin a new perch on more of the NATO border, which is the real reason America has been right to arm Ukraine. A deal that amounts to Ukrainian surrender will be a blow to American power that will radiate to the Pacific and the Middle East. It would be the opposite of Mr. Trump’s promise to restore a golden age of U.S. prestige and world calm.

In 2008, the Bush administration declared that Ukraine “will become” a member of NATO. Since that time, over four administrations, Republican and Democrat, US imperialism has expended vast resources to transform Ukraine into a spearhead for the eastward expansion of NATO, aimed at weakening Russia by drawing it into a bloody war on its western marches.

Trump’s foreign policy shift reflects the reality that this policy has failed to achieve the goal of inflicting a “strategic defeat” on Russia. But dominant factions of the political establishment fear that to “cut and run” from Ukraine now would be an admission of failure, with devastating consequences not just for the NATO alliance but for the global standing of American imperialism. They fear, moreover, that alienating the United States’ NATO allies could lead them to make their own alliances independent of the US, including seeking alternatives to the dollar, with negative consequences

for US imperialism’s ability to confront China.

Ahead of the 2024 presidential election, the Biden administration’s reckless escalation of the Ukraine war allowed Trump to posture as seeking “peace.” Under conditions in which the US war with Russia had no broad popular support outside the Democratic Party’s base in the affluent upper-middle class, Trump’s posturing as an opponent of the war played a role in his electoral victory.

In reality, the Trump administration is devoted to global war-making on a vast scale. In his first month in office, Trump has declared his intention to conquer Greenland and the Panama Canal through military force, annex Canada through economic coercion, and ethnically cleanse Gaza and turn it into an American protectorate.

These plans for war and colonial domination are to be financed through Trump’s massive onslaught on the federal workforce and the ongoing efforts—led by Elon Musk’s Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE)—to slash social programs and impoverish the working class.

How the situation develops remains uncertain. Any agreement between Trump and Putin over Ukraine will last only as long as it serves the interests of the Trump administration and the factions of the ruling class it represents. The war in Ukraine, moreover, is just one component of a global conflict that is escalating on multiple fronts. Whatever the tactical differences within the ruling class, all factions are committed to using military force to secure American imperialist hegemony.

The working class must recognize that the struggle against war is inseparable from the fight against the capitalist system that produces it. A movement against imperialism must be based on the independent mobilization of workers across national borders, armed with a socialist program to put an end to war, exploitation and dictatorship.



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