

The Trump-Putin summit in Alaska and the shift in American geostrategy

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The heads of all the major European powers are heading to Washington today for emergency meetings with US President Donald Trump and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, following Trump's summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska on Friday. That meeting, in which Trump warmly embraced Putin and called for a negotiated peace in Ukraine, has set off a political crisis across Europe.

Attending the talks in Washington are German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, French President Emmanuel Macron, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, Finnish President Alexander Stubb, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen. They aim to present a united front as they confront the fallout from Trump's shift in US support for the Ukraine war, hoping they can prevent Trump from abruptly pulling the plug on their entire operation.

In advance of Monday's talks, debate within the media and among officials in both the United States and Europe centered on whether any settlement would involve binding "security guarantees" for Ukraine and, at the same time, compel Ukraine to surrender territory to Russia. On Sunday, US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff told CNN that for the first time Russia had agreed to allow the United States and European powers to extend "Article 5-like protection" to Ukraine, a reference to NATO's mutual defense clause.

Zelensky called it "a historic decision," writing on X that the guarantees must provide "protection on land, in the air, and at sea" with Europe's full participation. At the same time, however, Trump has diverged from Ukraine and the major European powers by backing Putin's demand that Kiev cede territory, including sections of the Donbas region not currently under Russian control.

That such a change was coming had been evident for

some time. The Alaska summit made it official, and the reaction in European capitals has bordered on hysteria, augmented by the fact that Ukraine has suffered a series of military defeats. Whatever they declare publicly, the reality is that without US backing the prosecution of the war in Ukraine becomes untenable. The NATO alliance has been held together until now by Washington's ferocious hostility toward Russia, a policy spearheaded by the Democratic Biden administration.

Trump, reviving the tradition of the far-right "America Firsters" of the World War II era, speaks for layers of the American ruling class oriented toward war in the Pacific and the confrontation with China. He has coupled this outlook with tariff and trade war measures directed against the European powers. For this faction, disengaging from the conflict with Russia over Ukraine offers potential advantages: securing access to vital resources in Russia and Ukraine, loosening Moscow's alignment with Beijing, and weakening European imperialism.

Particularly since Trump's re-election, the US foreign policy establishment has discussed a "reverse Kissinger" strategy. Faced with China's economic rise, they aim to invert the policy championed in the 1970s by US President Richard Nixon's Secretary of State Henry Kissinger of allying with China against the Soviet Union. In an article titled "A 'Reverse Kissinger'?", the American Enterprise Institute think-tank endorsed attempts to ally with Russia against China, but noted that the Ukraine war was an obstacle to winning over Putin. It wrote:

Moscow and Beijing have been forced together by the war in Ukraine. Ending that war, and mending ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin, could slow the Sino-Russian

convergence—and perhaps even make Moscow a partner in containing Beijing. The aspiration is admirable. ... It didn't work, because Putin was less interested in stability than in swallowing Ukraine.

At the same time, any shift in Washington's policy toward Russia will provoke bitter conflicts within the American state apparatus. For powerful sections of the ruling class, the defeat of Russia remains non-negotiable—not only to salvage the credibility of American imperialism after pouring vast sums into the Ukraine war, but also because they view concessions to Moscow as weakening the broader confrontation with China.

The heads of European imperialism converging on Washington are not only seeking to pressure Trump directly, hoping to play for time if not shift course, but also to rally allies within the American political establishment to block any retreat from the NATO war drive.

However the situation develops, certain fundamental issues must be stressed. First, Trump's shift on Ukraine is not a "peace policy." His support for the genocide in Gaza and the bombing of Iran make this clear. The divisions within the American ruling class center on tactical issues related to a shared project of global domination.

Second, Trump's maneuver takes place within the framework of an escalating global war and intensifying conflicts between the United States and the European imperialist powers. The costs of this conflict will be imposed through a massive assault on the working class.

Across Europe, governments are carrying out a vast program of remilitarization that can only be financed by dismantling what remains of social protections and diverting trillions into a military build-up. In the United States, Trump is spearheading a social counterrevolution and dictatorship against the working class, tearing down every constraint on the accumulation of wealth by the rich. One element of his calculations is undoubtedly the need to redirect military resources toward the "near abroad" in Latin America and against workers within the United States itself.

Third, Putin's fawning praise for Trump at the summit on Friday underscores the thoroughly reactionary character of the Russian government. Putin's ludicrous flattery recalls Stalin's infamous toast to Hitler in August 1939, as the Stalin-Hitler Non-Aggression Pact was being

concluded: "I know how much the German nation loves its Führer. I should therefore like to drink to his health." Within a week, World War II had erupted; two years later, Hitler launched his invasion of the Soviet Union, at the cost of 27 million Soviet lives.

Like Stalin, Putin seeks deals with imperialism that can only end in disaster for the working class. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 was provoked by the US and European imperialist powers, through the relentless expansion of NATO to the east and the refusal to negotiate over Ukraine. The invasion, however, was the action of a bourgeois state defending its own interests. It had nothing in common with the independent mobilization of the Russian or Ukrainian working class against imperialism.

The reactionary character of Putin's rule is underscored by his alignment with far-right forces across Europe and the United States—including Viktor Orbán in Hungary, Marine Le Pen's National Rally in France, and Alternative for Germany. They will be strengthened by the realignment now underway.

The outcome of today's talks in Washington remains uncertain, but what is beyond doubt is that the fundamental tendencies driving the world toward catastrophe remain. There will be no progressive resolution to this crisis without the independent intervention of the international working class.

The Trotskyist movement completely rejects the opportunist mantra that "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Neither the maneuvers of Trump, nor the intrigues of the European powers, nor the reactionary calculations of Putin offer a way forward. The struggle against genocide, austerity, dictatorship and war requires the building of a conscious, international socialist movement of the working class, fighting irreconcilably against all the capitalist governments and their political agents.



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