

OPINION

Putin has eliminated truth. If nothing is true, anything is possible



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Starting with red carpets, military fly-overs and shared limo rides and ending with a stage-managed media appearance next to a fawning Donald Trump, the Alaskan summit was, regrettably, a victory for the world's leading autocrat, Vladimir Putin, and a loss for democracy. As a result, whether it's to defend their ally, Ukraine, or their own place in the world, the leaders of the West, including Australia, now have no choice but to act for democratic values.



Putin and Trump: allies in autocracy. *Credit: Marija Ercegovic*

If Putin had a wishlist, Russia's 21st century tsar can now check off a list of desired items: an elevated place on the world stage and recognition as a global player, an end to years of isolation of the Russian Federation, photo-ops fully curated for his propaganda, withdrawal of the threat of more sanctions, deflection of responsibility for the war onto Ukraine. Not a bad outing for an indicted war criminal who has systematically waged war on a small neighbour for more than 10 years, destroyed thousands of its schools and hospitals, reduced some of its towns and cities into urban deserts of ruin and

rubble and kidnapped 20,000 of its children (for which the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant).

And, perhaps, most importantly from his perspective, Putin flew back to Moscow without any commitment to end his unilateral, illegal and brutal war against Ukraine. Quite the contrary, he was given a spotlight stage on which to repeat – without objection or even comment from Trump – his hegemonic demands that Ukraine basically surrender by giving up substantial amounts of its own sovereign territory, fully disarming, swearing off NATO participation, and dumping its democratically elected government and its president, Volodymyr Zelensky.

While Trump recently made a few frankly inconsequential and pathetic noises of complaint about recent Russian attacks on Ukrainian cities, his lips were sealed in Anchorage. As silence is assent, this gives Putin a de facto green light to continue his savage campaign to destroy Ukrainian society, identity and statehood. In this respect, [as reported by Al Jazeera](#), the average number of missiles and drones fired by the Kremlin at Ukrainian civilians has increased in recent months by nearly 1000 per cent to 5000 deadly projectiles per month.

If one Alaskan hope was Trump pushing Putin closer to a negotiated peace, the exact opposite has occurred. Putin's violence has been vindicated, his brutality legitimised and his evil enabled. Peace was put on hold; Putin's agenda was advanced. Putin will now continue to send hundreds of thousands of Russian troops to their deaths to gain, in 2025, the equivalent Ukrainian area of greater Launceston.

Territory, though, is less important to Putin, a former KGB colonel, than another key aspect of his overall agenda. Namely, he aims to alter public discourse into an alternative reality. In its Orwellian scope, Putin's Way sees propaganda take primacy over factuality, aggression become fully acceptable, and rules become entirely of one's own design and liking.

As British author Peter Pomerantzev has written, "It is so important for Moscow to do away with truth. If nothing is true, then anything is possible... We're rendered stunned, spun and flummoxed by the Kremlin's weaponisation of absurdity and unreality."

What is most disturbing about where we find ourselves is that it is the packaged and polished product of Trump's promotion of Putin. Anchorage will go down as the moment in history where an American president deliberately abandoned America's democratic role to appease aggression. Countries heavily invested in democracy as a way of life and source of global stability should be deeply worried about what cabalistic carve-up was possibly concluded in camera by Trump and Putin – and that Zelensky will now be asked to somehow agree to.

We can only speculate whether Trump's actions – and deliberate inactions – are due to his infatuation with Putin, his admiration for strong-man leadership, his dishonest and narcissistic mentality, his absolute lack of historical understanding or some backroom “deal” that personally benefits him. Anchorage adds credence to Peter Hartcher's assessment that [Trump is, in fact, an agent of Putin](#).

While his motive may never be fully identified, the watching democratic world now clearly sees the means. Namely, that Trump and Putin are allies in autocracy; theirs is a bromance in brutalism. For their part, the West's leaders need to proportionately respond. That means strengthening their resolve, their rhetoric and their institutions – NATO, the EU and the UN.

It also means increasing the West's active support for the proxy fight in Ukraine between themselves and those who want reality re-created in their own hyper-inflated images and neo-imperial ambitions. The West cannot afford to be indecisive for democracy. That means giving the Ukrainians not only what's needed to survive, but what's needed to pressure Putin into ending the war.

Here, it should be noted that Australia's last major decision – to send 49 M1A1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine – was taken in October 2024. Almost a year has passed since, and Russia has increased the scale of its invasion, while Australia has not increased the scale of its response. Indeed, Australia remains the largest importer in the world of Russian blood oil, as laundered in India, and the government hides behind lame bureaucratic excuses, giving Putin another reason to be happy.

It's high time to recognise the new challenge, stop excuses, step up and put an end to Putin's plans rather than promote them.