
— **Opinion**

Trump-Putin peace deal sounds death knell for Ukraine

The package on the table now is not art – or statecraft - in any way. It is a surrender to all the things we in the west have previously believed in.

Pete Shmigel

Former political adviser



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It is no small irony that the Trump/Putin 28-point “peace deal” for the Russo-Ukrainian War [<https://www.afr.com/topic/russia-ukraine-war-6fid>] landed in Kyiv just as Ukraine was marking the anniversary of the Holodomor, Stalin’s genocidal famine that starved millions of Ukrainians to death in the 1930s.

This is because the proposed plan, if adopted, is a likely death knell for Ukraine as a sovereign, democratic nation and part of Europe. And, relatedly, such a “deal” should also make Australia think about implications for its own regional security.



Europe, with its history of failed appeasement, will be nervously watching events and discussions in the next few weeks. **David Rowe**

There are several reasons why the plan represents an existential threat to Ukraine. The first aspect that raises concern is the way in which the plan has been developed – in a behind-closed-doors, bilateral discussion between Trump envoy and ally Steve Witkoff and Kremlin officials, to the full exclusion of Ukraine. President Zelenskyy was subsequently presented with a *fait accompli*.

It is difficult to foresee a situation where an independent country with a duly elected government could accept an agreement to whose development it was not a party. Imagine Australia accepting any agreement negotiated about it by, say, China and Indonesia, particularly one involving its future sovereignty and security.

Secondly, Ukraine would also be rightly concerned about the track record of the United States and Russia in agreements involving or about Ukraine. Since Ukraine's independence in 1991, dozens have been forged and virtually none have been implemented.

This has usually been the case because Russia – and to a lesser degree the US – have either ignored or reneged on assurances given. The most significant of these agreements, of course, is the Budapest Agreement of 1996, whereby Ukraine sacrificed all its nuclear weapons in exchange for, *inter alia*, security guarantees by the US that have very obviously never been met.

More recently, Russia has consistently rejected every ceasefire proposal, as unequivocally agreed to by Ukraine, that has been put to it. As a result, Ukrainians might rightly believe that any promises made are more than likely to be broken.

The “deal” is similar to the notion that Australia would sacrifice, say, Queensland to appease a foreign threat.

Then, there is the content of the plan itself which, in parts, is hard to believe, if not for the fact that it was written by New York City property developer spivs and real estate moguls rather than statesmen. The most contentious of its points are: a) Ukraine ceding territory in addition to parts of the country currently occupied by Russia; b) Ukraine essentially halving the size of its current armed forces, and; c) Ukraine giving up on proposals to join NATO.

If adopted, such measures would have the effect of essentially rewarding Putin for conducting more than 10 years of unilateral invasions and, most recently, undertaking a murderous missile campaign of bombing Ukraine’s civilians in their apartments and houses.

This would establish a new low and a departure from the established international rules-based order by acknowledging that aggression is acceptable and tyranny is tolerable. Considerations of illegality and immorality would be suspended as part of a new order of authoritarian advantage.

Putin would be further rewarded materially by the lifting of sanctions from his near-crippled economy, the return of the majority of the \$300 billion in frozen Russian assets, and not needing to pay any reparations to Ukraine, whose energy grid, as one example, is nearly fully destroyed. That is the sound of *ka-ching* at the

Kremlin.

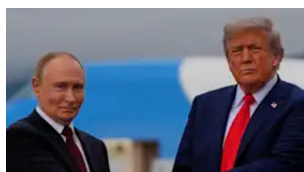
At this point, it's difficult to fathom how American negotiators adopted all these commitments that are completely in Russia's favour and completely detrimental to Ukraine's future. Naivety, lack of historical understanding of Russian imperialism, an "all deals are good deals" mentality, or even more sinister explanations about Trump's motives are all possible explanations.

As Ukraine's ambassador to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, pointed out last week, in Australian equivalent terms, the "deal" is similar to the notion that Australia would sacrifice, say, Queensland to appease a foreign threat. Nonsensical *in extremis* – but that's what has been put on the table for Kyiv to ostensibly consider.

Very importantly, even if adopted, the "deal" will not secure the peace which is conceptually its objective. Rather, a weakened Ukrainian military and the presence of no international peacekeepers in Ukraine opens the gate to more war by Putin, who has consistently shown that he is not satisfied by the territory taken to date and has talked about fulfilling tsarist imperial ambitions. The "deal" only buys Putin time to rebuild his hugely decimated army and his increasingly depleted war materiel. Europe, with its history of failed appeasement, will be nervously watching events [<https://www.afr.com/world/europe/europe-s-rearguard-battle-to-save-ukraine-from-trump-s-peace-plan-20251123-p5nhmp>] and discussions in the next few weeks.

President Trump is famous for the "art of the deal". Alas, the package on the table now is not art – or statecraft – in any way. It is a surrender to all the things we in the West have previously believed in.

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Pete Shmigel is an Associate of the Ukrainian Security and Cooperation Centre in Kyiv, Ukraine.