

Trump – Putin Alaska Meeting: The First Green Shoots of a Peace Agreement?

Introduction

They came, they met but “We didn’t get there” was the verdict given by the US President Donald Trump after his three-hour meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Alaska. Trump came away with less than the minimum he had hoped for, which was a temporary cease-fire. Despite Putin’s gracious words to Trump—and Trump’s description of him as a “Fantastic” partner. Russia gave no ground whatsoever on its fundamental position that Ukraine is Russian territory and that they will not compromise. Putin did not even agree on a pause. The fact that the first face-to-face meeting between Russian and US heads of state since the start of the Ukrainian war in February 2022 took place is itself significant.

The Meeting

There was high ceremony, a red carpet, an air force fly past and a warm reception on the tarmac as Trump clapped when Putin alighted. The two leaders warmly shook hands and smiled and then rode together in ‘The Beast’ (Trump’s armoured presidential limousine). A welcome that surpassed expectations. For President Putin, it was a breaking out of diplomatic isolation, and a delaying of a round of direct and secondary sanctions. The fact that the Alaska summit happened at all was a victory for Putin. In a short six months Putin went from being isolated by the West to being welcomed on US soil as a partner and friend.¹

Across the globe there were hopes for a successful summit and an ending of a war that has raged for over three and a half years. But President Putin managed to sidestep any announcement of a temporary ceasefire or battlefield concessions. He showed no willingness to shift course. Trump who had announced on his campaign trail that he would end the war on his first day in office was only told that the war would not have taken place if he had been in the chair instead of Joe Biden.

As per reports, Putin demanded Ukraine withdraw from Donetsk and Luhansk as a condition for ending the war, but offered Trump a freeze along the remaining frontline. Although Luhansk is almost entirely under Russian control, Ukraine still holds key parts of Donetsk, including the cities of Kramatorsk and Sloviansk and heavily fortified positions whose defence has cost many lives.²

However, President, Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine, has consistently rejected giving up territory and on Saturday European allies reaffirmed that Ukraine’s borders must not be altered through force.

After the meeting the two Presidents gave statements to the press but took no questions. Putin the first to speak, praised the "Constructive atmosphere of mutual respect" of the "Neighbourly" talks, and then spoke about the history of Alaska's past as

a Russian territory. Later he mentioned what he called the "Situation in Ukraine" and stated that although an unspecified "Agreement" had been reached, the "Root causes" of the conflict had to be eliminated before peace could be achieved.³ This as has been frequently spelt out is the encroachment of NATO into the Russian sphere of influence when the Soviet Union collapsed.

When it was President Trump's turn to speak, he said; "There were many, many points that we agreed on" adding that 'Great Progress' had been made in an 'Extremely productive meeting'. But he did not share any details. "We didn't get there," Trump admitted. Then, optimistically, he added: "But we have a very good chance of getting there". However, there was optimism; President Trump standing in front of a sign that read 'Pursuing Peace' said that the two had made some headway and he went on to tell Fox News that he would grade the meeting as 10 on a scale of 1 to 10.⁴

Focus Now on Ukraine & Europe

Ukraine and other European nations believe the worst did not happen, that is agreeing to hand over chunks of Ukraine to Russia or to limiting European aid to Kyiv. But after the meeting and debriefing European leaders there is an impression that President Trump now believes a peace treaty can be done rapidly, as long as Ukraine agrees to give up more territory in the Eastern Donbas region, putting the onus on President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine to agree. After all, President Trump told Fox News, "Russia is a very big power, and they're not", referring to Ukraine. "Now it is really up to President Zelenskyy to get it done", he added. "I would also say the European nations have to get involved a little bit".⁵ Putin appears to have pressed about the root causes of the war: Ukraine's independent course, its perceived anti-Russian integration into Western institutions, and the broader erosion of Russian influence in Eastern Europe. Whereas Trump, indicated that he may delay tough sanctions that he had previously threatened.⁶

But the outcome of the meeting, with more talks to come, reveals an underlying problem for the Europeans. They lack a strategy of their own for bringing the war to a close, or for defeating Russia. Instead, they have no option but to keep up with the unpredictable stands of President Trump while trying to ensure red lines that protect Ukrainian sovereignty and European security.

President Putin may have successfully neutralised the idea of a ceasefire by hinting at a broader deal he knows will take time to negotiate. If his military objective, as per Matthew Savill of the RUSI, "Was to avoid immediate constraints on Russian operations in Ukraine, then he appears to have succeeded: the continued intensity of fighting reinforces the impression that the Russians are prioritising changing facts on the ground ahead of any ceasefire".⁷

Analysis

Some things stand out and need a deeper analysis. First being the US change of stance as far as supporting European security is concerned and the realisation that it will not be easy to 'Pull the Plug' on Europe unless there is a semblance of stability in Ukraine.

The other is the reluctance of Europe to jump into the fray as far as the Ukrainian conflict is concerned. In spite of successes in the non-contact sphere as far as drones are concerned on ground, Ukraine has not had much success recently. Its forces have been forced out of Kursk, while in Pokorovsk the situation is increasingly becoming untenable. Unless, there is an infusion as far as trained manpower and weapons takes place, a turnaround seems remote. Hence for the US, conflict termination is necessary but with some sort of 'Victory Sign' and this will result in its focus getting back to the Indo-Pacific. The victory signs can be security guarantees to Ukraine while agreeing to the territorial issues raised by Russia.

As far as Russia is concerned the 'Root Causes' remain but they will also look for a relief of sanctions placed on them and economic integration. The fact is that for the US President who wants to stop the war, it is not going to be easy to address all the concerns of Ukraine, Europe and Russia without some compromises by each of the players.

This reinforces the risks to Ukrainians and their European allies of US leverage over their security. If Trump accepts Putin's view of the war, and the demands that follow from it, then the US and Europe would be divided on the latter's most severe and urgent security threat. Diplomacy is approaching a difficult moment as Trump must choose between Europe and Russia.

"It was determined by all that the best way to end the horrific war between Russia and Ukraine is to go directly to a Peace Agreement, which would end the war, and not a mere Ceasefire Agreement, which often times do not hold up", is what Trump posted on Truth Social.

Conclusion

"The meeting proved that negotiations are possible without preconditions", wrote the former President Dmitry Medvedev on Telegram. As per Ulrich Speck, a German analyst "Now Russia is willing to negotiate to satisfy President Trump, but Ukraine is weaker, and President Putin believes he is winning the war. That's a defeat for the West," he said.⁸

For President Putin who came to Alaska with the principal goal of stalling any pressure on Russia to end the war, the outcome of the summit outcome is positive. Russia will now look to continue its summer military offensive which in the past week has shown signs of gaining momentum in the Donbass region and put greater pressure on Ukraine. As the threat of further economic pressure on Russia was not discussed, status quo remains. As far as India is concerned, there seem to be positive signs due to the impending imposition of 25 per cent tariffs for purchase of Russian oil. Further, India has always talked of dialogue and diplomacy as being the way forward.

While the summit may have failed to yield any tangible progress towards peace in Ukraine, but it cemented the rapprochement between Russia and the US. Ultimately Trump left for Washington with little to show except for an invitation for a next meeting in Moscow. The fact remains that 'There's no deal until there's a deal'.

Endnotes

¹ "Live Updates: Trump Meets Putin in Alaska for Ukraine Talks." BBC News, www.bbc.com/news/live/c2kzn1nw1d4t

² Helmore, Edward, and Pjotr Sauer. "Trump Reportedly to Back Ceding of Ukrainian Territory to Russia as Part of Peace Deal." The Guardian, The Guardian, 16 Aug. 2025, Accessed 17 Aug. 2025, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/aug/16/ukraine-russia-peace-deal-donbas-region

³ Gozzi, Laura. "Trump and Putin Alaska Summit: Five Takeaways from the Meeting - BBC News." BBC News, 16 Aug. 2025, www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gj9er0x0zo.amp

⁴ "MSN." Msn.com, 2025, www.msn.com/en-us/news/world/trump-rolled-out-the-red-carpet-for-putin-he-got-little-in-return/ar-AA1KCdaU. Accessed 17 Aug. 2025.

⁵ Helmore, Edward, and Pjotr Sauer. "Trump Reportedly to Back Ceding of Ukrainian Territory to Russia as Part of Peace Deal." The Guardian, The Guardian, 16 Aug. 2025, Accessed 17 Aug. 2025, www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/aug/16/ukraine-russia-peace-deal-donbas-region

⁶ Tenev, Martin. "Bering Bad News: Trump, Putin and European Lessons from the Alaska Summit." ECFR, European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), 16 Aug. 2025, Accessed 17 Aug. 2025, ecfr.eu/article/bering-bad-news-trump-putin-and-european-lessons-from-the-alaska-summit

⁷ Savill, Matthew . "Matthew Savill Comments on the Trump-Putin Summit in Alaska." Rusi.org, 16 Aug. 2025, Accessed 17 Aug. 2025, www.rusi.org/in-the-news/matthew-savill-comments-trump-putin-summit-alaska

⁸ Erlanger, Steven. "Europeans Worry Trump Will Pressure Zelensky after Meeting with Putin." Nytimes.com, The New York Times, 16 Aug. 2025, Accessed 17 Aug. 2025, www.nytimes.com/2025/08/16/world/europe/putin-trump-alaska-summit-ukraine.html

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