

Trump-Zelenskyy Implosion: Implications of US Pulling the Plug

Introduction

Rarely in recent times where systems, norms and interests dominate has the fate of a nation been so dependent on the whims of a single man. When President Zelenskyy entered the Oval Office, he needed to repair a deep rift between him and President Donald Trump. Trump had called him a 'Dictator'. But Trump had softened his tone after recently meeting with the British Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, of whom spoke about the need for an enduring peace agreement that would deter future Russian aggression. It was a sign of US support for Ukraine's defence against Russia.^[i]

But on 28 Feb, the world witnessed something that normally takes place behind closed doors. It was a meeting intended to ease tensions but instead descended into a televised shouting match. By the end Ukraine's Ambassador to the US was holding her head in her hands. The Press Conference was cancelled and a deal giving the United States (US) access to Ukrainian minerals was not signed. As Zelenskyy drove back to his plane for an early departure, Trump delivered a terse message to Zelenskyy of being 'Not ready for peace if America is involved'.

The fact is that Trump and Zelenskyy have fundamentally different visions for how Russia's war in Ukraine should be resolved. The rift between President Donald Trump and President Zelenskyy has now brought many questions to the fore.

What are the implications of the US pulling the plug as far as assistance to Ukraine goes? Will this result in a withdrawal from the Treaty Organization? And finally, can peace talks continue with Ukraine unwilling to enter into any talks? There have been three options spoken about, the first being a regime change in Kyiv with the new leadership willing to enter into negotiations.

Implications of the US Pulling the Plug

Trump has engaged directly with Russian President Vladimir Putin and sidelined European allies while joining a handful of countries which include Russia, Iran and North Korea in voting against a United Nations (UN) resolution condemning Putin's aggression. Yet despite this new geopolitical reality, and despite month after month of grueling fighting that has Russian forces taking territory by the day, Ukrainians themselves remain deeply resistant to accepting an end to the war that would sacrifice their country's territory and sovereignty.^[ii]

Currently, the war is stalemated, but Russia has the initiative. Ukraine's defences on the Eastern front are bending but not breaking, and it retains an enclave in Russia's Kursk region.

The fact is that Ukraine needs a steady flow of weapons, munitions, and supplies to continue its resistance, and to quote President Zelenskyy has "A low chance to survive without the support of the United States". While fresh funding is unlikely to be announced by the US, the main question is whether President Trump will allow American equipment to flow to Ukraine from previously announced commitments.^[iii]

Military aid funds have been committed, but the equipment is in different stages along the delivery pipeline. While the Europeans, have committed around \$40 billion of military aid but that has not yet been delivered.^[iv]

Though discussion of military aid generally focuses on major weapons, the key is quantity, not particular systems. In addition to weapons, militaries in combat need ammunitions of all sorts, from small arms to artillery to tanks and missiles, and supplies like vehicles, night vision devices, and spares. The key, therefore, is maintain the flow for all weapon systems to ensure their serviceability.

Apart from this, there is other crucial support—training and intelligence data, for example—that the US provides. This is critical in building Ukraine's military capabilities. Training encompasses not just the operation of donated western equipment but also for individuals and units. Intelligence information has enabled Ukraine to understand the strategic picture better, what Russia is doing and intends to do, and the tactical level, where to fire its long-range munitions. Elimination of these can affect Ukraine's military effort. Finally, there is the much-touted communications provided by Elon Musk's 'Star Link', what if this is denied?[\[v\]](#)

The Europeans might replace the lost support, but they are already supplying as much as they can, given the deteriorated state of their defence industry. But the truth is that the US has capabilities and scales that the Europeans lack. Hence, there is a sense of pessimism which was clearly expressed by Vice President JD Vance when he stated that “Russians have a massive numerical advantage in manpower and weapons in Ukraine, and that advantage will persist regardless of further Western aid packages”.[\[vi\]](#)

It has, therefore, been assessed by some analysts that the effects of a US aid cutoff, “Would definitely result in far greater loss of life and could easily result in Ukraine losing the war”.[\[vii\]](#)

President Zelenskyy may have bought time as far as signing a peace deal is concerned but will this result in better terms of a negotiated settlement is a moot question. Further, will it be enough to hold ground, as Russia continues pressing its offensive.

Views from Europe

President Trump in his meeting with Prime Minister Starmer of the UK stated unequivocally about America's future role in European affairs, “I'm not going to make security guarantees... We're going to have Europe do that”. President Trump is clearly willing to force Europe's hand and treat US commitments as subject to conditions rather than one bound by principles.[\[viii\]](#)

But the reality is that President Trump is threatening to annex Greenland, impose tariffs on trade and is now abandoning Ukraine.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, European Council President Antonio Costa and European Parliament President Roberta Metsola all told Zelenskyy in a joint post: “Your dignity honors the bravery of the Ukrainian people. Be strong, be brave, be fearless. We will continue working with you for a just and lasting peace”.[\[ix\]](#)

For the first time, European leaders are uncertain whether the US remains committed to NATO, and to the American leadership role in it. Will they, therefore, be able to step up their support in a meaningful way, by providing Ukraine the long-term security guarantees and potentially be ready to put boots on the ground to help secure a lasting peace? Or will differences of opinion and bureaucracy among member states destroy its ability to play the leadership role it should be playing?”

For Russia, the spat was a diplomatic triumph as it has driven a wedge between Ukraine and its Western allies and more advantageous for it driven a wedge within NATO. It brings the Kremlin closer to what it wants most of all: Russia and the US negotiating about Ukraine's without the Ukrainians, a twenty-first century version of the Yalta Agreement at the end of World War II. No wonder Dmitry Medvedev, the Deputy Head of the Russian Security Council, wrote on Telegram that Trump had given Ukraine a “Strong slap on the wrist”.[\[x\]](#)

Conclusion

In the fallout with Zelenskyy and the end of US support for the war effort, the Trump administration has not only shaken Ukraine but has also called into question some of the bedrock assumptions that have formed the basis of the transatlantic relationship since World War II.

The bottom line is that Ukraine wants its territory back and wants to be part of NATO or be given security guarantees but it does not have the money or weapons to stand on its own. Russia feels Ukraine is historically a part of imperialist Russia and sees a red line in it being part of NATO.

Europe led by liberal democracies kept harping on a sense of entitlement as far as its comforts and views are concerned but was not willing to spend on its security requirements. The US, on the other hand, feels it needs to recover its investments in Ukraine by controlling its minerals. And in its quest to make 'Make America Great Again' is unwilling to keep footing the security bill of Ukraine. Apart from that it also needs to focus on the threat from China and continue its backing of Israel.

Marco Rubio, once a strong supporter of Ukraine, wrote: "Thank you POTUS (President of the United States) for standing up for America in a way that no President has ever had the courage to do before". The fact is that Trump is viewing all this from a financial perspective. No wonder he gave Ukrainian President Zelenskyy an ultimatum: "You either make a deal, or we are out."

Europe does need the US to end the war in Ukraine permanently. But the US also needs Europe to successfully accomplish that task. Amidst all these differences of interests the world wants peace. The fact is that many players are finding it difficult to deal with blunt realities.

Endnotes

[i] Brett Samules, Trump ends talks with Zelensky, accuses him of not being 'ready for peace', The Hill, 02 February 2025 <https://thehill.com/homenews/administration/5169413-trump-zelensky-meeting-post/>

[ii] Weber, Peter. "Trump Sides with Russia on Ukraine War Anniversary." Theweek, The Week, 25 Feb. 2025, theweek.com/politics/trump-russia-ukraine-war-anniversary-macron. Accessed 5 Mar. 2025.

[iii] Cancian, Mark F. "Will U.S. Military Aid to Ukraine Bring Victory?" Csis.org, 2024, www.csis.org/analysis/will-us-military-aid-ukraine-bring-victory.

[iv] Ibid

[v] Cancian, Mark F, and Chris H Park. "Is Ukraine Now Doomed?" Csis.org, 2025, www.csis.org/analysis/ukraine-now-doomed.

[vi] ibid

[vii] ibid

[viii] AP. "UK's Starmer Meets Trump, Wants Security Guarantees for Post-War Ukraine, Talks Trade - the Tribune." The Tribune, 27 Feb. 2025, www.tribuneindia.com/news/world/uks-starmer

meets-trump-wants-security-guarantees-for-post-war-ukraine-talks-trade/. Accessed 5 Mar. 2025.

[ix] “Fiery Clash: Trump and Zelensky’s White House Showdown – Famagusta Gazette.” Famagusta-Gazette.com, Mar. 2025, famagusta-gazette.com/fiery-clash-trump-and-zelenskys-white-house-showdown/. Accessed 5 Mar. 2025.

[x] “Trump Demanded Concessions from Zelensky for US Aid.” Stringer.news, 28 Feb. 2025, stringer.news/events/56a222c1-5f99-40de-9326-9c10bc0afc16. Accessed 5 Mar. 2025.

Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd) is a Distinguished Fellow at the USI of India. Commissioned in 1981 into the 18 Cavalry, he has held various important command and Staff appointments including command of an Armoured Division.

Uploaded on 07-03-2025

Disclaimer : The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisation that he/she belongs to or of the USI of India.