

# Geopolitics | Donald Trump's Tectonic Shifts In US Foreign Policy And Russia-Ukraine War

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**US President Donald Trump met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky at the White House, and the press conference by the two leaders was unprecedented.**



Vice President JD Vance, right, speaks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, left, as President Donald Trump listens in the Oval Office at the White House, Friday, Feb. 28, 2025, in Washington. (AP)



By [Anuradha Chenoy](#)

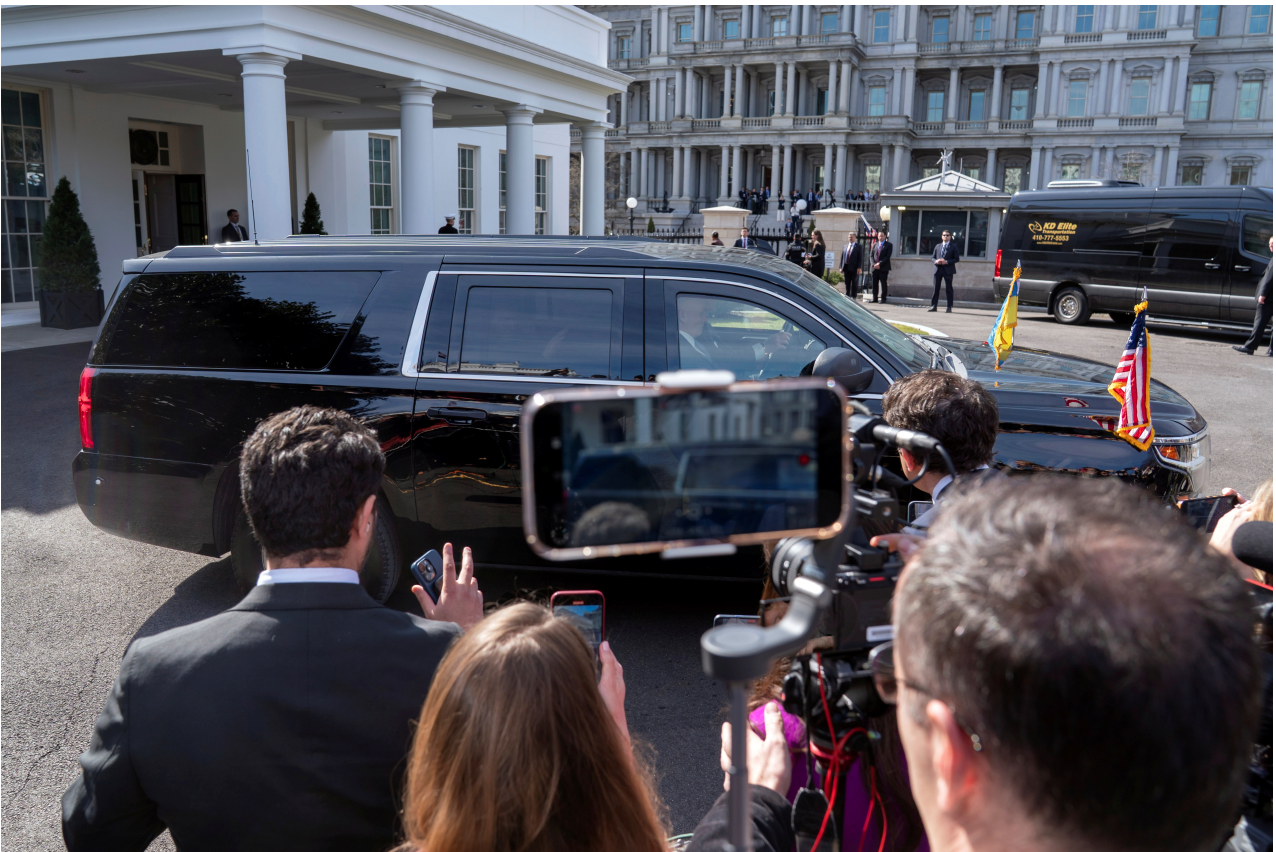
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President Donald Trump in his second term is dramatically shifting the terms of the Russia-Ukraine war and simultaneously resetting the US-Russia relations in directions not seen since the Second World War.

The press conference by Presidents Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky (28 February) was more of an angry public spat before the world media, unprecedented in the history of White House press conferences. This press conference/ public spat demonstrated that Zelensky used the opportunity to tell the world that he was unhappy with the 'deal' with the Americans, he wanted better terms like Ukrainian territory Back, unconditional US support and security guarantees before accepting ceasefire. The Trump team stated that Zelensky remained ungrateful for the support (\$350 billion) the US had given, held no 'cards to continue this war that could lead to a third world war'.



A vehicle with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on board departs after a meeting with President Donald Trump at the White House in Washington, Friday, Feb. 28, 2025 (AP)

This press/spat conference demonstrated Trump's bullying style, his capacity to push a deal, humiliating the weaker side, and that the US will not respect or treat with equality the weaker and dependent side that Ukraine finds itself in. What was not said was that Ukraine agreed to be set up as the dummy in the strategic plans of the collective West in a proxy war to weaken Russia. Now, Zelensky returns empty-handed. While Trump's keenness to re-set relations with Russia will continue.

Trump has several reasons for this reset with Russia. Trump recognizes the ground reality that Ukraine is losing and badly bleeding, as are its allies no matter what narrative they spin. So, Trump is cutting loose before a final Ukrainian collapse and managing a withdrawal dressed up as peace for the US.



Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, left, departs after a meeting with President Donald Trump at the White House, Friday, Feb. 28, 2025, in Washington (AP)

Trump sees the Ukraine war as Joe Biden's folly, which he critiqued through his election campaign, promising peace to his mass base. The current conjuncture of his victory and the Republican majority in the U.S. Congress (at least for another two years) is ideal for his foreign policy shifts. As Trump said: "If it doesn't happen quickly, it may not happen at all."

Trump got Zelensky to sign a deal on the excavation of Ukrainian minerals on his terms, even though Zelensky is the one who wanted a mineral deal in exchange for the US military to secure Ukraine. Trump has rejected any US troops going to Ukraine. Instead, Trump has offered that the US will partner with Ukraine in excavating these minerals in Ukraine in return, will pay the US 50% of revenues earned by selling the natural resources owned by the Ukrainian government. The profits from the sale of the minerals will go into a 'reconstruction investment fund'. This fund will invest in the reconstruction of Ukraine across all sectors. This means the US will over the next several decades own 50% of all Ukrainian minerals, hydrocarbons and infrastructure.

In this deal the US gets "maximum percentage of ownership of the fund's equity" and decision making. Importantly, the security guarantees that Zelensky was seeking in return for this sell-out are not mentioned, as Trump said the very presence of the U.S. "dig-dig-

digging" on Ukraine soil deters Russians from coming into Ukraine. For this mineral extraction, Trump needs a friendly neighbor in Russia, while Ukraine that already lost 20% of its territory, now loses most of its mineral resources.

Trump's business interest vis-a vis Russia are clear since the February 6, 90-minute ice-breaking phone conversation with President Vladimir Putin, which was more than just a return to diplomacy. The high-level follow-up meeting in Riyadh between U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, Special Envoy Ambassador Steve Witkoff on one side and the Russian side with Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Aide to the Russian President Yuri Ushakov, where both sides agreed to work towards resolving all contentious issues and restarting their consular services.

Kirill Dmitriev, the head of state-owned Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF) present in this Riyadh meeting said that by leaving Russia, U.S. businesses lost around \$300 billion a point of concern for transactional Trump. Trump knows that the majority of rare earth minerals he is after are in the Russian part of Donbass and in Russia's Arctic region.



President Donald Trump welcomes Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House in Washington, Friday, Feb. 28, 2025 (AP)

Trump aims to expand American influence in the Arctic, so he talks of acquiring Greenland and Canada. 50% of the Arctic region is Russian territory and its cooperation would be essential to excavate here. U.S. oil major Exxon Mobil were partners of Russian state oil company Rosneft for Arctic oil explorations, but this project stopped after US sanctions in 2014. So, Dmitriev said the two sides had discussed possible cooperation in the Arctic during the Riyadh meeting.

Of course, bringing peace between the US and its allies and Russia is no easy matter. European countries have been shell shocked by Trump's phone call and the haste with which the follow-up is happening, where Zelensky has been 'informed' and the Europeans completely cut off. Now, President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer tried to convince Trump that the European Union (EU) will send thousands of 'peacekeepers' along the 600 mile long Line of Actual Contact. The Russians reject this and say that any such troops will be treated as combatants and only the UN Security Council can pass a peacekeeping force. Now, Trump will have to manage the Europeans since the Russians are hard negotiators.

Meanwhile, U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth declared what the peace between Russia and the US on Ukraine is likely to look like when he spoke to NATO's Ukraine Defense Contact Group on 12th February. He said: (i) the war must end; (ii) It was unrealistic to expect any return to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders; (iii) Nato membership for Ukraine is not a realistic goal; (iv) Security guarantees would be backed by European and non-European troops, not by NATO. (v) No US troops will be deployed.

U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance during the Munich Security Conference then lectured the EU on their double standards and dictated that the Europeans must both pay and play a bigger role in European security since the US priority was to focus on deterring China. So, Europe will have to increase their defence spending to at least 3.5% of their GDP and be left holding Ukraine any which way they like- again a win for the U.S. military industries.

To show that Trump's talks with Russia are not just rhetoric, the U.S. joined Russia to first vote against a resolution in the United Nations General Assembly that condemned the Russian war against Ukraine and then followed up by voting with Russia in the UN Security Council resolution that took a neutral position appealing for peace.

All these are early steps taken under the Trump leadership - since there will be no ceasefire until the peace negotiations are in place. Getting peace in place of war is trickier than starting a war. But clearly, the peace will be largely on Russian terms. So Russia will keep Crimea and the four provinces that it occupied; Ukraine will remain neutral and not part of NATO; there will be a demilitarized zone between Russia and Ukraine. Trump knows that if he wants a deal he will have to agree to much of these terms. So, Zelensky and the Europeans have no options but to agree because if the US pulls out, there will be a complete collapse of Ukraine.

Obviously, peace is beneficial for all but the terms and negotiations for peace will be hard. But, Trump is set on a path and will not allow any force to come in its way. Meanwhile, the world watches the performances, rhetoric and actions of a dramatic change in Trans-Atlantic Relations.

(Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this article are that of the writer. The facts and opinions expressed here do not reflect the views of ETV Bharat)

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