



The historic Trump-Zelenskyy exchange at the White House

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Glenn Greenwald (GG): I also wanted first to cover what was truly an extraordinary event. I mean, a historically extraordinary event that took place just a little while ago, earlier this afternoon in the Oval Office where Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy came to Washington primarily because he was summoned by President Trump and the Trump White House to do so. The Trump administration is very eager to reach an agreement is one generous way to put it, pressure the Ukrainians to agree or submit to an agreement is probably the more accurate way to put it in which the United States will obtain very substantial rights to the crucial minerals in Ukraine, many of which are in the Donbass region that the Russians currently occupy, but many of which are simply spread throughout western Ukraine that are crucial for industrial growth. There's some lithium there, there's all kinds of rare earth minerals that are necessary for future weapons as well and for a lot of other drivers of economic growth into the future that President Trump very much has his eye on. And Trump brought this suggestion, this proposal, and was a little bit ambiguous about it. Some people understood that he was offering it as a condition for continuing to fund the war in Ukraine, essentially saying to Ukraine, if you want us to continue to finance and arm your war against Russia, the condition is that you have to give us the rights to these minerals in your ground or 50% of it, or we become partners in it. And that led a lot of people, including a very good friend of our show, a great friend of our show, one of our best friends of the show, Michael Tracy, to conclude that this was Trump essentially saying that he's going to continue to pursue Biden's policy of financing the war in Ukraine, and definitely he just wants some mineral rights as a condition for doing so.

There was another interpretation though that I think was very viable, which is that President Trump keeps saying that we gave \$350 billion to – apparently I sneeze even when I'm not in the studio, it's only during the show though, I swear, I don't sneeze ever during the day, maybe it's just psychological. In any event, President Trump has been very fixated on the fact that we gave \$350 billion in his words to Ukraine. That figure has been disputed, but clearly it's in excess of 100 billion, maybe 200 billion. And this isn't new during the campaign over the last couple of years, he's been objecting to this and questioning it and saying why is it in the American interest? Why does the American worker have to finance the war in Ukraine?

And the other alternative is that he is determined to get that money back through middle-rights and he continues to emphasize that he intends to end the war in Ukraine, that he intends to negotiate a deal between Ukraine and Russia for the war to end. So it's not as if he is saying, oh yeah, I want to continue the war, but I just want to get mineral rights for it. He keeps claiming that Europe's aid was in the form of loans and grants that they'll get back, some of which it actually was, but not all of which, whereas the United States just kind of gave this money with no expectation in return. So it seems more plausible to me that what Trump is saying is, we want our money back that we've given you and you'll get the benefit that if we have a vested interest in your country in extracting these rare earth minerals out of your country that that will provide a sense of security because we'll have to have a physical presence there. Now, obviously the ukrainians don't want to sign away their very lucrative and valuable rights to these minerals, but at the same time they have been relying upon and hope to continue to rely upon us largesse. And Trump's view is why should we just give you this money?

So this visit from by President Zelensky to the White House today obviously took place in a context in which Trump has been saying very insulting things about Zelensky, calling him a mid-rate comedian, accusing him of being a dictator because he won't have elections, of being extremely unpopular in his country – a kind of war of words that took place. Trump seemed to retreat a little bit on it when UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer was in the White House yesterday on Thursday and a reporter asked about him having called President Zelensky a dictator and he said something like: Oh, did I say that? But as soon as Zelensky got there today, Trump came to greet him outside of the White House dressed in the normal Trump presidential costume of an expensive suit and a silk tie and Zelensky showed up in his sweatshirt and jeans and President Trump immediately said: Oh look, he came well dressed. Already kind of mocking and insulting Zelensky. You know, I guess at the beginning when Russia invaded in 2022, it made sense for Zelensky to prance around and camouflage or whatever, because the idea was he had to go underground. He was hiding. He was commanding from a bunker. Now he's on the cover of Vogue. He travels around the world. He's constantly in Kiev. This costume has no more validity, but he continues to wear it. And I guess president Trump didn't appreciate the fact that he showed up at the Oval Office for a meeting with President Trump with Vice President JD Vance dressed the way you might dress if you were going to the mall or if you were hiking up a mountain and expected the weather to be a little bit nippy. So that was the way that the meeting began.

Now here is them in the Oval Office, they sat down in the traditional place in the Oval Office where world leaders when they visit the White House end up sitting next to the President. They were both surrounded by officials, the traveling party that Zelensky brought with him. And on President Trump's left was Vice President JD Vance and then next to him was Secretary of State Marco Rubio and his Treasury Secretary right next to him. And obviously world leaders argue all the time, they fight all the time, they have disagreements all the time, especially in a case like this where there's been a war of words over the past couple of weeks, but even longer going back there was a fear in Kiev that if Trump won, aid to Ukraine could be endangered. But a true war broke out, a major confrontation, that first involved President

Trump and President Zelensky, Vice President Vance got involved, and it just continued to escalate because Zelensky, instead of doing what might have been wise, given his dependency and his country's dependency on the United States, kept interrupting, talking over them, fighting with them and therefore fueling this disagreement, making Trump, as angry as I've seen him in public. I've never seen Trump raise his voice this way. I don't know if I would say he lost control of his composure, but he certainly lost his cool. He clearly does not like Zelensky. He dislikes Zelensky's posture. And he basically kept telling him, look, you're in no position to do anything, but come here with your hat in your hand and you should be expressing gratitude to us. And instead you're very ungrateful. You're very demanding and you're going to risk World War III. You're playing games with the lives of millions of people, including your country's. It was a remarkably contentious public argument that I think isn't just about personality clashes, but is about some very deep seated disagreements that clearly the Trump administration and president Trump in particular have with Zelensky and with Ukraine. Now there's been reporting that Biden used to get very angry with Zelensky as well, to the extent that Biden knew what was going on. He felt like Zelensky was constantly asking for more money. And there have been reports that Biden got very angry on various calls, but none of that happened in public. Here is just a segment of what took place, the remarkably just contentious and confrontational exchange between Vance and Trump on the one hand and President Zelensky on the other.

J.D. Vance (JDV): I'm talking about the kind of diplomacy that's going to end the destruction of your country.

Volodymyr Zelensky (VZ): Yes, but if you are not strong –

JDV: Mr. President, Mr. President, with respect, I think it's disrespectful for you to come into the Oval Office and try to litigate this in front of the American media. Right now, you guys are going around and forcing conscripts to the front lines because you have manpower problems – you should be thanking the president for trying to bring an end to this conflict.

VZ: Have you ever been to Ukraine, that you say what problems we have?

JDV: I have been to...

VZ: Come once.

JDV: I've actually watched and seen the stories and I know that what happens is that you bring people, you bring them on a propaganda tour, Mr. President. Do you disagree that you've had problems bringing people into your military?

VZ: We have problems.

JDV: And do you think that it's respectful to come to the Oval Office of the United States of America and attack the administration that is trying to prevent the destruction of your country?

VZ: A lot of questions. Let's start from the beginning. First of all, during the war, everybody has problems, even you, but you have a nice ocean and don't feel it now, but you will feel it in the future.

Donald Trump (DT): You don't know that.

VZ: God bless, God bless, God bless, you will not have a war.

DT: Don't tell us what we're going to feel. We're trying to solve a problem. Don't tell us what we're going to feel.

VZ: I'm not telling you. I'm answering the questions.

DT: Because you're in no position to dictate that. Remember this. You're in no position to dictate what we're going to feel.

VZ: You will.

DT: We're gonna feel very good.

VZ: You will feel influenced.

DT: We're going to feel very good and very strong.

VZ: I'm telling you, you will feel influenced.

DT: You're right now not in a very good position. You've allowed yourself to be in a very bad position, that he happens to be right about.

VZ: From the very beginning of the war –

DT: You don't have the cards right now. With us you start having cards.

VZ: I'm not playing cards.

DT: But right now you don't have your playing cards.

VZ: I'm not playing cards, Mr President.

DT: Yeah, you're playing cards.

VZ: I'm not playing cards. I'm very serious, Mr. President.

DT: You're playing cards.

VZ: I'm serious, I'm a president of war.

DT: You're gambling with the lives of millions of people. You're gambling with World War III. You're gambling with World War III. You're gambling with World War III. And what you're doing is very disrespectful to the country – this country.

VZ: I'm – with all respect to you...

DT: It's backed you, far more than a lot of people said they should have.

JDV: Have you said “thank you” once?

VZ: A lot of times. Even today.

JDV: You went to Pennsylvania and campaigned for the opposition in October. Offer some words of appreciation for the United States of America and the president who's trying to save your country.

DT: Your country's in big trouble.

VZ: Can I answer?

DT: No, no. You've done a lot of talking. Your country is in big trouble.

VZ: I know. I know.

DT: You're not winning this. You have a damn good chance of coming out okay because of us.

VZ: We are staying, Mr. President. We are staying in our country, staying strong from the very beginning of the war. We've been alone, and we are thankful. I said thanks in this Cabinet –

DT: You haven't been alone. You haven't been alone.

VZ: – and not only in this Cabinet. I said thank you.

DT: We gave you, through the stupid President, 350 billion dollars.

VZ: You voted for your President.

DT: We gave you military equipment.

VZ: You voted for your President!

DT: And your men are brave, but they had to use our military. If you didn't have our military equipment, this war would have been over in two weeks. It's going to be a very hard thing to do business like this.

JDV: Just say thank you.

VZ: I said thank you—I say thank you to the American people.

JDV: Accept that there are disagreements and let's go litigate those disagreements rather than trying to fight it out in the American media when you're wrong. We know that you're wrong.

DT: But you see, I think it's good for the American people to see what's going on out here. I think it's very important. That's why I kept this going so long. You have to be thankful. You don't have the cards.

VZ: I'm thankful.

DT: You don't have the cards. You're buried there, your people are dying, you're running low on soldiers. Listen, you're running low on soldiers. It would be a damn good thing. Then you tell us "I don't want a ceasefire. I don't want a ceasefire. I want to go, and I want this." Look, if you could get a ceasefire right now, I'd tell you you take it so the bullets stop flying and your men stop getting killed.

VZ: Of course we want to stop the war, but as I've said to you, with guarantees.

DT: But you're saying you don't want a ceasefire? I want a ceasefire because you'll get a ceasefire faster than a —

GG: Now, it is true, people often point out, and I think rightly so, that a lot of what Donald Trump says, a lot of what he does, a lot of what he threatens he will do, a lot of what he predicts will happen, is his way of trying to gain an upper hand in negotiations. If anything, if he prides himself on anything, it's priding himself on being a good deal maker. That's been his brand and his identity. going all the way back those decades when he was a real estate developer in New York and then a casino developer. The name of his book, as you likely know, is *The Art of the Deal*. This is how he thinks of himself above all else, as somebody who's not just a deal maker but drives a very hard deal. So when he's yelling at Zelensky, when he's insulting him, when he's telling him he has no leverage, it very well might be, on some level, an attempt to force Zelensky into doing a deal that President Trump perceives as

favorable to the country. And even if it's disfavorable to Ukraine by saying, look, you have no leverage, you need us, you have no cards to play, you're gonna basically sign whatever we tell you to sign because if you don't, we'll cut off aid to you and you'll have no chance to fight the Russians, you'll have no leverage, your country is gonna be gone. It might have been some of that, but clearly, as I said, the way in which Trump's comportment was so different than it normally is, I mean, even when he's very angry at the press, he'll be snide, maybe, he'll be insulting. It's always with a kind of light demeanor. He doesn't like to show that someone's gotten to him, that someone's made him angry. Here, clearly. I don't think it was just Zelensky today. I think the whole situation of Zelensky demanding more money constantly, of always complaining that it's not enough, is something that clearly Trump is angry about. Angry towards Zelensky, angry toward Ukraine, angry toward the Biden administration, resentful toward Europe, and that is likely to have an effect on how President Trump treats Ukraine going forward.

But I think the most important thing continues to be, Trump vowed when he ran, that he would open relations and communication with the Russians in order to end the war in Ukraine promptly, he continues to say that's his goal. So this idea that some people have, including, as I mentioned, Michael Tracy, that he's really just trying to continue the war indefinitely and wanting to get as much as possible for it seems inconsistent to me with the rhetorical goal he continues to set for himself. The metric of success that he continues to define, which is that he intends to end this war and end this war quickly. He constantly says he wants to be known not just as a deal maker, but as a peacemaker. And so if this war continues to just go on indefinitely, I think Trump will consider himself to have failed in that goal, that goal that he constantly sets for himself, the metric he invites you to use to judge him by will be a failure. So I don't think this was just a negotiating play. I don't think Trump is envisioning this war going on for long. He realizes it depends not just on himself, but on Putin and on the Russians. And part of what I think was so interesting about that interview we did with Professor Dugin was despite this cartoonish image that the Western media and the Western governments like to depict of Russia being this totalitarian regime, everybody is just subordinate to Putin, Putin speaks and everybody obeys – there's a lot of political pressure on Putin. And it's coming not from the faction that wants to end the war in Ukraine, but the faction that's very concerned that Putin cares too much about integration into the West, that he's too willing to make concessions and give too much away in order to get an agreement with Trump and with NATO in order to end the war. And so he has to be very careful. And so it's not only up to Trump or even up to Putin, but about how much political space there is for Putin to be able to do the kind of concessions, or the kind of negotiating that would be necessary to end this war, but that is clearly Trump's goal. He thinks this war is a waste. He thinks it is dangerous. He thinks it is creating a lot of unnecessary massive loss of life, all of which is true. But he also has to drive a hard bargain, not just with Ukraine, but also with Russia. Otherwise, there won't be a deal done, and I think that continues to be, and I hope it is, what his actual goal is. But you saw the spillover of what had been the longstanding tensions, probably on Zelensky's part because he was the one who was led to believe, he was the one who was encouraged and was told that: oh don't worry you don't have to do a peace deal with Russia in the beginning, after Victoria Nuland and Boris Johnson told him, we the

West are going to continue to support you, no matter what you do, for however long it takes, so just go to war with the Russians, we'll give you everything we need, we'll be behind you. And as it often happens with the United States, either the policy changes, the promises weren't enduring, the climate of Washington changes. And Zelensky's finding that from his perspective, he prolonged this war. He avoided a diplomatic solution because he was promised aid. And now he's being told, look, either you sign your mineral rights away, or we're going to cut off your aid. And so I'm sure he's resentful as well. He perceives himself as being the tip of the West, of democracy fighting against Russia. He clearly believes all of that. But as Trump told him, look, you're not winning, you have no chance to win. Your only goal should be to end this war, otherwise you're not going to have a country left. And it's, I think, rather cathartic, actually to hear a president say that, but also to hear a president say, as he said yesterday when asked about the conditions for ending the war, he said: NATO is out, Ukraine is never going to be part of NATO. He said that's probably the reason the war began in the first place. And so rather than this caricature that, oh, Putin started the war because he's a psychotic monster – even though we've heard for 25 years from five different presidents that he's rational and trustworthy and shrewd and cunning – that got turned into like some Hitlerian psychopath overnight who just wants to conquer the world regardless of the cost. Trump said the reality is that it was the US movement toward putting Ukraine in NATO that likely provoked Putin into the war, that that was a factor in the war. And it's also very refreshing to hear through a realistic rather than a propagandistic or fairy tale view coming from the White House about what has been this horrific and at the end of the day, completely unnecessary war that is now in its fourth full year.

So I'm sure there'll be further fallout, probably even over the next day or so because Zelensky is still in the White House. I believe they're meeting in private right now as they suggested they would after that incredible outburst in public and we will continue to follow the story and it has always been our view and continues to be our view that it's in everybody's interest including the United States for that war to end as soon as possible and that NATO and the United States ensure their own humiliation by defining victory in that war to be something that was never going to happen, which was the expulsion of every Russian troop, not just from Eastern Ukraine and the provinces in the Donbas, but even from Crimea, something that the Russians would never ever do. They'd rather use nuclear weapons than give that up. Now everybody admits that NATO's definition of victory has no chance of happening. They've now changed it to "oh, no, all we want it to do is prevent Russia from eating up all of Ukraine." Russia has more than 20% of Ukraine. There are hundreds of thousands of people down on both sides. And large parts of Ukraine are destroyed. It's been an absolutely horrific war that could have been avoided at the beginning and had Kamala Harris won, had Joe Biden won, there's no question in my mind NATO would continue to fund this war, would make no efforts to facilitate a peace deal, probably would block any attempts to do so. And it really is at the end of the day, only Trump who has that chance to do so.

END

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