



John Helmer: Russian Sources Say Trump Has Accepted Russia's Territorial Claims in Ukraine

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Dimitri Lascaris (DL): Good day, this is Dimitri Lascaris coming to you from Kalamata, Greece, for Reason2Resist on August 16th, 2025. Yesterday, Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President Donald Trump met face-to-face for the first time since Trump returned to the White House in January of this year. Their meeting took place in Alaska. Let's have a look at what happened after President Putin's plane touched down at the Elmendorf-Richardson US Air Base in Alaska.

Press 1: President Putin, will you agree to a ceasefire?

Press 2: Mr. President, what's your message to Vladimir Putin?

Press 1: Mr. Putin, did you overestimate Ukraine? President Putin, will you stop killing civilians? President Putin, how can the US trust your word?

Spokesperson: Thank you, press. Thank you.

DL: So, as you just heard, a female reporter with a distinctly American accent shouted several questions at Russia's president, including this one: President Putin, will you stop killing civilians? If only US corporate reporters asked such questions of American presidents themselves or of their allies like Benjamin Netanyahu. In any case, President Putin answered none of those questions and, as you saw, pointed to his ear as if to say that he could not hear the questions over the roar of jet engines. You may have noticed as well that as the two presidents walked toward the podium, they looked skyward as airplanes could be heard flying overhead. Those airplanes were a US B-2 stealth bomber accompanied by several US fighter jets. The two presidents then met face-to-face for three hours or actually a little bit less than that, I understand. President Putin was joined in that meeting by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his foreign policy advisor Yuri Ushakov. President Trump was joined by US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Trump's so-called peace envoy, Steve Witkoff. Their closed-door meeting was expected to last up to seven hours, but as I just mentioned, it lasted

less than three. And afterwards, the two presidents delivered remarks in a 12-minute or so press conference, but took no questions. President Putin, I understand, returned to the territory of Russia after the press conference and did not spend the night on US soil.

We'll show you some excerpts from that press conference, but before we do so, let me bring our guest into the discussion. Today, we're pleased to be joined again by John Helmer. John is the longest continuously serving foreign correspondent in Russia and the only Western journalist to direct his own bureau independent of national commercial ties. Born and educated in Australia, and then at Harvard University, John has also been a professor of political science, sociology and journalism and an advisor to governments, including those of Greece and Australia. He's also published several books on military and political topics, his latest being *Long Live Novichok: The British Poison That Fooled the World*. Thank you for coming back onto Reason2Resist, John.

John Helmer (JH): Thank you for having me, Dimitri. Good to be here.

DL: John, let's begin with President Putin's arrival in Alaska. As I mentioned, there was a flyover of a B-2 stealth bomber at that moment. What did you make of that and what were your overall impressions about the way in which President Trump chose to greet President Putin?

JH: Well, there's a lot that's visible in the clip you showed. You also left out some bits, which I'll come to in just a minute. Overall, what President Trump turned on was a characteristic display of lethal power. It was not only that he had the B-2 flyover accompanied by four fighter jet escorts and stopped to watch. The honor guard was not a collection of soldiers presenting arms. It was a lineup of F-22 fighter jets. Elmendorf Richardson Air Base is a fighter interception air base. It's for defense against incoming. It is not a bomber base. B-2s are not based at Elmendorf. The display of the F-2s as an honor guard was an attempt to say, as Trump actually said later on and said in the Fox News interview that he gave immediately after the press conference, "US arms are the greatest in the world. The US capacity to inflict violence is the greatest thing in the world. We've just made peace by inflicting a B-2 bomber attack on Iran" and so forth and so on. We've been through that before. Our audience is very familiar with that.

DL: Before you continue, John, before you continue, I just want to ask you a question about this. You didn't quite see it in the clip that I showed, but on either side of the red carpet that they walked to get onto the podium, there were fighter jets. But what was interesting to me, you only see the nose of one or two of them in that clip, but when you see them in full, I didn't see any markings on those fighter jets, and it looked almost as though whatever markings there had been were painted over. You're confident that those were not Russian jets, but those were actually American warplanes? Is that your understanding?

JH: Absolutely. No Russian jet that I'm aware of penetrated American airspace. Just the civilian aircraft carrying President Putin last, but also the ministers of state who came the day

before, plus the press. There were some other bits that you left out because it's very subtle. And perhaps we can go through that. There is a kind of, let's call it a secret or subliminal set of signals from this, which are very important to corroborate what I believe to have been the difference between the Russian source interpretation of what happened, Trump's frustration, on which he put a good face at what happened. The very brevity of what happened compared to the schedule. By the way, the schedule was announced in advance by the Kremlin. The White House was very slow, put up an official itinerary, and they were very slow in identifying how many people were on the US delegation and who, and how many events there would be in what order and with what duration. So what happened was far too little, far too short for a negotiation on terms. Second, it was a significant success from a Russian point of view. I'll explain that in a minute. And third, President Putin turned in a performance that was highly collectively addressed to the home audience. He mobilized more than 20 officials in the Kremlin the day before to discuss what would be discussed. And he had discussed on the telephone with almost all Russia's allies over the previous week, what would be discussed.

DL: Before you actually get into what happened, because I think it would be useful for us to show clips of the press conference. And then, after our audiences had the benefit of seeing some of these clips, I wanted you to offer us your views on what actually happened to this thing. But I don't want to prevent you from continuing your analysis of what happened upon the arrival of Vladimir Putin. Yeah. So if you have something more to say about that, please, please go ahead. If not, I'd like to show some clips before we continue talking about what happened.

JH: Let me quickly insert what happened visually that indicated how much control President Putin was showing. What you didn't see as each president got out of his airplane – it's quite a ceremony. Each president of the two most powerful states on Earth nuclear wise, and each gets out of this airplane and walks towards the other in a manner of speaking. It's on US territory. Yes. In Putin's walk, he gives two thumbs up as he walks towards Trump. It's a long walk. And he does this. And you can hardly see it. But I've spent a long time looking at this carefully. And there are some body language analyses, which slow things down and let you see what Putin was doing was signaling to Trump: We've agreed, don't worry, it's all taken care of – as indeed my Russian sources believe had been agreed before they arrived, which explains a lot that followed. Second, when President Putin met with the emissary, Steve Witkoff, in the Kremlin the weekend before, he made a highly unusual, highly unusual head bow to Witkoff at the shake-hands-welcoming in the Kremlin. I've never seen it before. Never seen it before. Presidents do not bow to messenger boys, ever.

Now I know a lot of people who've heard me explain this with a picture that it's customary for judo adepts like President Putin to do that. No, no. Judo bows come from the waist, never from the head. Never from the head. What Putin did was ramrod stiff all the way through the welcome. He never nodded his head. He did not bow towards Trump. He was very sensitive to it. He did bow at the end of the day – and we can come to that – when he went and presented flowers at the graves of Soviet pilots who'd been killed during World War Two's

resupply operations during the war against Germany. He bowed, crossed himself and presented flowers at each of the graves. That's the only time and it's well within Christian Orthodox tradition to have done what he did. What he showed on this occasion was a physical demonstration of his unreadiness to concede unreasonably to the US. And what Trump showed with his display of power was the usual unreasonable display of US power. I hope that explains it, but there's a lot more body language we can talk about because it's a reasonable explanation of what actually began to happen. But by all means, let's look at the press conference so I can then tell you who didn't show up and why.

DL: Okay, so as I indicated, the press conference lasted for a little more than 12 minutes. Interestingly, President Putin spoke for nearly eight of those 12 minutes.

JH: Yes.

DL: And well over one half of his time, maybe even two thirds of it was devoted to discussing the positive aspects of the historical relationship between Russia and the United States, as well as the fact that the two nations are close neighbors, literally several kilometers away from each other, territorially speaking. President Putin then had this to say about the Ukraine war and his dealings with President Trump.

Vladimir Putin (VP): ...And you know fully well that one of the central issues was the situation around Ukraine. We see the strife of the administration and President Trump personally to help facilitate the resolution of the Ukrainian conflict. And his strife to get to the crux of the matter to understand this history is precious. As I've said, the situation in Ukraine has to do with fundamental threats to our security. Moreover, we've always considered the Ukrainian nation, and I've said it multiple times, a brotherly nation. How strange it may sound in these conditions. We have the same roots. And everything that's happening is a tragedy for us, a terrible wound. Therefore, the country is sincerely interested in putting an end to it. At the same time, we're convinced that in order to make the settlement lasting and long term, we need to eliminate all the primary roots, the primary causes of that conflict and we've said it multiple times, to consider all legitimate concerns of Russia and to reinstate a just balance of security in Europe and in the world on the whole. And I agree with President Trump, as he has said today, that naturally, the security of Ukraine should be ensured as well. Naturally.

DL: Okay, so, Russia's government has been saying, John, since no later than June of last year, that to end the war, the root causes of the war will have to be addressed. And we just heard that from Russia's president, again, after this nearly three hour meeting face to face with President Trump. Now, in that press conference, he didn't reiterate what the root causes are, but we know from prior statements, many of them, not just by President Putin, but also by various senior officials of the Putin administration, that they include NATO membership for Ukraine, the militarization of Ukraine, something that the Russian Federation wants to undo, Kiev's disregard for the rights of Ukraine's Russian speakers, and of course, the territorial question, who will have sovereignty over those four oblasts that Russia has

annexed and Crimea. In the lead up to this meeting, Donald Trump claimed that there would be land swaps between Russia and Ukraine. And he and other Trump administration officials strongly implied that Russia was prepared to make major concessions from its core demands. But I heard nothing in that press conference, nor have I seen any statement from Russia's government since the press conference ended. And by the way, I went to the website of TASS, saw nothing there, which enlightened us as to what happened. At least I didn't see anything. I went to the website of RT International. I went to the website of the office of the Russian president. And I saw nothing which causes me to think that there were any concessions made from Russia's oft repeated core demands. And so my question to you is, first of all, have you seen any indication, either in the press conference or from subsequent straight statements from reliable officials that Russia's core demands have materially changed?

JH: No, no, categorically no. Indeed, what's happening here in my belief, but let's put it another way, in the belief of the Russian sources, we've all had a very long night from a Russian point of view. So people are groggy. People are also a bit euphoric. The state PR line, and you mentioned RT, that's a state PR organ. A much more reliable source to follow in events like this is RIA Novosti, which gives you time tags and ball by ball, moment by moment, clips and texts for events like these, not RT. But there hasn't been a change of Russian positions. What there was in advance of this meeting, as I understand it from my Russian sources, who were not speaking euphorically, who were speaking realistically and in a position to know and whose positions to know, I've been testing for weeks now. Their view was, basically to put it in a very simple way, Trump's position as expressed by Witkoff a week ago in the Kremlin was "give me a ceasefire so I can get out of this war". Very simple. Give me a ceasefire so I can get out of this war. When Putin says in the press conference and bear in mind, as you noted, that was a written speech. He was reading it. It had been prepared before the press conference. Arguably, it had been prepared before he landed. It would have been modified and anything significantly changed during the proceedings. But President Trump has a very short attention span. He could barely sit still or stand still listening to Putin talk for eight minutes out of 12. Bear in mind, Trump didn't have any papers prepared. Any at all. He improvised very easily and finished. What happened was that the Russian side agreed as Putin said, President Trump is not the best bet that we could have ever imagined but he is the only choice we've imagined who's been practically there. He has been the one striving to end this war. First. Second, Trump and Putin agreed that had Trump been president, this is a myth, but they agreed publicly and Trump repeated what Putin had agreed to – if Trump had been president, there would be no such war.

DL: John, I'd like to actually show that clip. I was going to ask you about it so we may as well share that now. Sorry.

JH: Okay.

VP: And one more thing. I'd like to remind you that in 2022, during the last contact with the previous administration, I tried to convince my previous American colleague the situation

should not be brought to the point of no return when it would come to hostilities. And I said it quite directly back then that it's a big mistake. Today when President Trump said that if he was the president back then, there would be no war and I'm quite sure that it would indeed be so.

DL: So there you have it. He's embracing the oft repeated statement from Trump that if he had been the president in the last administration, the war in Ukraine would never have happened. Sorry. Please continue, John.

JH: This is very important. This goes to the issue of what was agreed in advance and therefore what the purpose of this meeting was for the Russian side and for the American side, why it was so much shorter than scheduled and why Vice President Vance wasn't there at all. He was in England as an official guest of the British foreign minister. These are all significant, let's call them corroborating bits of evidence. I believe my Russian sources are right. There was an agreement in principle in advance. Trump says, give me a ceasefire so I can get out of this war. The Russian side says, we will go along with the idea that if we give you that, you show us you're getting out of the war. We will reinforce the line that if the war is lost, it will be the Europeans and Zelensky who will have lost it, not you. Russia will be agreeing that Russia and the United States do not want to fight a war against each other, at least not in Europe. And you have to listen to what Trump has to say about China in the Hannity interview with Fox a few minutes after that press conference. And what the Russian side understands to be the American position was set out in a script written for Hegseth at a NATO council meeting, I believe it was on Thursday. Essentially, and we've talked about it before, the Russian view is, the American view is the US are not going to fund and not directly arm the Ukrainian war. If the Europeans can buy stuff and want to fight on against the US Russian agreement in principle on a ceasefire and lose, that's their lookout. The US is not going to bail out.

DL: I'd like to interrupt again, because I want to show that clip again. You and I are on the very same wavelength in terms of what really is important here.

JH: Yes.

DL: I'd like to show a clip of a recent interview with J.D. Vance in which he says essentially what you just said. So please everyone have a listen.

J.D. Vance: We're done with the funding of the Ukraine war business. Fundamentally, this is something where the president needs to force President Putin and President Zelensky really to sit down to figure out their differences. We have a lot of economic points of leverage and we're willing to use those to bring about peace. And that was a big thing that happened. Your point about weapons, what we said to the Europeans is simply, first of all, this in your neck of the woods, this is in your back door, you guys have got to step up and take a bigger role in this thing. We're done with the funding of the Ukraine war business. We want to bring about a peaceful settlement to this thing, we want to stop the killing, but Americans I think are sick of

continuing to send their money, their tax dollars to this particular conflict. If the Europeans want to step up and actually buy the weapons from American producers, we're okay with that, but we're not going to fund it ourselves anymore.

DL: Okay, I have to interject here with the question, John, because I've got to be clear about this. And before I highlight the inherent contradiction between the positions articulated in that video, I just want to remind people that back in February, US Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, I believe it was in Brussels, gave a speech to his European counterparts and NATO officials about this division of labor between the United States and European Union. Whereas Vance in that clip we just saw is kind of non-committal about selling weapons. He says, look at the Europeans wanting to buy our weapons and give it to Ukraine, we're okay with that. Hegseth was actually, I thought, more assertive and he basically said, you need to drastically increase your military spending and you need to buy weapons, including from us and give them to Ukraine. So you will assume the responsibility for continuing that fight whereas we will redirect our resources and effort to the People's Republic of China and other perceived enemies, for example, Iran. So I can't believe that people take seriously the idea that the Trump administration wants to stop the killing but is encouraging Europeans, even insisting, that's the way I read Hegseth's speech, that they drastically increase their military spending, buy weapons from the United States and then transfer them to Ukraine. How is that consistent with their stated desire to stop the killing in Ukraine?

JH: The consistency is explained, Dimitri, if you accept the unstated US position that the war's been lost. And that nothing the Europeans can do will save the Ukrainian regime in Kiev. Hegseth repeated the line in a speech last Thursday. I'll read it out. It says almost the same things. "Together", says Hegseth, but this wasn't written by him. He's incapable. It was written by Colby Elbridge under the section of defense for policy. That's where the brain starts and stops in the Pentagon. "Together" – and I'm reading it, looking down at my notes, – "we can establish a division of labor that maximizes our comparative advantages in Europe and Pacific respectively". Division of labor. The US will concentrate on war with China. If the Europeans want to fight Russia on the Ukrainian battlefield Vance and Hegseth offer to sell them the weapons, but not guarantee that they will win the war. They will lose the war, but the Russian side is saying, well, all right, we've heard this. This is a strategy of sequencing. You want to move on. We've told you that the base primary causes of the war, the root causes, are the advance of NATO in order to destroy us, the Ukrainian platform being a battlefield to destroy us. Therefore, we will give you a ceasefire. You prove to us that the war is over for you. You will not secretly facilitate the platform and call it a European war.

No, no, no. My Russian sources, we can entertain a lot of skepticism about that, but let's understand how they think and why they think this was a good outcome and why it was so short. The Russians think that the US side has agreed to the incorporation of all four regions plus Crimea, first. Second, some form of security guarantee that embodies demilitarization of Ukraine from a Russian point of view and protection of what's left of Ukraine from a European and an American point of view. And that that might be, Hegseth added in his speech, a non-NATO mission, which may have Europeans in it, may have non-Europeans in

it. The essential thing then that's left out because it's Vance's job in England to convince the Europeans, starting with the British, that they better sign on to the terms that Trump and Putin have agreed, or they can face the war alone and lose it because that's the deal, if you like, that Putin will let Trump off the hook for having lost the war. He will give him the grandstand for having won the peace. Both of these are baloney, okay? We know that, everybody knows that. Putin is quite right. Trump is the only possibility presenting itself in Washington DC of a solution that's less destructive, less violent than the one the Europeans have in mind, than the chancellor of Germany has in mind and so on.

So that doesn't mean that from a Make America, Make the Empire Great Again point of view, that the US is abandoning NATO or abandoning the reinforcement and rearmament of both Germany, the new redeployment of nuclear weapons all the way up the Northern front, across the Arctic front, down the Far Eastern front to the China border, not to mention the Southern border with the war against Iran, the war against Palestine, the wall that the US is beginning to develop in the South Caucasus in Armenia and Azerbaijan. That doesn't mean that from a Russian point of view, that there's any illusion about two things. One is that the US is an expanding imperial state that threatens Russia. No doubt, it's not a conversion there. Two, that anything the US signs can be trusted. No belief there either. But on the other hand, here's a test of Putin and Trump face to face for the first time. Trump being in power now to establish whether what he says is what he'll do. And you heard the voice of the reporter before she asked the question to Mr. Putin whether he's gonna stop killing civilians. And by the way, Putin was speaking in English to Trump. He speaks pretty good English and he certainly understands English. The question was are you ready for a ceasefire? And that's a crucial question which we've talked about before. The European demand was as expressed by General Kellogg representing Trump who wasn't allowed to be at this conference – there were other US generals in Anchorage, General Caine from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and General Grynkewich who's the new head of SACEUR, the new Supreme Allied Commander of Europe. They were the generals, not somebody like Kellogg. What is understood here is that the US side has to prove that it's walking away from this war definitively. And that a ceasefire is something Russia's willing to offer with these conditionals.

DL: When you talk about conditionals, I did not hear you mention the issue of Ukraine's membership in NATO. Is it your understanding from your Russian sources and the information available to you that that's part of this deal that the United States will object to, veto, obstruct Ukraine's members in NATO or have they, as you understand it, parked that issue?

JH: No doubt about this. I'll just read it to you, exactly what Hegseth said on Thursday: "The United States does not believe that NATO membership for Ukraine is a realistic outcome of a negotiated settlement. Instead, any security guarantee must be backed by capable European and non-European troops deployed under a non-NATO mission." So no question, from a Russian point of view, if the US is telling the truth, if the Secretary of Defense can be believed when he tells it to the NATO Council, "no NATO membership". But that's a formality to the extent that a Ukrainian battle platform is being constructed without NATO

membership, and that's what the war's being fought to stop. So I'm putting it to you that the Russian sources believe Trump's sincerity in agreeing to each of these provisions. No NATO, incorporation of the four regions plus Crimea, security guarantees for Ukraine, and very important, no secondary sanctions against India and China, no attempt to destroy the international oil trade, and the abandonment, the non-enforcement, of primary sanctions against Russia. The sanctions war is to be relieved.

Now, all of these things can't happen all at once. They aren't likely to be written down, even now. But what happened in Anchorage was a test of one thing the Russian side, and particularly President Putin, was not sure about. What happens between Foreign Minister Lavrov, for example, giving foreign minister, Secretary of State Rubio a very clear set of terms and messages to take back to Washington. What happens? What happens when President Putin welcomes Mr. Witkoff in the Kremlin and gives him very clear set terms to take to Washington? What happens? Answer: for the last months, what the Russian side has seen is on the one hand, Trump says one thing, and then within a few hours, he says another thing. He contradicts himself as he did on the way in. On the plane on the way into Anchorage he said, I want to see a ceasefire, an immediate one, I'll be disappointed if there isn't. And then he also says at the press conference, "I'm going to allow the Europeans to tell me what to do". I mean, the contradictions are obvious. So what needed to happen was the Russian side said to Witkoff, okay, you take your message back, but we want to hear it from Trump. We'll tell Trump what we've just told you, Mr. Witkoff. And we want to hear what he has to say. If you want a ceasefire, we'll give it to you, but you give us an end of war for the US. That implies no more intelligence sharing for attacks on Russia, no more arms supplies, direct or indirect. Now that's not yet clear. Therefore the ceasefire isn't yet clear, but what is clear and it's made very clear in the Hannity interview is Trump's agreed not to impose secondary sanctions on India and China in the coming hours. He said weeks. Second, the issue of non-enforcement of primary sanctions is up in the air. So we're in a testing period.

Now, why was the meeting so short? Because it was president Putin testing whether Trump could hear what he had to say. And now in a two hour 45 minute session, remember what happened and didn't happen. It was scheduled according to Yuri Ushakov's announcement on the website of the Kremlin, not on the White House schedule, there was to be a one-on-one round of talks. Putin, interpreter, Trump, interpreter. That didn't happen. Instead, there's three on three. Trump didn't wanna be in the room, couldn't be in the room with Putin by himself. Instead there's Rubio and Witkoff. On the Russian side, Lavrov and Ushakov. And there's nothing else. There was to be an extended delegation. There were 16 US officials among them, all the business money bags that Trump has hired as cabinet officers. Witkoff as an MS3, Lutnik as a commerce secretary, Bessent as the treasury secretary. These are all the men who want business and can discuss relief of sanctions for Russia. They're all there, but they don't participate. In fact, on the Russian side, their equivalent money bag is Kirill Dmitriev, representative of the oligarchs. Dmitriev promotes himself at all these meetings but he was utterly isolated exactly as Lavrov organized in Saudi Arabia months ago. This time, Dmitriev dematerializes in this meeting. What happens is in two hours and 45 minutes, you can subtract 30% of that for translation. You've got about an hour and a half, a bit more, for

discussions. And guess who did all the talking? You heard Putin reading a speech for eight out of 12 minutes. He knew – Putin knows, everybody knows, that Trump can't sit still for more than about five minutes. And the body language analysis of what happens on his face, even in that press conference, is very interesting. He couldn't cope with doing it one-on-one. Remember, he doesn't read. He doesn't have a very good grip on the terms. He knew "ceasefire" was in his head, but he needed the accompaniment of the two. And so what you had was Putin stretching his patience beyond breaking. It's beyond me to say that Trump said, I've had enough of this, let's go home, we've agreed, I've listened to the guy, we'll have a nice thing, but I don't need any more. I don't want to have lunch in Anchorage. I don't need my officials. If they want to make money, let them exchange their bribes. Let them enrich my son with the crypto companies in Dubai. All of that's out of here. I'm going home. Bingo. This thing ends in top speed.

Why? Because it was a test from the Russian side of what Trump could hear. It was the best for Trump of what Putin would say. And it was a test from Trump's point of view. Were the Russians to be relied on not to defeat the US in Ukraine? That's what he cares about. He doesn't want to be the responsible president for an abandonment of Saigon. He doesn't want to be the president for the abandonment of Kabul. He wants the Europeans, if they're stupid enough to pay Trump to lose this war, he wants them to be blamed for themselves. And so he sent Vance. Why isn't Vance there? Vance was announced to be the head of the delegation supporting Trump. In the American press, he wasn't there. And nobody in the American press told us why he wasn't. Well, you know where he was? He was having a fishing holiday in the Cotswolds with the foreign minister Lammy. That's not exactly a holiday. What Vance is doing...

DL: No, please continue your thoughts about Vance.

JH: In my reading of it, Vance's job is the important one. He doesn't have to sit and listen, he can listen a bit longer than Trump. That was Trump's problem. He had to sit and listen.

DL: Right.

JH: The Russian people can sit and listen to Putin for four hours every December. An incredible performance on the president's part and an incredible performance on the Russian people's part. But Trump doesn't have five minutes of patience to listen. So Vance's really important job is to mobilize the British to lead the way in Europe or getting Zelensky on board for the implementation of a ceasefire that lets the US get out of the war and brings the curtain down from a Trump point of view. And that's an exchange of signals of trust which have yet to be proved. But this is how we started. This is why the Russian sources I've talked to through the night believe that this was a significant success for Putin, allowing a significant walk away success for Trump which they're not publishing. Because you look at the Western press: Trump fails to get a ceasefire out of Putin. "Fail, fail, fail". No, not from a Russian point of view. But there's obviously years of distrust of the Americans advancing to

destroy Russia. This is the best bet the Russians have got to stop that on one battlefield without allusions about all the others.

DL: So just a very important point you made about the Hannity interview. I just want to tell our audience exactly what was said. Trump told Fox News Hannity that he would hold off on imposing tariffs on China for buying Russian oil after making progress with Putin. Apparently Trump did not mention India, another major buyer of Russian crude, which has been slapped with a total of 50 percent on US imports. And the quote from that interview is: "Because of what happened today I think I don't have to think about that now", referring to Chinese tariffs. And he goes on and says, Trump: "I may have to think about it in two weeks or three weeks or something but we don't have to think about that right now." And of course the deadline for imposing those tariffs, the secondary sanctions, has passed.

JH: Yes.

DL: Now just another observation, I don't think you need to comment on this, but if you would like to please do so. I imagine – it's interesting that he took Rubio into this meeting – because I imagine that Rubio, first of all we all know Rubio to be a frothing-at-the-mouth-Neocon and probably somebody in that cabinet who doesn't want to see the United States withdraw. I'm not convinced that Rubio actually wants that. But in any event I imagine this is probably the first time that Rubio has actually met Vladimir Putin. I can't think of a circumstance in the past where Rubio would have had an opportunity to sit down and talk to Putin one-on-one so perhaps this has had some positive impact on Rubio's view of this conflict but that remains to be seen. What I really want to talk about next John is this commentary from Trump in the few minutes that he spoke at the press conference with Vladimir Putin.

Donald Trump: I believe we had a very productive meeting. There were many, many points that we agreed on. Most of them, I would say a couple of big ones that we haven't quite gotten there but we've made some headway. So there's no deal until there's a deal. I will call up NATO in a little while. I will call up the various people that I think are appropriate and of course I'll call up President Zelensky and tell them about today's meeting. It's ultimately up to them, they're going to have to agree with what Marco and Steve and some of the great people from the Trump administration...

DL: You heard him say, John, that it's ultimately up to them.

JH: Exactly.

DL: I just find that comical. I'm sorry to be, you know, disrespectful of Trump. It's certainly not the first time I've been disrespectful of Trump, nor will it be the last. But I find that comical. I mean, as Trump himself said in the White House a few months ago, "you ain't got no cards, Volodymyr Zelensky". And, you know, his government is completely and utterly dependent upon American military intelligence and economic aid. So it sounds like he's

basically at least claiming to be conferring upon Zelensky a veto power over whatever deal was struck with the Russian Federation. So what do you make of this comment? First of all, is Trump simply trying to perpetuate the myth that Ukraine remains a sovereign state? Or is he really effectively conferring upon his vassal, because I think that's the best way to view Zelensky vis-a-vis Trump, a veto power over whatever deal he has struck with the Russian president? And if effectively Zelensky can veto this thing, if he can tank the deal, why would anybody think that he isn't going to do that? I mean, didn't they just issue a statement, Zelensky, after meeting with the Europeans, with this maximalist and fantastically ludicrous demand that Russia pay reparations and withdraw from all of the territory and Ukraine will be a part of NATO and the kitchen sink and Bob's your uncle – I mean every imaginable demand that Ukraine could give – and no lifting of sanctions on Russia. That was the position and Zelensky has consistently been maximalist. So it just seems to me that if he in fact does have the ability, if he's being given the authority by the Trump administration to tank the deal, it's a virtual certainty that he will. What do you think about all that?

JH: Well, you're a first rate cross-examining attorney here, Dimitri. Trump put himself in the witness box and you've torn his testimony apart. How does it make sense? And are you, sir, offering a veto to the man you considered, as you said to have had no cards and the only cards you've got are the ones I gave you. The only cards you will have are the ones the Europeans will buy from me to give you. Answer: He's from a Russian point of view at this point of the testing. And we have passed a stage which we hadn't passed before. These two presidents have just met. What's happening is Trump's preparing himself for: "Ultimately, chaps," – you hit the right adverb there, that's exactly what he said, that's a disclaimer – "you want to go on fighting? You can buy the stuff from me, but I'm out. If you lose, I'm not going to bail you out." So in my judgment, the Russian side interprets that to mean he accepts that Putin is offering a ceasefire and terms which weren't negotiated, but which are inherently conditional on Trump and Vance obtaining from the Europeans the squeeze on Zelensky. If they can't and don't, the scheme fails, the ceasefire doesn't come into operation, Trump has offered Putin everything in return for Putin offering everything Trump said he wanted – ceasefire to start with. And it fails. Why? Because Zelensky and the British and the French and particularly the Germans refuse. So Trump says just contact my front office, you can buy all you want, but if you lose, you lose by yourself. Not me. I'm on my way to fighting Iran, to fighting Iran through Pakistan, that direction, fighting Iran from the Azerbaijan direction. I'm on my way to China. I'm on my way to sequencing some other wars where the US has a bigger interest.

Meantime, what Putin has achieved for his allies: Time. Time. It's an MOU that's not a bankable IOU. The terms of agreement to continue to talk are, as Witkoff once falsely promised Iran, the longer you talk, the less we attack with secondary sanctions. He promised India. He promised Modi. He promised Ji. Now, next week, Mr. Jaishankar, the foreign minister of India will lead a very large and important Indian delegation to Moscow for the annual Indian-Russian Intergovernmental Economic Commission. But the headline in India is to discuss rupee trade. What's rupee trade? It's the solution of the problem that the central bank governor Nabiullina, favored by Putin, has refused to solve which blocks the ability of

Russia and India to go on oil trading despite US secondary sanctions. India and Russia need time to solve a problem that from an Indian point of view, Nabiullina and other favorites of the Kremlin's economic administration have refused to settle until now. Now is now.

Next week, there's a serious chance that with the time Putin has gotten out of Trump now the Indians and Russians will come to a better agreement of how to trade without dollars and how to protect the oil trade from the secondary sanctions threat, the primary sanctions threat and from warfare from attacking tankers which is what the Anglo-American special services have been doing. So from a let's call it "pro-Putin" or "Kremlin circle environment" you see this as a very considerable achievement. In politics, you know just as well as our audience does, politics is about very short term successes. And if this is three weeks or a month or two weeks or less or more a lot's been learned. A lot's being learned with a relatively little amount of concession on Putin's part which is why of course the neocon press, why the Ukraine press, why the pro-NATO press, have said Trump lost, Putin won. Well, no, it's not quite that. From a Russian point of view Putin won. But I hope it's clear from a limited conditional point of view this is what had to be understood by the president of Russia and he had to buy it by making the kinds of concessions that allowed Trump to grandstand. But in principle this summit could have happened months ago.

DL: I mean the ludicrous thing about them saying Trump lost is that the war has already lost and it was really lost even before Trump got into the White House. So it's just a question of how are you going to clean up this mess. It's not a question of who's won and who's lost. That's already been resolved. Which brings me to my next question. We haven't talked about the state of the battlefield which to a large degree must be driving all of this, certainly influencing the behavior of various belligerents. What is your assessment and more importantly what do you believe the Russian military's assessment is of the state of the battlefield in Ukraine today? Broadly speaking.

JH: Broadly speaking there is an acceleration of operational movement westward. It's no longer tactical advances, small numbers moving across ground gaining small amounts of territory. Now there's very large amounts of territory that are being gained at the operational level that's increasingly larger numbers of troops, drones air and ground coordination required are advancing into the so-called demilitarized zone area of Ukraine. So to the Dnipropetrovsk Sumy region and so forth. At the same time we have to note that since February when President Putin offered to suspend the electric war campaign, Russia has not been attacking rail junctions and the power that enables Ukrainian trains to run from Poland into Lvov and Kiev in the west and towards the front in the east. That seems – seems – to me to be now changing with increasing frequency of Russian attacks on Ukrainian rail hubs, road hubs, and the ability to to prevent increased reinforcement of the Ukrainian forces to the front. So the front is continuing to move west at a faster rate than before. The daily defense bulletin I read shows a level of casualties announced or losses announced by the Russian defense ministry – around 1300 a day. Ignore what Trump has to say about casualties. And you don't have to believe what the defense ministry announces as the Ukrainian casualties. What I'm saying is the numbers show a high and accelerating rate of loss as the Russian

forces move westward. Now there's a very good independent to some extent pro-Ukrainian Hungarian military officer Mark Takash, who every couple of weeks or a month analyzes the record, mostly open-sourced Ukrainian record, of tactical and operational warfare on the ground at each part of the front from Sumy down to Odessa. And I recommend that folks look at this because this is an infantry officer, not pro-Russian, using mostly Ukrainian sources identifying the trends that I've just summarized. Without his evidence I wouldn't be quite so confident. It would be propaganda. Takash doesn't produce propaganda. He produces a pretty decent account of what is happening on the battlefield. I hope that answers your question. If things continue as they are, the Ukrainian ability for command and control at operational level is disintegrating fast.

DL: So certainly for what it's worth I'm not a military expert. I completely concur with what you've had to say and you added some facts to my understanding of the current state of the battlefield. So this brings me to my last question. In light of this rapidly deteriorating situation, John, for the Ukrainian forces – I don't mean to laugh it's actually tragic what has happened to the country – but what has caused me to chuckle is the disparity between what you just described, which I think is an entirely fair assessment and the maximalist position of the Zelensky regime, backed apparently by all major European governments. It seems that that is also their position. Perhaps here I'm asking you to psychoanalyze, but how do you explain the fact that they are being so maximalist in their demands vis-à-vis the Russian Federation, given the rapidly deteriorating situation on the ground?

JH: Well, I think part of the answer to that's been given by the Ukrainians themselves. Alexey Arestovich, who used to be an advisor in the presidential office of Zelensky, publishes a daily blog. He puffs it full of personal philosophy, which is not so interesting to me, but he clearly says that none of the candidates who are proposed by the outside powers or by the Ukrainian press to be alternative to Zelensky – General Zaluzhnyi, the ambassador in London, and former President Poroshenko, who remains in the Ukraine, and some other possibilities – none of them represent a significant change of line. So he's warning that the attempts to replace Zelensky with these alternatives aren't alternatives at all, won't make any difference. Therefore, I think he's saying, but I won't put words in his mouth, and he hasn't used his own mouth to say this, to see what another Ukrainian who's on the Russian side, Oleg Tsaryov, who's based in Crimea, whom the Ukrainian regime tried to murder a couple of years back, Oleg Tsaryov publishes also on a Telegram platform and analyzes the campaigns to so-called reform Zelensky, has until relatively recently taken the view that Zelensky will survive all these assaults on his credibility, the anti-corruption campaign and so forth, because there's no alternative. If there's no alternative, I don't know, I'm not a... I used to watch Westerns, as did everybody. What happens when the Red Indians, to describe them politically incorrectly, attack a wagon train? Well, you circle the wagons, you jump behind them as cover, and you poke your rifle out at the approaching attackers. You circle the wagons. And you don't ask yourself, am I going to survive this? You do the best you can to survive.

The fact is, as we've just agreed, on the battlefield Ukraine isn't surviving. It's gradually being defeated and annihilated towards capitulation. The alternatives to Zelensky aren't viable. So what is Trump doing that is worth a chuckle? Well, the answer is, I'll just hold it up: Presidential approval rating. Okay, presidential approval rating. Nothing Trump's doing has lifted his negative, net-negative disapproval for months and weeks. All of this Nobel Peace Prize-winning effort to make peace and save lives in the world hasn't convinced a single US voter to shift in his direction. Okay? He's got to face the fact that he must therefore avoid the blame. He must avoid the stab in the back inheritance of having lost the war. That's dangerous. The negative approval rating of his handling of the Ukraine war is about minus 16%. Minus 16% – only his negative approval for inflation is worse. So what's he going to do?

DL: Right.

JH: He's got to circle the wagons and make sure that the only person in the middle of the wagon circle is Zelensky and any European stupid enough to put himself there. So Vance is in England to make sure that Starmer isn't that stupid. Whether Chancellor Merz wants to be that stupid is of no interest to Trump, Vance and the boys, because they'll sell him all the weapons. Merz is obligingly offered 50 billion euros worth of investment fund to buy. Okay, that's it – circle the wagons, keep uttering irrationalities until you haven't got any more bullets and make sure that no one, not a single US voter, blames Trump for stabbing Ukraine in the back and defeating the forces of freedom and all the other nonsense that have been defeated in Ukraine. He must avoid the stab in the back. He must avoid more disapproval than US voters are already giving him. This is a president who's just lost his war in Washington D.C., for Christ's sake. He may have won his military invasion of Los Angeles, but he tried to invade the D.C. police force and militarize the control of the District of Columbia this past week. And he lost in court. He can't replace the police chief of the district in which he's the principal resident. Well, well, well.

DL: For what it's worth, John, you know, my own best guess as to why the Europeans and Zelensky remain maximalist is that they are so politically invested in victory that if they were to accede to Russia's terms, even half of what Russia is demanding, they understand that they'd be turfed out of office in the blink of an eye. And not because the European people are determined to press on to victory. It's because a lot of Europeans will say, you sold us a fake bill of goods, you've been telling us since February 2022 that Ukraine was going to win this war, you've caused us to invest massive amounts of money in this war, you have fueled a conflict which you could have resolved long ago that has killed hundreds of thousands, millions of people probably at this stage. You're a bunch of liars. You're corrupt warmongers and we're fed up with you. And I think that that's ultimately what is going on here. That's my best guess at any rate. I can't read their minds, but it seems to me that they are desperately trying to defer Judgment Day for as long as possible, preferably at a point where they're no longer young enough to do politics, so they're retired from it.

JH: Well, there's certainly that, but they're playing constituency politics. Yes, they may be losing on that battlefield, but they want to preserve the arms builders as constituents. They want to keep building and financing a war against an enemy. They want to preserve those boats in those regions, all of those things. If we took each country, Italy, France. Portugal, Spain, the UK, the Netherlands, one by one, the constituencies would be different. But yes, they can't suddenly say, we see the light. Why? Because their propaganda war has been won. There isn't a single significant mainstream press in any of the European states that I can think of that's anti-war. There's no anti-war movement in the United States of a significant power the way there was during the Vietnam War. They've got to somehow preserve differently from one country to another, one political setup from another, avoiding the blame for losing and somehow, cope with the propaganda defeat. It can't be a defeat because they keep saying that they've won. I mean, you and I and our audience are in the unique position of not believing any of that stuff and finding it impossible to believe that people go on believing it. But the fact is, we're the minority. What we believe and can argue and substantiate, as you've done, Dimitri, with your other guests on each of these fronts, what we can show is not politically powerful in each of the states. We wish it were, but it isn't.

DL: On a closing note, I was reading The Guardian's coverage this morning. It pains me to have to read that newspaper. But I force myself to do so because it's kind of representative of the so-called liberal wing of the mainstream press in the English-speaking world. And it was just implacably hostile. The tenor of the coverage was implacably hostile to any peace deal between Russia and the United States. And that's supposed to be the progressive end of the political spectrum in the West. So I completely concur with your assessment, John. As always, it is a pleasure to talk to you. Thank you very much for your fine insights. And we will be watching closely in the weeks ahead to see whether or not this mission that J.D. Vance has been sent upon and will be a successful one. So thanks again.

JH: Thank you, Dimitri. Good luck to us.

DL: Good luck to all of humanity. And we're signing off today. I'm coming to you from Kalamata on August 16, 2025.

END

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