

All the Ukrainian Known Knowns

By Victor Davis Hanson

Aside from the rhetoric, there is a growing consensus among Western diplomats, military analysts, military officers, heads of state, and even much of the media about how to end the endless Ukrainian war.



A proposed peace will see a DMZ established somewhere along an adjusted 1,200-mile Ukraine-Russia border. Tough negotiations will adjudicate how far east toward its original borders Russian forces will be leveraged to backstep.

Publicly in the U.S. and covertly in Europe, all accept that a depleted Ukraine will not have the military strength to retake Crimea and the Donbas.

In 2014, both were absorbed by Russia during the Obama administration. Neither that administration nor any since has advocated a military effort to reclaim them.

Loudly, the U.S.—and again quietly Europe—concedes that Ukraine will not be in NATO—a confirmation that Russia will use to justify to its people its disastrous invasion, and even many Ukrainians will accept.

How will the West deter Putin from his inevitable agenda of reclaiming lost Soviet territory and Russian-speaking peoples? For now, his army is exhausted, its arsenals depleted, and its reputation shattered.

In the future, a commercial corridor, anchored by concessions to American and international mining concerns, will supposedly serve as a tripwire to deter Putin from attacking in-the-way noncombatant Americans.

More practically, Ukrainian forces will be kept fully armed. They have already inflicted perhaps a million casualties on Putin's forces—possibly five times the dead, wounded, and missing that the Russians lost to the Taliban over that entire decade-long misadventure in Afghanistan.

If Trump can coax even a ceasefire, the oddly bellicose left will still rail about "Munich" and Trump as "Putin's puppet."

But after perhaps 1.5 million total Ukrainian and Russian dead, wounded, sick, and missing, transatlantic leftists will quietly admit they never had any realistic plan to win by fighting Russia to the last Ukrainian.

And they certainly were not willing—despite what they claimed in their spasms of braggadocio—to send U.S., U.K., European, or NATO ground troops into Eastern Ukraine.

Trump has faced criticism for his volatile, art-of-the-deal approach to Ukrainian diplomacy over the last 10 weeks.

Lost in such criticism is that the Biden administration did not even try to end the war. Instead, in the LBJ-style of "light at the end of the tunnel," it parroted the great "spring offensive" to come. And when that gambit disastrously failed, it resorted to the banal blank check of "as long as it takes."

Western leaders simplistically thought that sending more arms,

money, and Ukrainians into the cauldron would eventually break Russia—30 times larger than Ukraine, 10 times richer, over four times more populous, and far less bothered by the mounting toll of its greater losses.

In addition, we even know the likely course of negotiations to end the slaughter.

As soon as Trump pressures Zelenskyy for a ceasefire and a rare minerals mining concession, Putin smells an advantage. So, he digs in and orders his generals to double down on terror strikes for advantage.

And then, once Trump sees that scolding Zelensky empowers Putin to back off from a ceasefire, he turns on Putin and puts far greater pressure on him: a secondary embargo on all who buy Russian oil that even the “on to Moscow” crowd had never envisioned.

Once Putin seems to agree, then Zelenskyy thinks he was had and wants a better mining deal or reconsideration of NATO or more sophisticated weapons—until Trump reminds him that the despised U.S., not his beloved Europeans, is his only route to a shaky peace.

So, we know the negotiations will have a yin and yang until there is no solution other than a ceasefire leading to a Korean-peninsula-like hot peace.

Putin always preferred to exploit the Obamas and Bidens of the world. And he did so in 2014 and 2022, rather than the mercurial, unpredictable, and ultimately dangerous Trump, during whose tenure he stayed put within his borders.

He also knows that for all the talk of his puppet Trump, the latter killed hundreds of the Wagner group, pulled out of an asymmetrical missile deal, first sent offensive weapons to Ukraine, sanctioned Russian oil and oligarchs, warned the Germans not to deal with Putin on the Nord Stream II pipeline,

and bombed into extinction ISIS of Iraq, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, and Qasem Soleimani.

So, Putin knows that India, China, and others who buy his oil will not if he reneges on his willingness for a ceasefire.

If and when peace comes, we can already foresee the misinformation that will follow: Trump deserves no credit. Zelenskyy remains the true hero. A now hollowed-out Russia was the real winner.

The only mystery?

Since when did the anti-war left prefer an endless and horrific war to a difficult, messy peace?

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