

# Conrad Black: The end of Ukraine war is coming

By Conrad Black

Whatever happened in the Trump-Putin meeting, just after this column was written, we are finally getting close to the only satisfactory end to the awful Ukraine war. President Donald Trump deserves credit for being the only western statesman who audibly made the point that the West had two objectives in this war. Of course, Russia could not be permitted to occupy and reabsorb Ukraine. If it had done so, it would in one stroke have regained the largest single piece of what it had lost in its total defeat in the Cold War, which caused the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the collapse of international communism, (and the realignment of the left of the world as spontaneous environmental militants attacking capitalism from a new angle in the name of saving the planet). Ukraine is next to Russia itself the largest and most strategically important component of the former USSR. Apart from being a strategic disaster and a terrible injustice to Ukraine, the Russian conquest of Ukraine would have exposed the Western Alliance as a paper tiger that no aggressive state need take seriously.



President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin arrive at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson on August 15, 2025 in Anchorage, Alaska. (Photo by Andrew Harnik/Getty Images)

The other Western objective, which Trump alone among Western leaders has recognized, is to assist Ukraine in a way that avoids such a profound humiliation of Russia that it settles durably into the potentially lethal embrace of China. Russia is no longer a particularly powerful country: its GDP is smaller than Canada's and its standard of living has fallen as its population shrinks and it has never had enlightened or well-functioning political institutions. Its government is a corrupt despotism to which not the slightest credence can be attached in any context. The Russian army has been exposed in Ukraine as a shower; Russia has failed to take more than about 19 per cent of the country of barely a quarter of its own population and Russia has suffered over a million casualties and more than 50,000 deserters and has been propped up by North Korean and gangster mercenaries and drones from Iran (hardly the great arsenals of tyranny).

But the one serious problem that Russia could inflict upon the West is to agree to the relocation by China of 30 or 40

million of its surplus population to Siberia with the right to exploit the resources of that vast territory which Russia has never been able to do, apart from oil, in exchange for a royalty payment to the Kremlin to keep it afloat politically. This would formalize Russia's vassalage to China and it would for the first time make China a resources-rich country and a significantly more serious rival to the West and particularly to the China-containment group that is gradually taking shape around the United States, Japan, India, South Korea and Australia. Ultimately, while Vladimir Putin must not be allowed to creep in increments back into the borders of Russia from Peter the Great to Brezhnev, it is a distinguished Western civilization that occupies an immense landmass in Eurasia and we want it in the West.

All talk of China surpassing the U.S. economy ended shortly after Trump was inaugurated president for the first time in 2017. The principal geopolitical contest now underway is for the continued expansion of the Western world. In the 1930s, the genuine West was really the United States, France, Great Britain and the advanced members of the British Commonwealth including Canada, and a few of the smaller and more prosperous European countries. It now includes most of Europe, the Americas, much of the Far East, Australasia and part of the Middle East. But until the end of the Cold War, the eastern frontier of the Western world in Europe was only about 150 miles east of the Rhine at the East German border. It advanced in a mighty bound nearly a thousand miles to the eastern border of Poland at the end of the Cold War and is about to advance another 800 miles to the revised eastern border of Ukraine. This is not imperialism; it is benign cultural Darwinism and Western civilization, for all its vulgarity and other failings is the most advanced in the world. We legitimately aspire to have the West extend between Vladivostok and Vancouver, westwards as well as eastwards.

To be fair, Russia has some legitimate partial claim on

Ukraine. It was formally established as a jurisdiction by Lenin after the First World War. It was a contested zone between Poles, Lithuanians, Russians and Tartars, and while it has now demonstrated an unconquerable will to exist as a sovereign country and must be allowed to do so, it has in political terms essentially been a failed state for most of its 34 years in that role. Crimea was part of Russia until Nikita Khrushchev gave it to Ukraine in the 1950s and while even the approximately 17 per cent of Ukrainians who speak Russian as a first language appear to be patriotic Ukrainians, some compromise on borders is not unreasonable, both in recognition of realities on the ground and of historic facts, as well as in the Western interest to protect and strengthen Ukraine without antagonizing Russia to the point that it becomes a permanent client state of China. If Trump can accomplish his double-objective, this could be done in the context of a non-aggression agreement between NATO and Russia, with a general guaranty of Ukraine's revised borders. These could not be the fake guaranties given when Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan gave up the nuclear weapons they had inherited from the USSR in 1993 and 1996.

Putin has bungled this war diplomatically as badly as he has militarily. If he had made serious peace overtures on the basis of what he might now be able to achieve, the war would have ended years ago at much reduced cost in blood, treasure and prestige to Russia. Trump went to such lengths to dangle an unembarrassing peace in front of him that he was widely reviled as being mesmerized by Putin, including by the Trump-deranged media of Canada. Now that Trump has transformed NATO from the flabby "alliance of the willing" in which everyone graciously accepted an American military guarantee but almost nobody, including Canada, contributed anything significant to their self-defence, into a serious strategic force, NATO can be much more helpful to Ukraine. Trump can now sell the most advanced military hardware in the world to its allies without stirring up his isolationist followers, and the NATO allies

can give it on to Ukraine which can make the vagaries of war as well-known to the Russians as they have become to the Ukrainians. And Trump's secondary sanctions will, as his tariffs have done, demonstrate what a matter of commercial life and death access to the U.S. market is to almost every country. Putin has to take what Trump offers and if he doesn't the penalty he will pay will sharply increase every week, commercially and militarily.

When Trump last met Putin in Helsinki in 2018, former CIA director John Brennan called it "treasonous" for not pressing hard enough on Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. We now know that collusion and most of the charges against Russia were a partisan fiction. Now former director John Brennan is finally under criminal investigation for corrupting the CIA and assisting in putting a pastiche of lies and defamations (the Steele Dossier) as supposedly authentic intelligence into the 2016 election campaign, as well as for lying under oath to the Congress. In the jungle of the United States, justice is unreliable, but it is coming now, in America as in Ukraine.

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