The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Who Are the Winners and Losers of Trump's Split With Ukraine?

By Eugene Finkel

March 06, 2025



Saul Loeb / AFP

The rupture between the Trump administration and Ukraine — the Oval Office confrontation, followed by the suspension of U.S. military aid and intelligence sharing with Ukraine — is painful, but not entirely unexpected for Kyiv and its supporters. It portends a break between Ukraine and its European partners such as France and Britain, which tried but ultimately failed to prevent this outcome.

After the meeting, Republican politicians rushed to praise Trump for his supposed defense of U.S. interests, and putting America first. Yet looking at the bigger picture and the main actors involved in the war — the U.S., Ukraine, Russia, Europe and Britain — the outcome of the last several weeks of escalating tensions between Trump and Ukraine is certain for just one of them: the United States lost — and it lost badly.

In the short term, President Trump failed to achieve any of the things he sought. His desire to

freeze the war and quickly resolve the conflict now seems unattainable. He was also unable to get a much-desired stake in Ukraine's rare earth minerals or sideline and potentially remove Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, whom he strongly dislikes, from office. associates with his first impeachment in 2019 and had recently called a "dictator." The stop to U.S. aid to Ukraine is about cutting losses and hoping that pressure might achieve what diplomacy could not, but no U.S. aid also means much decreased U.S. leverage going forward.

Beyond Trump, the longer-term consequences for the U.S. are less certain but still overwhelmingly negative. The administration's policies of undermining the existing transatlantic security structures and alienating and threatening allies while cozying up to President Vladimir Putin's Russia are bound to create a more dangerous, chaotic and unpredictable world. Simultaneously, dismantling the existing instruments of soft and hard power, foreign affairs expertise and state capacity writ large makes navigating or even surviving this more dangerous world much harder for the U.S.

Related article: Welcome to Trump and Putin's Brave New World

For Ukraine, which is clearly exhausted after three years of brutal fighting, the most desirable outcome of engagement with the Trump administration would have been a commitment to continued military support and a ceasefire agreement that included the prospect of NATO membership or, barring that, meaningful security guarantees that would reduce the risk of further Russian aggression. Trump, however, is clearly unwilling to offer such a deal.

The worst possible outcome for Ukraine would have been a bad deal that gives Russia control over occupied territories and keeps Ukraine weakened, exposed, potentially economically exploited by the U.S. and deprived of Western security umbrella. The rhetoric of both Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance suggests that this was precisely the agreement they had in mind. Such an outcome, however, is a sure recipe for a future war once Putin had a chance to regroup and a likely subjugation of Ukraine by the Kremlin. This catastrophic outcome Zelensky was able — at least for now — to avoid.

What Ukraine is left with, therefore, is neither a win nor a total surrender but a continued struggle, for now with no U.S. support but a hope for a better outcome down the road. For now, Ukraine should be able to hold on. But in the long run will have to heavily rely on the increased support of its British and EU partners. Here, Ukraine also has reasons for optimism. Faced with Trump's bullying, the Europeans are now mobilized and seem more determined to invest in their own security than ever.

Related article: Kremlin Accountability for MH17 Is Essential for a Credible Peace

Domestically, Ukraine emerges from the confrontation with Trump more energized and united behind Zelensky, whose already substantial approval rating is now expected to surge to levels unseen since winter-spring 2022. Even if Ukraine fails to keep fighting without the U.S., the eventual outcome would be no worse than what Trump and Vance already sought to impose.

For Putin, an ideal outcome would have been a ceasefire along the lines envisioned by Trump.

That would allow him to wait, rearm and strike again. While this option is currently off the table after the confrontation between Trump and Zelensky, the Kremlin is also content with a continued war against a now weakened Ukraine. For Putin, the status quo is vastly preferable over a ceasefire agreement that includes security guarantees for Ukraine that would limit the Kremlin's ability to subjugate Ukraine in the future. The Russian economy is struggling but not yet collapsing — and thus while Putin has not, or at least not yet, won much from the rupture between the U.S. and Ukraine, he has gained something and certainly has not lost anything.

The final actor is Europe — the EU and Britain. They, after the U.S., are the second-largest losers of the current crisis. The realization that Trump's America is not a reliable ally and possibly even a hostile power is a shockingly painful new reality for a continent that has become accustomed to relying on Washington's security umbrella. These days are likely over. But while the United States is busy destroying what it already possesses, Europe has a chance to build its own new, powerful and durable security structures that would not depend on the whims of U.S. voters and their representatives. Whether it will happen it is up to the Europeans and their ability to fully understand that a new era is coming and rise to the occasion.

The views expressed in opinion pieces do not necessarily reflect the position of The Moscow Times.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2025/03/06/who-are-the-winners-and-losers-of-trumps-split-with-ukraine-a88275