

## MNI POLITICAL RISK ANALYSIS-Trump Speaks To Euro Leaders Ahead Of Putin Summit

by Adam Burrowes and Tom Lake

CNN [reports](#) that the high-profile 15 August meeting between US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin will take place at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska.

- In preparation for Friday's meeting, Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on 12 August. "Both sides confirmed their commitment to ensure a successful event," per a State Department readout.
- At 09:00 ET 14:00 BST, Trump will hold an emergency call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders to discuss the Ukraine war and strategy for the Putin meeting. Zelenskyy, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, and several European leaders will dial into the White House from Germany.

Zelenskyy and the Europeans will impress on Trump that an unfavourable deal for Ukraine is unlikely to resolve the security threat Russia poses to Europe. They are likely to warn Trump that recent battlefield advances by Russia, designed to convey a position of battlefield strength, may not be a reasonable reflection of the trajectory of the war.

- The worst-case scenario for Europe is that Putin is able to convince Trump that a Russian victory is inevitable. Such an outcome could feed into Trump's desire to see a quick resolution to the conflict and compel Trump to increase pressure on Zelenskyy to swallow territorial losses and restrictions on Ukraine's military and potential NATO/EU membership.
- While the White House has stressed that the meeting is a "listening exercise" for Trump rather than a negotiation, European leaders fear that Trump may be susceptible to Russian talking points.

Zelenskyy told reporters yesterday that Ukraine will not cede the eastern Donbas region comprising the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts without security guarantees: *"For Russians, Donbas is a bridgehead for a future new offensive. Any territorial issues cannot be separated from security guarantees."*

- Bloomberg [notes](#) ceding Donbas, *"would require Zelenskyy to order troops to withdraw from 9,000 square kilometers (3,474 square miles) of Ukrainian territory, handing Moscow a victory that its army couldn't achieve militarily for more than a decade."*
- The [Atlantic](#) writes: *"Putin has shown no sign of compromising his positions. His demands to reach an end to hostilities remain maximalist: He wants Russia to keep the territory it conquered, and Ukraine to forgo the security guarantees that could prevent Moscow from attacking again. Those terms are nonstarters for Ukraine and the European nations that have rallied to its defense."*

Military analysts noted this week that a new Russian operation has broken through part of the Ukrainian frontline. The operation is the first significant change in frontline control in

months, but still minor relative to the human cost for Russia. A point that Zelenskyy will stress to Trump.

- Zelenskyy told reporters: *"In this month, [Russia] will try to demonstrate advances in all directions to politically press Ukraine, demanding concessions. We understand this, and our army is preparing for this."*
- In an [interview](#) with Sid Rosenberg yesterday, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, arguably the most prominent Russia hawk in the Trump administration, acknowledged the heavy Russian casualty rate: *"This war means a lot to Putin. ... The last month...I think in July they lost 60,000 Russians. Not lost like missing in action—like dead."*
- As noted in the [12 August edition](#) of MNI's US Daily Brief, the Russian operation appears to have driven an 18km wedge into Ukraine's frontline. It is unclear if the operation will durably change the frontline, but shortages of Ukrainian fighting troops may force Kyiv to divert personnel from other strategically important defensive positions, opening up more vulnerabilities.

**Figure 1: Territory Gained in Russian Offensive Operation**



Source: Institute for the Study of War, Daily Telegraph

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told reporters yesterday: *“The goal of this meeting is for the president to walk away with a better understanding of how we can end this war... This is a listening exercise for the President.”*

- She added that Trump *“hopes in the future there can be a trilateral meeting with these leaders to finally bring this conflict to an end.”*
- Both Leavitt and State Department spokesperson Tammy Bruce made statements to the press seemingly aimed at calming European nerves. Both said it was Putin who ‘suggested the meeting,’ and both stressed *“this is not a negotiation.”*

Thomas Graham, a Russia expert at the Council of Foreign Relations, said he believes it is likely the meeting would not be held if there is not the expectation internally for some substantive US-Russia agreement to emerge from it, per Laura Rozen at Diplomatic.

- Graham said: *“Whether [US envoy Steve] Witkoff conveyed properly to the Russian side what the conditions were for this meeting or not, we don’t know, in part because we don’t know what the conditions exactly were.”*
- *“But a failure at this point for the presidents to meet and agree on something substantive obviously [would] be a significant setback. And will, I think, put a lot of pressure on the White House to reconsider how it wants to move forward in its relationship with Russia.”*
- The most obvious outcome sought by the White House is Putin’s approval of a bilateral, or trilateral, meeting with Zelenskyy. Putin has so far resisted such a meeting, although the Kremlin has kept the door open.

## European Leaders Tread Fine Line In Backing Kyiv Without Alienating Trump

The European leaders set to be present on the call with Trump face a difficult task in both demonstrating their continued commitment to backing Ukraine in its war against Russia’s invasion, without sparking a backlash from the US president, who has touted efforts to reach a peace agreement as soon as possible.

- While in January, Trump referred to the EU as a “nasty” organisation, [“formed in order to screw the United States”](#), his tone has somewhat shifted. Following the NATO summit in June, Trump said that he was impressed by leaders’ commitment to their countries, and a shortly before today’s call he posted on his Truth Social platform *“Will be speaking to European Leaders in a short while. They are great people who want to see a deal done.”*
- Present on a video call starting at 08:00ET/13:00BST/14:00CET from the European side will be the host, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, alongside Zelenskyy. Finnish President Alexander Stubb, French President Emmanuel Macron, Italian PM Giorgia Meloni, British PM Sir Keir Starmer, and Polish PM Donald Tusk will participate, as will European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, Council President Antonio Costa, and NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte.
- The call with Trump and Vice President JD Vance (calling in from his vacation in England) will take place an hour later. At ~10:00ET/15:00BST/16:00CET the ‘coalition of the willing’ (the countries that have volunteered troops for any eventual peacekeeping duties in Ukraine) has a call hosted by Germany, France and the UK.



Finally, Merz will hold a press conference going over the flurry of diplomatic activity at 12:00ET/17:00BST/18:00CET

For the European leaders, there is a clear objective of impressing on Trump that negotiations with Putin cannot begin until there is a ceasefire along the frontlines.

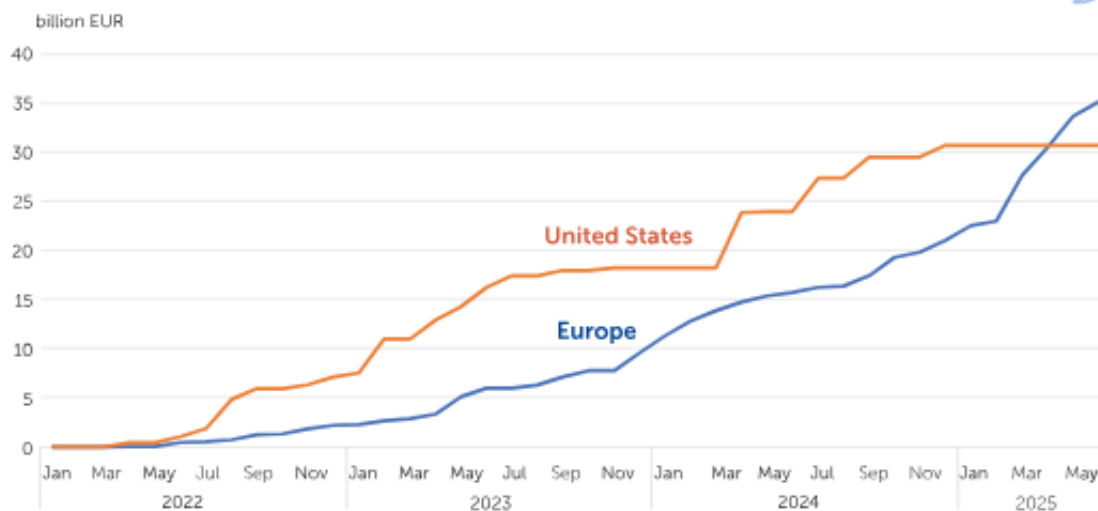
- Trump has recently talked up the prospect of 'land swaps' in order to reach a peace deal, but Zelenskyy has warned against such an idea.
- Legally, the president's hands are tied on such an idea. Article 73 of the Ukrainian Constitution stipulates that *"Issues of altering the territory of Ukraine are resolved exclusively by an All-Ukrainian referendum."*

There has been speculation that the European leaders could look to present a more robust stance towards their support for Ukraine and opposition to any concessions to Putin. European countries are now (if taken as a single bloc) the [primary financial and military supplier to Kyiv](#) as the US draws down its support under the Trump administration.

- While Ukraine would find itself significantly disadvantaged without any US backing, the support of European countries would likely prove sufficient to ensure some form of armed resistance to Russia's invasion could continue into the medium-to-long term.



## Military Aid via Defense Procurement (Cumulative): US and Europe (2022–June 2025, billion Euros)



Note: This graph shows the cumulative value of military aid procured or planned to be procured from defense industries. Military aid drawn from donors' armed forces stockpiles or cases where donors do not specify the source of the weapons is excluded. In this graph, "Europe" refers to all EU member states, the United Kingdom, Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland.

Source: Kiel Institute for the World Economy: Ukraine Support Tracker

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