

TRUMP CONFESSES THAT THE UNITED STATES IS A CLIENT OF RUSSIA

There's a great deal of normalcy bias in the reporting on Trump's capitulation. NYT reports (based on watching the Sunday shows) that Marco Rubio and Steve Witkoff "hint" that Putin will make concessions to reach a plea deal with Ukraine, without questioning whether those are anything but personal inducements to Trump (like a Trump Tower) and without noting that Wikoff is incompetent to understand what would be a real concession in any case. WaPo describes that Putin was willing to offer security guarantees, without noting that guarantees without NATO are useless (and one of the tools Putin has used to lull his imperial victims in the past).

Curiously, one place that is not suffering from normalcy bias is WSJ's editorial page, which notes what is being shared with "friendly media" (seemingly excluding WSJ from that moniker) are "worse than worthless."

The President went into the summit promising "severe consequences" if there was no agreement on a cease-fire. He left the summit having dropped the cease-fire with no consequences in favor of Vladimir Putin's wish for a long-term peace deal as the war continues. Mr. Trump took new sanctions on buyers of Russian oil off the table.

Mr. Trump also said the burden is now on Ukraine to close the deal. European leaders told the press that, in his conversations with them, Mr. Trump said Mr. Putin demanded that he get all of Ukraine's Donetsk region, which would mean that Ukraine give up its main line of defense in the east.

White House leaks to friendly media suggest Mr. Putin promised that, in return for Donetsk, he'll stop his assault and won't invade other countries. No wonder Russian commentators and Putin allies were celebrating the summit's results. Their President ended his isolation in the West, made no public concessions, and can continue killing Ukrainians without further sanction.

Mr. Putin's promises are worse than worthless. He has broken promise after promise to Ukraine and the West. This includes the 1994 Budapest Memorandum promising to defend Ukraine against outside attack, and multiple Minsk agreements. He wants Donetsk because he would gain at the negotiating table what he hasn't been able to conquer on the battlefield. It would also make it easier to take more territory when he or his successor think the time is right to strike again.

The silver lining is that European leaders say Mr. Trump told them Mr. Putin had agreed to accept "security guarantees" for Ukraine. The suggestion is that the U.S. might even be one of those guarantors, albeit outside NATO. But Mr. Trump provided no details.

For guarantees to have real deterrent effect, they would have to include foreign troops in Ukraine. Kyiv would need the ability to build up its military and arms industry.

All this is distracting from the question not asked at the Sunday shows yesterday: Why Trump's team walked out of their meeting with Putin looking like they had seen death.

Let's recap what got us here:

- Some weeks ago, Trump gave Putin the 50 days the Russian president wanted before he would come to the table. Then, as Putin kept bombing, making Trump look weak, Trump shortened the timeline to ten days. But instead of imposing the sanctions that Lindsey Graham had spent months crafting, Trump instead sent Steve Witkoff to Moscow. Witkoff, *by design* (because this is what happens when you choose to put someone with no relevant expertise or temperament in charge of negotiating deals), came back promising deals he couldn't describe, it's just not clear for whom.
- On an impossibly short notice, Trump arranged to host Putin on former Russian land. Going in, Trump promised that if Russia didn't deal on a cease fire, there would be tough consequences. Europeans and Volodymyr Zelenskyy smelled a rat, but didn't succeed in convincing Trump how badly he would be manhandled.
- And manhandled he was. Sergei Lavrov showed up wearing a CCCP jersey, Putin

displayed undisguised contempt for everyone. And Trump walked out looking ashen. Putin treated Trump like a menial client.

- Trump told Sean Hannity that he shouldn't have done his interview right afterwards, and I wonder if he had not – if Trump had not felt it necessary to immediately declare a success, ten of ten – then Trump's team might have tried to find a way out. But whatever Trump then said to Zelenskyy and European leaders made them realize things were worse than they anticipated.
- Trump sent out Rubio and Witkoff on the Sunday shows to basically defer, making transparently bullshit claims of concessions from Russia. But today, Trump is making it clear that he will make demands Zelenskyy cannot accept – the Crimea recognition Trump floated to get elected in 2016, and no hopes of NATO membership – even while suggesting that Zelenskyy will have to make all the concessions.

Effectively, Putin ordered Trump to make Ukraine capitulate. Hell, maybe he even gave Trump a deadline.

And I would be unsurprised if Trump does what happened in February, after he bullied Zelenskyy, but for which Trump later blamed Pete Hegseth's incompetence. I would be unsurprised Trump withdrew US intelligence sharing, without which Ukraine cannot defend itself, possibly even halting the sale of weapons to Ukraine.

But the implications of all this are much larger. These demands, particularly the demand that Ukraine turn over the part of Donetsk that Moscow has never conquered, would leave Ukraine defenseless. Conceding these demands would make Zelenskyy vulnerable (indeed, one of Russia's puppets in Ukraine is already challenging his leadership). Ukraine really is the front line of Europe – of Moldova (with elections scheduled in September), of Czechia (with elections scheduled in October), of the Baltics, where Putin has been staging for some time.

And remember: one of the promises Trump floated during the election, one of the promises that – Nicolay Patrushev said – is why Russia helped reinstall Trump is that Trump limit intelligence sharing with Europe, all of it. Europe relies on that intelligence to combat Russia's influence operations within Europe. Without that intelligence, one after another country would fall to a pro-Russian party.

Since returning to office, Trump has dismantled every tool the US created to win the Cold War. It doesn't need to be the case that Trump has stashed his Administration with actual Russian agents – narcissism and venality explain much of what we're seeing – but there are somewhere between two and twenty Trump advisors who I have good reason to suspect are Russian agents. Over the past three years, right wingers have forced the tech platforms to eliminate the moderation that had provided visibility on Russia's influence operations. As I laid out, Trump dismantled US Russian expertise and the investigative tools created to hunt and prevent Russian influence operations in the US. Meanwhile, he is willfully bankrupting the

country based on plans largely adopted in joint venture with Putin client Viktor Orbán.

Trump has made the United States powerless against Russia, and I expect he will be instructed to make Europe powerless against Russia as well.

This is the point I'm trying to convey: All of Trump's power depends on his continued reinforcement of the disinformation that Russia used to get him elected the first time. Without Russia's continued indulgence, the foundational myths to Trump's power would crumble.

Particularly amid the willful destruction of US power, it would provide cause – and maybe even the will, among right wingers – to expel and prosecute him.

The hold Putin has over Trump is existential for Trump. And unless we can expose that, the US will increasingly become a mere satellite of Russia.

Trump is not making America great. He is gutting America.

This is not just about forcing Ukraine to surrender.

Trump has surrendered. And going forward, it is only going to get worse.