

## Russian Officials Expressed Cautious Optimism in Response to Zelensky-Trump Meeting

By Kateryna Stepanenko

- **The Kremlin is falsely portraying US peace efforts in Ukraine as aligned with Russia's objective of destroying Ukraine's sovereignty.**
- **Russian state media and officials are misrepresenting US policy to suggest a shift toward supporting Russian goals, despite no official change from the Trump Administration.**
- **Some Russian officials express optimism that the US will soon cut military aid to Ukraine, believing it would enable Russia's victory.**
- **Russian officials falsely claim that peace in Ukraine requires a Russian victory, misrepresenting US policy to their domestic audience.**
- **The Kremlin is using the Zelensky-Trump meeting to rally domestic support for the war, falsely framing it as a defense of Russian sovereignty.**
- **Russian officials are promoting baseless claims that the US will remove Zelensky from office and are suggesting a shift in US policy that undermines European security.**

**The Kremlin is falsely framing the US objectives of achieving peace in Ukraine as being aligned with Russia's stated objectives of destroying Ukraine as a sovereign state in the aftermath of the February 28 White House meeting between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and US President Donald Trump.** Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov responded to the Zelensky-Trump meeting on March 3 by falsely framing Moscow and Washington, DC, as being aligned on settling Russia's war in Ukraine, while deliberately framing Ukraine's ongoing defensive operations against Russian aggression and increasing European support for Ukraine as the emergence of the "pro-war party."<sup>[1]</sup> Peskov said that Russia will continue its war in Ukraine in the meantime to "achieve all Russian goals," which the Kremlin set at the start of the full-scale invasion. Peskov likely deliberately avoided specifying Russian maximalist objectives in Ukraine, which include the destruction of the Ukrainian state and military and the capitulation of the Ukrainian government.<sup>[2]</sup> Peskov's oversimplification of Russia's demands attempts to portray the US policy for achieving a just peace settlement in Ukraine with increased European support as the same as the Kremlin's goal of forcing Ukraine to surrender, which is not the case.

**On March 2, the Russian state media apparatus also deliberately miscontextualized Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov's February 26 Russian state TV interview,**

**presenting it as a response to the White House meeting.** In the interview, Peskov commended the US decision to vote against a United Nations (UN) resolution that recognized Russia as the aggressor in the Ukraine war.[3] Russian state media particularly amplified Peskov’s statement that “the new [US] administration is rapidly changing all policy configurations” which “largely coincides with [Russia’s] vision” only on March 2, two days after the contentious White House meeting.[4] The Kremlin tightly controls all Russian state media, and it is highly likely that Russian propagandists highlighted Peskov’s February 26 statement on March 2 to inaccurately frame the US position on Ukraine and European security as aligned with Russia.

The United States and Russian positions are not compatible, as the Trump Administration had called on Europe to provide security guarantees, which Russia is actively attacking.[5] The Trump Administration also noted that the US objective is to “bring an end to this conflict in a way that’s fair, enduring, sustainable and acceptable to all parties involved, “whereas the Kremlin continues to reiterate that Russia will continue its war in Ukraine without making any meaningful concessions.[6]

**Russian lower-level officials also signaled cautious optimism that the United States has changed its policy on Ukraine in a way that supports the Kremlin’s objective of destroying Ukraine as a sovereign state in response to the Zelensky-Trump meeting.** Statements made by Russian lower-level officials, such as State Duma deputies, local officials, and party leaders, are aimed at shaping the domestic perception in Russia about the Kremlin’s war in Ukraine. The statements made by lower-level Russian officials suggest that Russia believes that it can win in Ukraine.

**Some Russian officials expressed hope and confidence that the United States would soon cut off military assistance to Ukraine, which they likely think would enable Russia’s total victory in Ukraine.** Former Austrian Foreign Minister and current head of the St. Petersburg State University Geopolitical Observatory for Russia’s Key Issues (GORKI) Center Karin Kneissl stated on March 1 that “Russia has won in the sense that it was not defeated” in response to a Kremlin newswire question about whether Russia had won the war.[7] Russian State Duma Deputy Alexei Zhuravlyov stated on March 1 that he was encouraged by the prospect that Zelensky has “already lost the lion’s share of the weapons and money provided by the United States.”[8] Russian officials such as Russian Security Council Deputy Chairperson Dmitry Medvedev and Leader of the Russian “Just Russia” Party Sergei Mironov claimed that the Trump Administration can solidify its position on Ukraine only by cutting aid to Ukraine — a step that Trump has not taken thus far.[9]

**Some Russian officials falsely suggested that the Trump Administration officially recognized that peace in Ukraine could only be achieved by letting Russia win.** Leader of the Russian Liberal Democratic Party (LDPR) Leonid Slutsky claimed that Trump has finally realized that “peace will be ensured by Russia’s victory” on the battlefield and in the diplomatic arena — something that Trump has not said.[10] Slutsky’s interpretation of US policy is consistent with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s recent rejections of a ceasefire and any Russian concessions to achieve lasting peace in Ukraine.[11] Slutsky’s interpretation is inconsistent with the Trump Administration’s

stated policy objectives of protecting Ukrainian sovereignty and Trump's February 26 statement that he seeks to see Ukraine retake territory.[12]

**Russian officials are likely misrepresenting the US position on Ukraine to rally domestic Russian support for the continuation of the Kremlin's war in Ukraine.** Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) Spokesperson Maria Zakharova reiterated Russia's commitment to forcing the Ukrainian government to capitulate, destroying the Ukrainian military, and eliminating Ukraine's statehood in a discussion of the Zelensky-Trump meeting on February 28.[13] Russian State Duma Chairperson Vyacheslav Volodin called on Russian citizens and politicians to consolidate behind Russian President Vladimir Putin and his efforts to "defend" Russia in response to the Zelensky-Trump meeting.[14] The Kremlin has routinely falsely framed its war in Ukraine as a defense of Russian sovereignty, and Volodin's statement is likely aimed at garnering further support for the continuation of the Russian war effort.[15] Chairperson of the Russian Federation Council Committee on International Affairs Grigory Karasin claimed that Russian society is united and is "confidently" advancing Putin's war goals in Ukraine.[16] These sentiments are consistent with the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to expand its military, intensify military-patriotic education and preparation, and commit to pursuing maximalist goals in Ukraine.[17]

**Russian officials also baselessly suggested that the US government would forcefully remove Zelensky from office, supporting the Kremlin's long-standing goal of decapitating the Ukrainian government.** Russian State Duma Deputy Alexei Chepa implied on February 28 that the United States will "remove [Zelensky] somehow." [18] Crimea occupation official Mikhail Sheremet claimed on March 1 that Trump does not perceive Zelensky as a "legitimate" president capable of reaching a peace agreement, amplifying the Kremlin's long-standing efforts to discredit Zelensky.[19] Sheremet stated that he "would not be surprised" if the February 28 meeting would be Zelensky's "last meeting" with Trump. Russian officials also amplified unsubstantiated claims that Zelensky is unfit to lead Ukraine for personal and health reasons, and these narratives likely aim to discredit Ukraine's position in peace negotiations.[20] Russian officials claimed that US officials had accepted their "warnings" about Zelensky.[21]

**Russian officials also celebrated the prospect of the United States supporting Russian objectives over the security of its European allies.** Karasin claimed that a "new menacing cloud has appeared over the European Union and NATO — Washington's rejection of rabid anti-Russian plans" and that Europeans and Ukrainians will need to "get out of a hole." [22] Karasin thereby insinuated that the United States has aligned itself with Russia on matters of European security. Russian state media also amplified Peskov's February 26 statement on March 2 that French President Emmanuel Macron has not taken any real steps to communicate with Putin, likely to discredit and exclude European countries from participating in peace negotiations.[23]

**Russian officials are attempting to weaponize the White House meeting by claiming that Trump has fully realigned with Russia against Ukraine and Europe. However, their cautious phrasing suggests that even the Kremlin is uncertain about the validity of these**

**claims.** US officials have indicated that it may still be possible to conclude the agreement that was to have been signed on Friday. US aid has continued to flow to Ukraine, and the White House has not announced any formal changes to US policy on the war as of March 3.[24] The Kremlin likely hopes to reassure its own people that full victory is possible while capitalizing on the serious concerns the White House meeting has caused in Europe and Ukraine to undermine Ukraine's will to continue resisting and Europe's will to continue supporting Ukraine.

POWERED BY:



BABEL STREET

[1] <https://www.interfax dot ru/russia/1011674>

[2] <https://en.kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/67843>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-july-4-2024>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-1-2024>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-18-2025>; <http://en.kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/66181>

[3] <https://tass dot ru/politika/23283771>; [https://t.me/tass\\_agency/303433](https://t.me/tass_agency/303433); <https://t.me/zarubinreporter/3726>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/23283771>; <https://t.me/zarubinreporter/3727>

[4] <https://tass dot ru/politika/23283791>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/23283771>; <https://regnum dot ru/news/3950740>; <https://smotrim dot ru/article/4384560>

[5] <https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4064113/opening-remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-at-ukraine-defense-contact/>

[6] <https://www.voanews.com/a/rubio-us-looks-for-fair-sustainable-end-to-russian-war-on-ukraine/7979267.html>

[7] <https://tass dot ru/interviews/23272449>

[8] <https://t.me/DeputatZhuravlev/12077>; <https://news dot ru/vlast/ukraina-mozhet-lishitsya-bolshej-chasti-deneg-ssha-posle-spora-zelenskogo-i-trampa/>

[9] [https://t.me/medvedev\\_telegram/570](https://t.me/medvedev_telegram/570) ; [https://t.me/medvedev\\_telegramE/57](https://t.me/medvedev_telegramE/57) ; [https://t.me/dva\\_majors/65643](https://t.me/dva_majors/65643); <https://news dot ru/vlast/uvlekatelnoe-shou-nazvana-prichina-unizheniya-zelenskogo-trampom/>

[10] [https://t.me/slutsky\\_1/3280](https://t.me/slutsky_1/3280)

[11] <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-26-2025>

[12] <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHTwWID4SCE> ;  
<https://abcnews.go.com/International/ukrainian-official-suggests-us-mineral-deal-terms-improved/story?id=119199649>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHTwWID4SCE> ;  
<https://www.fox5atlanta.com/news/trump-hosts-british-prime-minister> ;  
<https://isw.pub/UkrWar022125>; <https://isw.pub/UkrWar021925>;

[13] <https://t.me/MariaVladimirovnaZakharova/9944>

[14] [https://t.me/vv\\_volodin/1025](https://t.me/vv_volodin/1025)

[15] <http://kremlin dot ru/events/president/news/72403>; <https://time.com/6319151/putin-defends-ukraine-war-russian-sovereignty/>

[16] [https://t.me/Grigory\\_Karasin/1999](https://t.me/Grigory_Karasin/1999)

[17] <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-february-13-2025>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/putin-unlikely-demobilize-event-ceasefire-because-he-afraid-his-veterans>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-december-21-2024>; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-march-1-2025>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-january-20-2025>

[18] <https://lenta dot ru/news/2025/02/28/v-gosdume-porassuzhdali-o-buduschem-zelenskogo/>

[19] <https://lenta dot ru/news/2025/03/01/v-gosdume-prizvali-ukrainskie-elity-k-sverzheniyu-zelenskogo/>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-20-2024>; <https://www.understandingwar.org/backgrounder/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-may-24-2024>

[20] <https://www.rbc dot ru/rbcfreenews/67c2e89f9a79472fef1d96d2>; <https://t.me/zarubinreporter/3723> ; <https://t.me/MariaVladimirovnaZakharova/9939>; <https://t.me/MariaVladimirovnaZakharova/9940>;  
<https://t.me/MariaVladimirovnaZakharova/9941>

[21] [https://t.me/slutsky\\_1/3280](https://t.me/slutsky_1/3280); <https://t.me/MariaVladimirovnaZakharova/9939>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/23283771>; <https://t.me/zarubinreporter/3727>

[22] [https://t.me/Grigory\\_Karasin/1999](https://t.me/Grigory_Karasin/1999)

[23] [https://t.me/tass\\_agency/303433](https://t.me/tass_agency/303433); <https://t.me/zarubinreporter/3726>

# SPECIAL REPORT

March 3, 2025



[24] <https://x.com/SpeakerJohnson/status/1896251543697121468>; <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/03/02/minerals-deal-ukraine-bessent-00206893>