

# At this rate, war between Europe and Russia could happen within five years

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Following three years of carefully calibrated dithering in Ukraine, Europe's moment of truth may have finally arrived. In a dramatic switching of sides not seen since the Hitler-Stalin pact of 1939, the Trump administration is effectively abandoning Ukraine and is now actively serving the interests of the Russian dictator. Vladimir Putin's February 2022 invasion tried to rob Ukraine of its past and its present: three years later, Donald Trump seems intent on robbing Ukraine of its future.

Since returning to the White House, Trump has used a combination of carrots and sticks to try to secure a peace deal in Ukraine. Unfortunately, he has only applied the sticks to Ukraine while reserving the carrots for Putin and Russia. Despite this grossly one-sided approach, Putin's intransigence has meant there has been little or no progress.

Though frustrated by Russia's failure to play ball, Trump's censure of Putin has been so innocuous that it might easily be mistaken for approval. Instead of threatening increased sanctions on Russia for its refusal to accept the proposed 30-day ceasefire, Trump has turned on Ukraine.

Incredibly, he has not laid blame for the war on Putin where it clearly belongs. Instead, the US president has called Volodymyr Zelensky a dictator and has falsely accused him of starting the war. This is geopolitical victim-blaming on an epic scale.

Trump's response to Putin's massive drone attack on Kiev last week, in which at least 12 people were killed, was merely to beg "Vladimir" to "stop".

A measure of the extent and the irreversible nature of this extraordinary turn of events can be seen in the latest version of Trump's so-called "minerals deal".

It's a remarkable document — a Mafia family-type offer that Trump thinks Zelensky cannot refuse.

Deserting Ukraine in its hour of need is bad enough, but demanding an extortionary pound of flesh on top is a contemptible and bizarre imposition of reparation payments on the victim, not the aggressor.

With the likely failure of his attempt to end Europe's bloodiest conflict since the end of World War II, Trump is likely to lose patience and abandon the entire enterprise. Two of his administration's leading officials have said as much.

Speaking last week, US vice-president JD Vance said: "We've issued a very explicit proposal to the Russians and Ukrainians, and it's time for them to either say yes or for the US to walk away from this process."

US secretary of state Marco Rubio abandoned scheduled peace talks in London, prompting the cancellation of a broader meeting with the foreign ministers of Ukraine, Britain, France and Germany.

All of which underscores the enormous gaps that exist between Washington, Kyiv and its European allies over how to end the war.

**Despite being under huge pressure,** the front line in Ukraine remains quite stable. Though lacking in manpower, the Ukrainian General Staff has compensated for these numerical deficiencies through tactical, strategic and technological innovation.

The Russian military has doggedly pursued its two-part strategy of so-called "meat-wave" attacks along the front line, combined with the strategic bombing of civilians across Ukrainian cities.

To counter these attacks while conserving its own personnel, Ukraine has deployed unprecedented amounts of sophisticated drone technology and remotely controlled vehicles. This has resulted in horrendous Russian casualty rates, with almost one million Russian soldiers killed or injured.

The destruction of Russian armoured vehicles has been such that frontline commanders have

been reduced to using non-armoured Chinese "golf carts" and motorbikes to carry troops into battle, considerably increasing the casualty rates.

Post-war analyses of Allied and German strategic bombing during World War II showed it to be largely ineffective in determining the outcome. Yet the Russian military continues with this outmoded strategy.

Ukraine, on the other hand, avoids strategic bombing in favour of targeted precision-bombing using high-explosive munitions delivered by long-distance drones.

Recognising that Putin's war is sustained by oil and gas revenues, not a week goes by without oil refineries, oil and gas depots, and other energy facilities, going up in smoke. With Ukrainian smart-drones capable of evading Russian air defences, the destruction of these energy facilities happens right across the Russian Federation, sometimes over 1,000km from Ukraine.

So, Ukraine remains in the fight. However, if Trump pulls the plug, it can only continue to do so through a massive ramping-up of European support. Europe must now step up to fill the considerable intelligence, financial and materiel gap left by Trump's probable desertion of the Ukrainian battlefield. If it fails to do so and Ukraine buckles, the consequences could be severe and fairly immediate: a full-scale war between Europe and an emboldened Russia within three to five years cannot be discounted.

Given the countries that are directly in Putin's line of fire, this development is likely to accelerate a shift in Europe's centre of political gravity from its current "home" in the west to the eastern part of the continent.

The Nordics, the Baltics, Poland and others in Eastern Europe know from bitter experience what a hug from the Russian bear entails. Consequently, they are taking no chances and are already in full rearmament mode. These are the countries that will make the running in countering Putin's wider imperial ambitions beyond Ukraine.

We in Ireland should not be complacent, either. If the worst happens, a further flood of refugees fleeing a war-torn east might be the least of our problems. One way or the other, Trump's fog of peace will soon dissipate. Unfortunately, Putin's fog of war is unlikely to do so for some time yet.

“Ukraine is still in the fight, but it needs greater support”