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The US-Russia Peace Plan: A Colonial Deal in 28 Points

by Riccardo Alcaro

- The US-Russian 28-point plan for Ukraine, in its current forms, is a less a peace deal than an understanding between two powers acting upon a colonialist logic.
- Russia would be given more Ukraine territory than it now controls, sanctions relief, legal immunity and international rehabilitation, while Ukraine would be left more exposed to future attacks.
- The US would profit from reconstruction by using Russian assets now under EU control, while Europe, forced to financially support the process, would become systemically more fragile.

The **28-point peace proposal** quietly negotiated between President Donald Trump's Special Envoy for everything Steve Witkoff and Russian sovereign wealth fund chief Kirill Dmitriev, a confidante of President Vladimir Putin, has sparked deep concern in Kyiv and across Europe. Rightly so. At even a superficial look, the draft reads as a deal that heavily favours Russia, diminishes the United States' standing (though it can give Trump a boost), weakens Europe and leaves Ukraine exposed.

One may credit the authorship of this plan for being somewhat in flux: more versions are circulating, particularly over the **security guarantee** the United States would extend to Ukraine. That suggests room for adjustment. But also with that caveat, the core contours of

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the proposal expose a fundamentally colonial dynamic of two powers comfortable with deciding the future of a sovereign country and disposing of goods they do not control while trying to make money out of it.

Limited sovereignty

The draft formally reaffirms Ukraine's sovereignty, but does little to guarantee it. The plan would require Kyiv to relinquish not only the territories occupied by Russia but also the portion of Donetsk still under Ukrainian control, home to about two hundred thousand people and strategically crucial for the defence of the rest of the country. This would represent not just a territorial and human sacrifice but the loss of lines of fortifications that would undermine Ukraine's defensive capacity in the medium term.

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Ukraine would be required to hold elections within one hundred days. In itself, this point is not necessarily controversial, but the fact that the Russians wanted to put it into the agenda is an indirect attempt to undermine Volodymyr Zelensky, who has remained president beyond his natural term of office by virtue of the martial law in force since the Russian invasion of 2022. The delegitimisation of the Ukrainian president has long been a goal of Moscow's propaganda, and the timing is more favourable now given the fallout from the corruption scandal involving two ministers, which could lead to the resignation of Chief of Staff Andriy Yermak. Moreover, holding elections at short notice in a country devastated by nearly four years of indiscriminate bombing could generate instability and offer Moscow space for a disinformation campaign.

The obligation to protect linguistic and religious minorities reflects a legitimate principle. But demanding that Russian be an official language and, above all, that the Russian Orthodox Church – which is headed by the Patriarchate of Moscow – be granted formal status, as one version of the 28-point plan **was reported by some sources** to read, is not. If indeed these provisos were part of the final deal, Moscow would most likely use them as a pretext to justify pressure, defamatory campaigns and other hostile actions. It should not be forgotten that the 2008 aggression against Georgia was **retroactively tied** to a non-existent "genocide" of South Ossetians.

In the all-important military dimension, Kyiv would have to enshrine in its Constitution a commitment not to join NATO (as it had done before Russia's first invasion in 2014). For its part, the Alliance would remove Ukrainian membership from its agenda, despite the solemn, if temporally vague, commitments made as recently as the 2024 summit.

The deployment of NATO troops on Ukrainian territory would also be ruled out. It is unclear whether the ban would apply to the European reassurance force, which would be deployed as a coalition of the willing rather than under NATO auspices. But it is beyond doubt that Russia will insist there is no difference between NATO troops and troops from NATO member states.

Ukraine would have to accept a cap of 600,000 soldiers: an improvement compared to the 80,000 demanded by Russia during the Istanbul talks in 2022, but still over one third less than today's total. Ukraine cannot afford forced reductions of its armed forces, which have grown not just in number but experience and capacity, are supported by a vibrant defence industry, and represent the main guarantee against future aggressions.

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Nothing is said about foreign military supplies, yet the reference to future negotiations aimed at clarifying all "ambiguities" between Ukraine, Europe and Russia, as well as between NATO and Russia (mediated by the United States, as though it were not the Alliance's leading country), opens the door to constraints on military assistance to Kyiv through arms control mechanisms.

US security guarantees, envisaged in **another version** as partially akin to NATO's Article 5 but limited to ten years, remain the most indeterminate element of the plan. It is not only the ambiguities of the text that generate uncertainty, but also the unreliability of an America increasingly oriented in a nationalist and unilateral direction, the absence of a strong legal basis, as well as the lack of personal investment by President Trump. Without more solid guarantees, the reciprocal non-aggression pledges would not be credible.

Rebuilding Ukraine and reintegrating Russia (while making money out of it)

The plan's colonialist logic is particularly evident in the chapter on reconstruction. It envisages using 100 billion US dollars in frozen Russian assets to support reconstruction and development projects led by the United States, to which 50 per cent of the profits would accrue. The remaining Russian assets (approximately 200 billion US dollars) would flow into a joint US-Russian fund for common initiatives. Since the vast majority of these assets (over 200 billion US dollars) are located in Europe, particularly in Belgium, Washington would profit from Ukraine's reconstruction by mobilising resources over which it does not have jurisdiction. Adding injury to insult, the draft includes the demand that the EU contribute a further 100 billion US dollars from its own coffers, widening still further the gap between those who decide and those who pay.

For their part, the Russians would get at least a portion of their frozen assets back within the framework of a revived economic relationship with the United States, while the gradual lifting of all sanctions would enable Moscow's re-integration into the global economy. Return to the G8 serves to formalise the resumption of relations with Russia, which, in the calculations (more likely illusions) of some, might thereby be 'peeled away' from China. As the cherry on top, all parties (that is, Putin and his entourage) would benefit from a general amnesty, meaning no trials for war crimes.

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Ukrainian dignity… and Europe's?

The chances that the Ukrainian government will accept this agreement in its entirety are close to zero, although Zelensky faces his **hardest choice** since Trump's return to power. Kyiv's military difficulties are not as serious as to make it keen on near-capitulation. Moreover, its direct dependence on the United States is lower than in the Biden era, though the loss of US intelligence would be highly damaging. At least for some time, Ukraine can resist pressure from Washington, as it did during the 2023-24 winter when Congress refused to approve new arms transfers or early this year when Trump briefly stopped military assistance and intelligence sharing.

Another factor in Ukraine's favour is support from European countries, whose role has grown as they have started buying US weapons and re-direct them to Ukraine in bigger numbers. The door is open to yet another European diplomatic initiative aimed at intervening on the draft text, particularly with regard to military supplies, the size of Ukraine's armed forces and the use of frozen assets, over which the EU must assert full control, overcoming Belgian resistance. The

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problem, as ever, is how to manage a president whose preferences are so volatile.

Even if Trump insists on a **quick end** to the process, it is unlikely that the US president could politically afford to impose such a one-sided plan against the will of Kyiv and its European allies. But delays or refusals even of individual points of the plan by Ukraine and European governments would be exploited to fuel the narrative that it is them, rather than the Russian aggressor, who are blocking peace. Fissures within the Western camp would deepen and Trump and the Ukraine-sceptic crowd in his Administration would grow further alienated from Kyiv. For Moscow, such an outcome would hardly be unwelcome; indeed, it is plausible that this result is what it has realistically aimed for.

This is one more reason for Europeans to close ranks and oppose Trump not with a sham resistance masked by embarrassing flattery and ritual rallies around the Leader, but through a strongly-argued – including openly, to Congress and the American public – defence of their vital interests in continental stability and Ukrainian sovereignty. Europe's dependence on Washington is real, but not such as to justify deferential postures that colonies were forced to adopt. If Ukraine has been able to withstand Washington's blows with dignity, Europe can do so as well.

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