

## SCHEMES

# Trump's complicated gamble for world peace identifies China as main enemy

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Donald Trump's lengthy telephone conversation with Vladimir Putin on 19 May does not yet represent a decisive turning point towards peace in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. However, it is certainly a further step towards the 'full implementation' of negotiations

and an energetic reaffirmation of Trump's desire to remain the undisputed leader and guarantor of the process after the new beginning of contacts between the Moscow and Kiev delegations in Istanbul last week was very uncertain and fragile.

**Putin's tone is much more cautious**, suggesting a continuing desire to delay and gain further territorial ground. Furthermore, there is a strong suspicion that Putin's intransigence is once again being pressured by China, who are interested in the conflict continuing indefinitely to be used, alongside other crisis contexts, to destabilise the West and strengthen Russia's subordination.

**However, Putin certainly does not want to be drawn** into Xi's sphere of influence, and he is keen to take the hand that Trump has extended to him in order to strengthen relations with the United States and Europe. This would enable him to escape the 'pariah' status that the invasion of Ukraine has given him in the eyes of the West. It would give him the opportunity to adopt a multi-pronged approach to foreign policy, as Erdogan's Turkey, Moscow's close neighbour and uncomfortable competitor, is doing successfully on the international stage. Moreover, he would gain breathing space for an economy which, despite generally withstanding repeated Western sanctions, is inevitably slowing down.

**From this point of view**, Trump's references in his account of the telephone conversation to Russia's willingness to engage in 'large-scale' trade cooperation with the United States once the war is finally over are a significant indication that he is seeking to include the promise of Russia's full reintegration into a system of trade and investment in a future peace agreement. This would also allow Russia to allay its fears that post-war Ukraine, albeit reduced in territory and not a member of NATO, would remain a sort of Western 'battering ram' aimed at Russia.

**However, to fully grasp the significance of Trump's determination** to achieve peace in the conflict that has ravaged Eastern Europe since 2022, it is essential to view his actions within the broader context of his ambitious endeavour to reshape American foreign policy and, more broadly, the landscape of international relations across Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia.

**Convinced that the fundamental confrontation for US interests is with China** in the Indo-Pacific region, Trump has been trying to build a large-scale diplomatic negotiation that brings together different but interconnected crisis contexts since taking office. For him, the decisive knot in this interlocking game is not the Russian-Ukrainian front, but the Middle East. There, he is aiming for a structural solution that primarily

involves resuming, completing and expanding the 'Abraham Accords' between Israel and the Sunni Arab countries.

**His recent trip to the Arabian Peninsula**, from Saudi Arabia to Qatar and the Emirates, demonstrated the importance he attaches to this region. While the trip was primarily focused on economic agreements, which are of great importance to the American economy in search of investment, it also had significant political implications. The unexpected opening towards Syria by al-Jolani; the rapprochement with Qatar; the consolidation of the now crucial strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince, Mohammed bin Salman; and the alternating offers of dialogue and threats towards Iran all contribute to the great mosaic that the US President is trying to piece together, despite the many risks and uncertainties involved. This mosaic also encompasses relations with Russia and European allies.

**In short, Trump aims to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict** once and for all by achieving mutual recognition between Jerusalem and Riyadh, establishing a Saudi 'protectorate' over Gaza and creating the 'great cotton road' — an alternative economic and political corridor to China and Iran — stretching from the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean, with India's support (India has become Washington's key Asian partner). However, this objective would necessarily involve compromising with Turkey (hence the olive branch extended to al-Jolani, Ankara's longa manus in Syria), while also safeguarding the security of Israel (probably with a buffer zone in the part of Syria inhabited by the Druze, who are historically allies of Jerusalem), and Russia's role as a regional power. This would entail maintaining its naval bases in Syrian territory and perhaps increasing its influence in Libya and North Africa in general. The offensive launched in recent days by General Haftar, supported by Moscow, against the government of Abdulhamid Dbeibeh could be interpreted in the context of this realignment of power and influence.

**However, on the European front**, this objective also involves Trump defusing attempts by certain European leaders (such as Starmer, Macron and Merz) to stir up the Moscow-Kiev conflict for domestic political reasons and continental hegemonic ambitions. Trump is seeking to bypass these leaders and uphold the principle that the war can only be solved through a Washington-Moscow agreement. This part of Trump's strategy clearly involves selecting Italian leader Giorgia Meloni as his preferred interlocutor on the continent, as evidenced by the Vance-von der Leyen meeting she arranged. It seems that she may also be involved in a triangulation with the American Pope Leo XIV, as indicated by the Vatican's suggestion that it could host Russian-

Ukrainian peace talks. This does not mean that Trump intends to sever ties with the 'willing'; he pretends not to see their obstructionist and bellicose intentions because he is interested in exploiting them to a certain extent as a means of putting pressure on Putin.

**In short, Trump's peacemaking strategy is a large,** complex web in which every strand is connected to the others. Only time will tell how much of this 'great game' will play out according to the White House occupant's intentions. However, Trump's foreign policy is certainly not disorderly, erratic or chaotic, nor is it inspired solely by low-profile interests, as his prejudiced opponents simplistically claim.