

Seven days that will shape a new world order

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*"In foreign policy, Trump is free to attempt to remake the world, and the United States could suffer a disastrous loss of influence to China and Russia before anyone can stop him."
– The Economist*

Since World War II, geopolitical transformations have typically unfolded gradually, marked by protracted negotiations and a complex interplay of pressures and counterbalances. However, in just one week, the dynamics among the United States, Russia, and Europe have shifted so abruptly that the global balance of power may be reconfigured for decades to come. What began with a call between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin on February 12 has culminated in negotiations in Riyadh, casting doubt on Europe's stability and Ukraine's future.

Washington's message is unequivocal: containing Russia is no longer the priority; instead, the focus is on reestablishing a pragmatic relationship with Moscow. Putin's rehabilitation on the international stage has been swift and unyielding. After three years of isolation due to the invasion of Ukraine, the Kremlin returns to the negotiating table without relinquishing any occupied territory. Moreover, signals from the White House suggest that unconditional support for Kyiv has ended. Ukraine's NATO membership has been ruled out, U.S. military funding has been drastically reduced, and peace now seems contingent on Kyiv ceding territory.

The Riyadh meeting included, from the U.S. administration, Secretary of State Marco Rubio; National Security Council Director Mike Waltz; and Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff. Representing the Kremlin were Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Putin's advisors Yuri Ushakov and Kirill Dmitriev. Notably absent were representatives from Ukraine or its European allies, solidifying this new reality. What once seemed unthinkable—the exclusion of Europe from resolving a conflict on its own soil—is now a fait accompli. The White House grants significant concessions to Putin without demanding tangible guarantees in return. If the goal is a negotiated peace, the approach appears, at best, erratic and, at worst, a strategic surrender.

The impact has been immediate. Europe, which for eight decades has relied on U.S.-provided security, now faces a crossroads.

At the Munich Security Conference, two days after the Trump-Putin call, Vice President J.D. Vance made it clear that Washington expects Europe to learn to defend itself. France and Germany have begun discussing a joint military reinforcement, aware that the era of the American security umbrella is ending. In Brussels, the concern is not only the weakening of

NATO but its potential irrelevance in a future where the U.S. and Russia might redefine rules without consulting the Old Continent.

Meanwhile, Ukraine faces an untenable choice: accept an unfavorable deal or prolong the conflict, hoping for a shift in international dynamics to break its diplomatic isolation. The first option signifies a strategic defeat; the second risks escalation. Moscow, with diplomacy honed over decades of Western confrontation, has adeptly seized the moment. In contrast, Trump's team, comprising negotiators with limited flexibility, has advanced based on its interests without conceding anything in return.

The risk of this strategy extends beyond Ukraine, setting a precedent for other global actors. If Washington capitulates to Moscow without securing commitments or concessions, what prevents China from adopting a more aggressive stance toward Taiwan? What message does this send to Iran or North Korea about the efficacy of military pressure? The balance of power hinges on credibility and consistency, both of which the United States has compromised in this instance.

Russia has gained the upper hand in the initial round. Whether Washington recognizes this in time, before Moscow fully consolidates its position, remains to be seen. The invasion will halt only if a favorable agreement is reached, including reducing NATO's military presence in Europe, territorial concessions from Ukraine, and the cessation of Western military support to Kyiv.

A world where powers do not guarantee their allies' security based on rights and norms is not only more perilous but also signifies a reconfiguration of the global order as we know it, without the West having the final say.