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Trump and Putin's Alaska summit – Key Takeaways

The Trump–Putin Summit of 15 August 2025, held at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska, took place amidst a relentless war in Ukraine, divisions within the West, and Donald Trump's return to office. Since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022, Moscow has faced sanctions and diplomatic isolation, while Ukraine fought with Western support to reclaim occupied territories. By mid-2025, however, the conflict had reached a stalemate: Ukrainian offensives slowed, Western aid was increasingly contested, and Russia retained control over parts of Donbas and the south.

Trump's re-election marked a sharp shift from the Biden administration's containment strategy. Instead of emphasising sanctions and arms, Trump revived direct diplomacy with Vladimir Putin, casting himself as the leader uniquely capable of negotiating peace. Hosting Putin on American soil—particularly on a US military base—was unprecedented and symbolically powerful, breaking with years of Western practice of shunning Russia's leader.

The meeting also echoed Trump's earlier encounters with Putin. At the 2018 Helsinki Summit, Trump was widely criticised for appearing to side with Putin over US intelligence agencies on election interference, raising concerns that his approach prioritised optics and personal rapport over substance. The Alaska summit revived these anxieties. For Trump, it was a chance to showcase statesmanship and deliver on campaign promises to end the Ukraine war swiftly. For Putin, it offered legitimacy and international visibility without immediate concessions. For Ukraine and Europe, however, the summit raised fears of being sidelined or pressured into compromise. Ultimately, the meeting was as much about global security credibility as about ending the war itself.

The summit was staged with an extraordinary ceremony—Putin rode in Trump's limousine, reviewed honour guards, and watched a US fighter jet flyover. Hosting him on a US military base sent a strong signal of legitimacy. For Moscow, these visuals projected Russia's re-entry into global diplomacy after years of isolation.

While the meeting was anticipated to take about seven hours, it wrapped up in less than three. No ceasefire or binding agreement emerged. Speaking to reporters after their meeting, Trump and Putin said they made progress, with Trump claiming the meeting was "extremely productive," but "there's no deal until there's a deal." The short joint press event offered little detail, underscoring the gap between symbolic progress and substantive results. A notable shift came when Putin reportedly accepted the idea of NATO-style security guarantees for Ukraine—without Ukraine formally joining NATO. This potential concession could shape future peace frameworks, though details remain vague and contested.

Putin returned to Moscow, claiming a diplomatic win. He avoided new sanctions, gained international visibility, and positioned himself as a central player in peace

talks. Russia also floated demands for Ukrainian withdrawal from Donetsk and Luhansk, which Kyiv and the West rejected outright.

In Washington and Europe, scepticism dominated. Critics argued that Trump handed Putin legitimacy without extracting concessions. European allies worried that replacing a ceasefire demand with open-ended "peace talks" played into Russia's hands. Calls for stronger sanctions and military aid to Ukraine grew louder.

President Zelenskyy sought clarity, pressing for concrete guarantees rather than symbolic promises. Kyiv rejected any settlement that legitimised Russia's occupation of eastern Ukraine. For Ukraine, the summit raised both hope—through the idea of security guarantees—and fear of being sidelined.

Domestically within the US, reactions split along familiar partisan lines. Trump allies hailed him as a deal-maker opening new channels, while critics warned of appeasement. Analysts highlighted the risk of Trump repeating the optics-over-substance pattern seen in previous summits with adversaries.

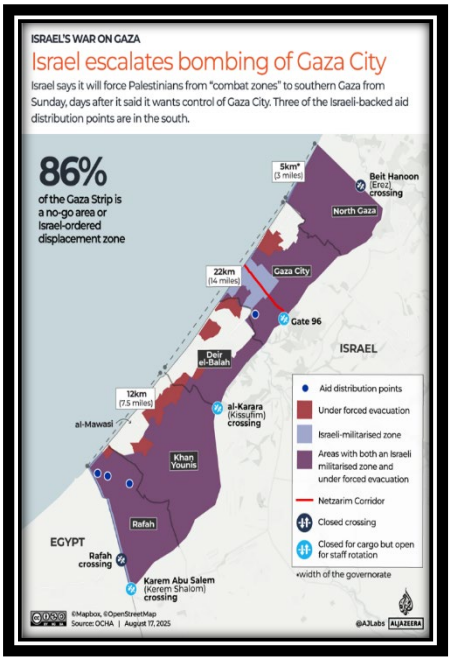
Trump floated the idea of a trilateral meeting with Putin and Zelenskyy, while European leaders considered developing enforceable guarantees. The path forward depends on whether symbolic gestures can be turned into binding security arrangements. Without sustained pressure on Moscow, analysts warn, Putin could use talks to strengthen battlefield gains.

The Alaska summit showcased compelling visual diplomacy and marked a shift from ceasefire demands toward a broader peace process framework—yet no concrete results were achieved. Putin successfully projected diplomatic legitimacy without compromising, while Trump took a middle ground: optimistic in rhetoric but lacking tangible results. A potential breakthrough could be NATO-style security commitments for Ukraine; however, defining and implementing them remains a significant challenge. The summit may have set a new course, but the real test is in turning symbolic gestures into enforceable agreements that ensure Ukraine's sovereignty and Western credibility endure.

Israel expands military operations in Gaza

Israel's military strikes and ground operations to destroy Hamas' military capabilities, which resumed on 18 March 2025, have continued in August. Israeli actions have killed nearly 62,000 Palestinians. The US ceasefire proposal reached an impasse in July. The plan included a 60-day truce, release of 10 living and 18 dead hostages, freeing Palestinian prisoners and expanded aid. Hamas demanded international guarantees for ending the war, Israeli withdrawals, and the dissolution of the Gaza Humanitarian Fund (GHF), which was accused of killing aid seekers. Israel remains firm on continuing military operations until Hamas is thoroughly defeated. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has also dismissed the possibility of a partial ceasefire and hostage deal.

On 7 July, Defence Minister Israel Katz instructed the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) to draft plans for a "humanitarian city" on Rafah's ruins, confining the Palestinians inside the zone and facilitating relocation. On 7 July 2025, Netanyahu met US President Donald Trump for the third time since the latter took office, discussing the ongoing situation in the Gaza Strip, a possible ceasefire deal, hostage strategy and Iran strikes. Both leaders repeated the proposal to transfer Palestinians out of the Gaza Strip. Netanyahu told the media that the US and Israel are working with other countries to give Palestinians a 'better future' through relocation.



The Israeli security cabinet on 8 August 2025 approved Netanyahu's proposal to take over Gaza City, despite warnings from the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) that the move risks the lives of remaining hostages and could trigger a humanitarian disaster. The five objectives of the plan include disarming Hamas, returning all hostages, demilitarising the Gaza Strip, taking security control and establishing a non-Hamas, non-Palestinian Authority governing body. Netanyahu hinted that Arab forces could assume control post-operation.

The plan limits the immediate operation to Gaza City, home to roughly one million Palestinians, many already displaced during the 22-month war. Civilians will be given until 7 October 2025 to evacuate southward before the IDF launches a siege aimed at killing remaining Hamas operatives. Israel currently controls 75% of the Strip, but Gaza City and central refugee camps remain largely untouched due to hostage concerns. Netanyahu's office avoided using the term "occupy," citing legal issues, instead saying "take over." Occupation would imply Israel's responsibility for civilian matters in Gaza. Israeli officials acknowledged that the plan effectively amounts to full military rule, with potential subsequent operations in other parts of Gaza. Gaza Humanitarian Foundation announced expanding from three to 16 aid sites to operate around the clock in anticipation of the evacuation.

IDF Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Eyal Zamir opposed the plan, warning it would endanger hostages, overextend troops, and saddle Israel with responsibility for Gaza's civilian needs. He estimated a complete occupation could take up to two years, with five months of intense fighting. Zamir reportedly told ministers they would be sending soldiers "into a death trap" and urged removing hostage recovery from Israel's war goals if the plan proceeded. Far-right ministers Itamar Ben Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich voted against the plan — Ben Gvir over humanitarian aid provisions, Smotrich opposed Netanyahu's willingness to pause the offensive if Hamas met conditions. Hostage families strongly opposed the

decision, staging protests in Tel Aviv, arguing that military pressure has failed to secure releases and that Hamas no longer poses a strategic threat.

On 21 July 2025, a group of 28 countries, including Britain, France and Spain, issued a joint statement demanding an immediate end to the war in Gaza, condemning Israel's restrictions on humanitarian aid and the killing of Palestinians seeking relief and calling for the immediate and unconditional release of the Israeli hostages. The group reaffirmed support for diplomatic efforts by the US, Qatar, and Egypt, pledging readiness to take further action to support a permanent ceasefire and a lasting political resolution. Britain, France, Canada, Australia and New Zealand intend to recognise a Palestinian state in September 2025. Australia noted that it received commitments from the PA to demilitarise, hold general elections and continue to recognise Israel's right to exist. Meanwhile, Egypt and Jordan are training PA Police officers to manage security in Gaza after the Israeli withdrawal. Both states are currently seeking funding from Gulf States to expand the programme.

Australia chooses Japanese frigate model for RAN

In a fillip to Japan's burgeoning interest in promoting its exports of defence equipment, Australia announced on 5 August that it had decided to award a lucrative ten billion Australian dollar contract to Mitsubishi Heavy Industries (MHI) for the construction of 11 upgraded Mogami-class frigates for its navy. The long-drawn acquisition process was widely viewed in Japan as favourable to the Mogami-class, though competition from the ThyssenKrupp conglomerate in Germany was stiff.

The Mogami-class stealth frigate is the latest workhorse of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Forces. Designed to replace the aging Abukuma-class frigates (which have incidentally been offered to the Philippine Navy as part of Japan's Official Security Assistance programme) in 2017, the MSDF currently operates 11 of the 12 projected to enter service, with another 12 'improved Mogami-class' vessels also slated to start production in 2028. The ship has a displacement of 5,500 tons (full load), and measures 132.5 metres in length, with a beam size of 16.3 metres. Powered by a 70,000-horsepower combined diesel and gas propulsion system, its maximum speed is over 30 knots. A crew of approximately 90 sailors is necessary to operate the ships, which carry a range of advanced sensors and processing systems necessary to carry out multiple mission types.

Key equipment includes OQQ-11 mine-hunting sonar, OQQ-25 anti-submarine warfare systems and a UNICORN mast (that is expected to be fitted onto Indian Navy ships as well). The ships are also armed with electronic warfare systems.

With regard to armaments, the Mogami-class possesses a 127mm Mark 25 naval gun, eight Type-17 anti-ship missiles, one RIM-116 surface-to-air missile launcher battery (SeaRAM) and Type-12 torpedoes. The Mogami-class has also been fitted with 16 Type-41 Vertical Launch System cells, enabling it to launch a range of shipborne missiles. A single hangar onboard carries an air arm of one MH-60K helicopter.

As for the 'improved Mogami-class' frigates selected by Australia, they are expected to be longer and have more displacement, with room for fitting up to 32 Mark-41 VLS cells capable of firing Tomahawks as well as other models. The size of the crew is also expected to be halved, with greater automation picking up the slack. Technical improvements will include an enlarged radar mast and improved hull-mounted sonar suite, with AESA radar capability expected to be added. Japanese representatives have been touting the ship's improved survivability and ASW capabilities as the Mogami-class' greatest advantages. Under the terms of the agreement, the first three hulls are expected to be constructed in Japan, with the remaining to be manufactured in Australia. This arrangement will allow MHI to circumvent Japan's stringent regulations barring sales of offensive military equipment.

The process of selection was a long-drawn test of patience for the Japanese, as there have been fears throughout of a repetition of the 2015 debacle surrounding the procurement of diesel-electric submarines for the Royal Australian Navy. At that time, despite an all-out effort by the administration of Shinzo Abe to secure the RAN contract for the Soryu-class submarine, Australia ended up selecting the French Naval Group as its preferred vendor, pushing Japan-Australia ties into a deep chill. This time, therefore, Japan adopted a more cautious yet full-throated approach, allowing Australian officials to thoroughly inspect the merits of the Mogami-class vis-a-vis its rivals. Mogami-class vessels in service with the MSDF made repeated port calls to Australian ports, where reporters and other relevant persons were given guided tours explaining the functionality and capabilities of the vessels.

In the final calculation, the Mogami-class' stealth functions and its reduced crew size may have proven to be the clinching argument in its favour. Its closest competitor, the German ThyssenKrupp's MEKO A-200, requires a 120-person crew to operate it, a disadvantage for the personnel-deficient RAN. Though the two countries have not finalised details on cost and construction schedules, Japan's largest arms export contract since World War Two is sure to provide a shot in the arm to Japanese defence manufacturers, who have long been dependent on procurement orders from the Japanese Self-Defence Forces, their sole customer.

Should the procurement process go smoothly, it is expected that Japanese defence manufacturers would gain the necessary confidence to expand further into international markets. However, stiff competition with established players such as France and the United States of America and emerging players such as the Republic of Korea and Turkey is sure to follow.