

GUEST EDITORIAL

EDITOR'S NOTE: Opinions expressed here do not necessarily reflect the views of The Daily Independent. This piece originally appeared in The Washington Post.

Keep working toward peace

It's been only about nine weeks since President Donald Trump began his stunning pivot toward Moscow, reversing the U.S. policy of support for Ukraine as the victim of Russian aggression, and upending America's policy alignment with Europe. This turn of events began on Feb. 12, when Trump held a lengthy phone call with Russian President Vladimir Putin, ending a three-year freeze in high-level contacts between Washington and Moscow.

This was followed by an extraordinary meeting in Saudi Arabia between Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. They discussed future economic ties and eventually restoring diplomatic relations. Trump's lead negotiator, Steve Witkoff, hasmet with Putin three times.

In a series of concessions perhaps meant to induce Putin to agree to a peace deal, Trump had the United States vote alongside Russia against a United Nations resolution naming Russia as the war's aggressor.

The U.S. president ordered a halt to offensive cyber operations against Russia. He stopped U.S. funding for a three-year project to trace the thousands of Ukrainian children abducted by Russia, and he withdrew U.S. cooperation with the International Criminal Court that indicted Putin related to the kidnappings.

To top it off, Trump slashed funding for the U.S. Agency for International Development — which funds many small, independent Russian and Ukrainian media outlets — and pushed to eliminate Voice of America and Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

Meanwhile, Trump has effectively thrown Ukraine under the bus. He has ruled out Ukrainian membership in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. He has refused to commit to any security guarantees for Ukraine, even as he pressures Kyiv to agree to a lopsided deal to surrender part of its future oil, gas and mineral wealth to the U.S. And he has berated Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky as a "dictator" and blamed him for starting the war.

What does Trump have to show for his policy shift toward Moscow? Pretty much nothing.

Putin has gleefully pocketed all the White House concessions and gifts, said "spasibo" and continued his ruthless assault on Ukrainian cities, while spurning entreaties for a reasonable peace deal. An especially devastating Russian missile attack on the city of Sumy on Palm Sunday left 35 dead and more than 100 wounded.

Trump's one bit of success was an agreement reached last month between Russia and Ukraine not to attack each other's energy infrastructure for 30 days. But Russian strikes continued in violation of the pause, and Russia has said it will no longer be bound by the deal when it expires.

Trump's pivot to Russia has so far failed to meet his stated goal, which was to stop the war and end the suffering. It's worth recalling that, during the campaign, Trump said he could end the war in "one day" after taking office.

On Friday, Rubio appeared to acknowledge the frustrating failure, telling reporters in Paris that Trump was ready to "move on" absent a peace deal soon. "I think the president's probably at a point where he's going to say, 'Well, we're done,'" Rubio said.

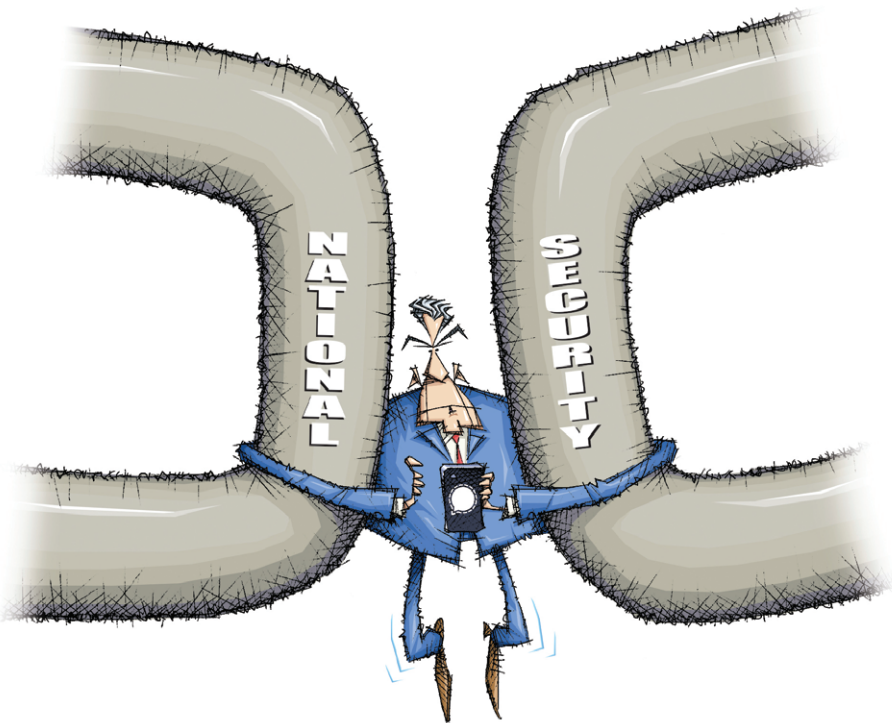
Diplomacy is painstaking work, and achievements rarely come in a few weeks, as the administration discovered with Gaza and might soon learn as it begins a new round of talks with Iran. Trump's trademark bravado is no substitute for the long and difficult process of finding common ground between warring combatants, and calibrating the right combination of pressure and inducements to reach a deal.

Rather than shrug their shoulders and give up, Trump and his team should return to the approach of the Biden administration and European allies: continue to arm Ukraine so it can defend itself and raise the cost of the conflict for Russia. This means supplying Ukraine with more lethal weaponry and allowing the country to stage defensive strikes against military positions inside Russian territory, something the Biden administration was too slow to approve.

It also means reengaging with European allies whom Trump and his team have needlessly offended. Rubio's meetings in Paris are a good start.

The British and French have proposed a European military force to deploy to Ukraine as a deterrent against further Russian attacks, but the plan needs American logistics, intelligence and air support; Trump should provide it. Further, he should now recognize that Putin is the aggressor in this war, Ukraine is the victim and the Europeans are our allies in countering Russian aggression.

THE FIRST AMENDMENT: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievance.



PETE HEGSETH-THE WEAKEST LINK

It's the economy

Many in the Democratic base are frustrated that their party isn't pounding away at Donald Trump over his attacks on the rule of law, academic independence and decency. That's not quite the case. Democrats and others opposed to the president's toxic agenda are seeing some success in the courts.

In Congress, however, Democrats currently have little power to stop him. Beating up on their politicians for not doing what they are unable to do is not helping the cause.

Preparing a slate of electable Democrats able to trounce the Republican bobbleheads in the midterms would be the more useful approach.

Which brings us to the rallies and demonstrations in cities across the nation. Beware, Democrats, who you let lead the parade. Social media has been doing backflips over the large crowds drawn to hear Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez rail against MAGA. In itself, that's OK. That gives the Democratic base needed hope and a sense of doing something.

The problem comes in assuming the cheerleaders would make good spokespeople. There's now talk of AOC taking on a major leadership role in the party. AOC has a pretty face, but hers should not be the face of the Democratic Party.

Kamala Harris had electric rallies, too. Recall those wild crowds packing stadiums in states both blue and

red. But once the campaign got going, MAGA aired nonstop the unfortunate positions Harris had taken — notably her call to have

taxpayers cover sex change operations for felons in prison.

AOC has a hit parade of politically poisonous remarks. A smattering:

"Capitalism is not a redeemable

system." (2022). Defending seemingly open borders early in Joe Biden administration, she said, "We need to abolish ICE," that is, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (2018). "The United States is running concentration camps on our southern border, and that is exactly what they are." (2019).

In a video from 2020, she's seen defending looters in Philadelphia. "So, they go out and they need to feed their child and they don't have money," AOC says with high melodrama. "They feel like they need to shoplift some bread or go hungry that night." Not much bread was being sold at Philly's ravaged Footlocker or Apple Store.

I'm not supplying Trump world ammo to portray these Democrats as defenders of criminality. MAGA already has it stocked in their magazine.

Democrats can be as bad in focusing national attention on Trump's growing economic disaster as they were at not

touting the fabulous economy Biden left us. And Trump is so good at luring them to his culture war nonsense and away from his disastrous economy.

The case of the deported Kilmar Armando Abrego Garcia is an example. It is an assault on our system of justice with a large dollop of cruelty thrown in. The sad reality is that the American masses are not losing sleep over the fate of a man who first entered the country illegally — even if they think Abrego Garcia deserves due process.

Their stock portfolios are another matter.

But even liberal-friendly media can't resist getting sucked into the nasty mockery, a Trump specialty. Last Friday capped a gruesome week in the markets, but the big story across evening news was Abrego Garcia chatting with a Democratic senator in a hotel restaurant with placemats. Trump couldn't have asked for a better distraction.

Thus, Democrats have two missions. One: Stop overplaying the importance of activists burdened by self-immolating statements on their record. When the election season begins to heat up, Democrats can let the jets loose.

Two: Democrats must stop letting Trump play them. Most hollering should be about the economy. Those are the headlines they shouldn't want to block but Trump does.

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IN YOUR VIEW

Conference center concerns, considerations

Listed are Ashland downtown conference center concerns and considerations:

14th Street side (between the Delta Marriott Hotel and Calvary Church):

1. Parking options for parishioners are already limited. Allowance for future parking garage access?
2. Designated handicap parking spaces are needed on 14th and Winchester Avenue.
3. Can the work crews please be asked to park away from the church whichever location is chosen?
4. Fire, EMS and conference center maintenance adequate access?
5. Access for apartment tenants and businesses that share Calvary EC's back alley is already congested. Staff parking is also via back alley.
6. Precedent setting to potentially compromise other downtown streets?
7. Downtown aesthetics compromised in the "Historic District."
8. Will an engineering plan need to be funded for the 14th Street side, either initially or from the building grant itself later? (Whereas there is already a plan paid for the Paramount

side option)

9. The Calvary Episcopal Church is not only about the physical structure and construction proximity safety concerns. The church is a combination of the ministries, Sunday worship and weekly activities. Interrupting these for two-plus years, especially after having Winchester Avenue disrupted for the last year and a half, is problematic. In other words, saying that the conference center construction will be careful to not "hurt the church" is a bit tone deaf to what the church is and how it operates. Changed or compromised access will hurt the church.

10. The compromised light and overshadowing of 14th Street side for the historic stained-glass windows plus added noise on 14th from traffic would prove to be a constant and long-term nuisance.

11. Just because there was a multi-story building (Ashland Oil Headquarters) on 14th and Winchester Avenue before does not mean there needs to be another structure in its place.

12. Building on the Paramount side would mean sticking to the plan that has already been funded and designed by architects.

Fr. Jon Hall
Rector, Calvary Episcopal Church