

Five key takeaways

**1. The illusion of superiority:** Trump considers himself smarter than other leaders, even former US presidents. He has openly criticized not only Democrat presidents but also former Republican ones like George W. Bush.

**2. The law of the jungle:** For Trump, the primary criteria in foreign policy are “power” and “playing cards”. He reminded Zelenskyy that without US military aid, Ukraine would stand no chance against Russia.

**3. Looking down on others:** Trump expected Zelenskyy to welcome him with humility and gratitude. Instead, Zelenskyy responded directly and firmly, which angered Trump.

**4. A desire for showmanship:** Unlike previous presidents, Trump raises sensitive issues in front of the media. He seeks to create a media wave to shape public opinion in his favor.

**5. Money-centric approach:** For Trump, international relations are evaluated solely based on financial gains and losses. He views the weapons

sent to Ukraine not as tools of political power but as a \$350 billion investment.

Rifts in NATO, Europe

Trump, who sought to humiliate Zelenskyy and blame him for US military aid, never imagined that Zelenskyy would stand up to him and leave the White House without signing any agreement. The reaction of European leaders to this dispute was also noteworthy. Senior officials of the European Union supported Zelenskyy. Kaja Kallas, the EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs, wrote on X, “Ukraine is Europe! We stand by Ukraine.” Moreover, Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, tagged Zelenskyy directly in another X post, saying: “You are never alone.” However, there are also divisions within Europe. While leaders from Hungary and Italy supported Trump, Sweden’s right-wing government stood by Zelenskyy. Giorgia Meloni, Italy’s prime minister,

called for an urgent meeting between the US and European allies to discuss major challenges, particularly the Ukraine crisis.

Lessons for America’s admirers

In the meantime, two important lessons have been drawn for admirers of the West and America to learn:

**1. Not giving in to pressure:** Standing up to leaders like Trump, who behave arrogantly and rudely, can yield better results.

**2. The high cost of US aid:** Countries dependent on Washington’s financial and military aid often face humiliation and a loss of dignity.

NATO on verge of collapse?

This dispute not only revealed NATO’s internal challenges but also highlighted horizontal and vertical rifts within the Western alliance. If Trump halts military aid to Ukraine and eases sanctions against Russia, the European Union will face its biggest



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (c) leaves the White House after meeting with US President Donald Trump (not seen in this picture) in Washington, D.C., on February 28, 2025.  
● SAUL LOEB/AFP

crisis since World War II. With his “money-centric” approach, Trump overlooks democratic values and human rights. He views the world as a

business transaction based on financial gains and losses. This perspective may prevent NATO and the Western alliance from addressing future challenges,

ultimately bringing them closer to collapse.

The article first appeared in Persian on SNN.

American Studies class with Professor Zelenskyy

**OPINION** When it comes to diplomatic meetings between heads of state, it is customary for even the smallest details of the ceremony to be meticulously planned and purposeful — from the attire and handshakes of the officials to even their manner of speaking and laughter. However, Donald Trump, much like how his return to the White House has profoundly transformed and redirected the course of US politics, seems to have many surprises up his sleeve when it comes to the etiquette of dialogue. This was evident in the bizarre and unusual events that unfolded during the Saturday evening meeting between the leaders of the United States and Ukraine. For Trump, Zelenskyy, the European Union, and even Russia, as well as the people who expected a routine diplomatic meeting, everything took an unexpected turn.



Staffers of the White House await the start of a joint press conference by the US and Ukraine presidents, which was later canceled as Donald Trump kicked out his Ukrainian counterpart following a heated meeting on February 28, 2025.  
● SAUL LOEB/AFP

Before the aforementioned meeting at the White House, Donald Trump had promised his people the signing of a \$500 billion deal with Volodymyr Zelenskyy for the extraction of Ukraine’s rare and valuable minerals. The stage was set accordingly for this scenario. It was planned that after the bilateral meeting, the leaders would sign the agreement and hold a press conference to map out how to confront Putin’s forces in the future. However, the tables suddenly turned, and the encounter between the two, due to Trump’s condescending and humiliating behavior toward his Ukrainian counterpart, escalated into a full-blown diplomatic scandal, all in front of cameras and the eyes of the world.

Leader’s foresight proven right

“You don’t have the cards right now with us.”  
“You’re gambling with World War Three.”  
“You have to be thankful.”  
“You’re running low on soldiers. It would be a damn good thing. Then you tell us, ‘I don’t want to cease fire.’”  
“It’ll be a tough deal to make because the attitudes have to

change.”  
“You’re not winning this”  
“If you didn’t have our military equipment, this war would have been over in two weeks.”  
These were just some of the taunts and insults hurled by Donald Trump and his deputy J.D. Vance at the unfortunate Ukrainian president during the meeting. The White House thus became a stage for Zelenskyy’s complete humiliation, an event that has sparked numerous reactions, too many to recount here. However, this incident undoubtedly holds many lessons and warnings for us Iranians and the countries of the region, and it is worth reflecting on them. The humiliation of Zelenskyy by Trump is a clear example of the West’s instrumentalist approach toward dependent governments. This top-down behavior demonstrated that even the president of a Western close ally with blond-haired, blue-eyed people will have no standing if they do not fully comply with Washington’s policies. The Leader of Iran’s Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, with his foresight, precisely three years

ago (March 1, 2022), at the onset of the war between Russia and Ukraine, pointed to this issue, stating: “The first lesson from the Ukraine affair is that the support of Western powers for countries and governments that are their puppets is a mirage; it is not real. All governments should know this. Those governments that rely on America and Europe should look at the situation in Ukraine today and Afghanistan yesterday.” Today’s developments prove the depth of this insight by the Leader.

Lesson in understanding US

The recent events also serve as a significant lesson for our country. While Donald Trump, by withdrawing from the JCPOA in May 2018, set Iran on an irreversible path in its dealings with the US, some, in a simplistic analysis, still advocate for negotiating with the unreliable US government. In contrast to this heavy-handed narrative, the explicit remarks of Iran’s Leader on February 7, 2025, clarified the country’s agenda. Ayatollah Khamenei stated: “No problem will be solved by negotiating with America. The

reason: experience.”  
After yesterday’s events, it seems no Iranian will count on negotiating with the Trump administration anymore. Mohammad-Ali Abtahi, a reformist political activist, wrote recently: “Trump behaved similarly with the King of Jordan and European leaders. Trump and Trump’s America are not people to negotiate with. Now imagine if [Iran’s President Masoud] Pezeshkian had been sitting across from him!”

Death of Madman policy

The altercation between Ukrainian and US officials at the White House shows that Trump’s aggressive foreign policy has also failed so far. The weakness of this strategy was first exposed just a few days ago by Hamas leaders, who ignored Trump’s threat to turn Gaza into “hell” if all Israeli prisoners were not released. Now, even a weak figure like Zelenskyy does not want to easily yield to Trump’s demands. While Trump, by adopting the “Madman” approach and initiating threats and verbal attacks against Iran, sought to intimidate and persuade our officials to sit at the negotiating table and then

gain concessions from Tehran, recent events have further exposed Trump on the global stage and will challenge his strategy against the Islamic Republic. Friday’s failure for Trump was no less than Zelenskyy’s. The defeat of a president who seeks to project an image of constant victory negatively impacts the calculations of other parties involved with him in foreign policy matters and diminishes his bargaining power, which is based on coercion and fear.

Clear message for Middle East

Finally, the Trump-Zelenskyy dispute sends a clear message to the Middle East. Some regional countries, including Turkey and Saudi Arabia, have in recent years relied on the West to embark on adventures that have had significant consequences for the region. The Trump-Zelenskyy conflict sends a clear message to our region: security cannot be outsourced to foreign powers. Muslim countries must strive to establish a native and collective security regime.

The article first appeared in Persian on Quds Online.



During a campaign speech, Donald Trump holds up a mask of his face in Sarasota, Florida, on November 7, 2016.  
● CHRIS O’MEARA/AP



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