

Opinion **Donald Trump**

What if Donald Trump were still president?

Hard as it is to believe, the situation in Ukraine could be worse under different US leadership

HENRY MANCE



Donald Trump earlier this week declared Vladimir Putin's 'genius' and called his invasion plan 'pretty smart' © Mario Tama/Getty

Henry Mance YESTERDAY

Sometimes, usually against my will, I remember Donald Trump. You know, the one with the fake tan and small hands? Who looked straight at a solar eclipse and suggested you inject bleach? He still exists!

This week, Trump's acolytes [launched Truth Social](#), a social network intended to rival Twitter, from which he is permanently banned. It hit technical problems immediately, with users unable to sign up. Donald, when they say move fast and break things, they don't mean your own app! As the [comedian Jimmy Kimmel put it](#): "Truth Social has been such a disappointment so far Trump may have to rename it . . . Don Jr."

Sadly, we still get to hear [Trump's views on Ukraine](#). Speaking at Mar-a-Lago, he described Vladimir Putin's invasion in the only way he knows how: as a property deal. "He's taking over a country — really a vast, vast location, a great piece of land." He declared Putin's "genius" and called his invasion plan "pretty smart". Separately, he joked the US could use something similar "on our southern border."

Remember: if several thousand votes in Arizona, Georgia and Wisconsin had gone the other way, this guy would still be president and this week would be even worse.

Let's imagine how much worse: if Trump were president now, he would at some point have referred to events in the wrong country, probably Uzbekistan. He would have tweeted about a basic aspect of geography, possibly the existence of the Black Sea,

with the boast “not a lot of people know that”. Jared Kushner would have a role. In fact, given the inevitable staff turnover, he might by now have *all* the roles. And unlike Joe Biden, Trump wouldn’t have released the US’s excellent intelligence, because he wouldn’t have read it.

Trump claims that Putin’s invasion “would have never happened” while he was president. Crimea was taken by Russia in 2014, when Barack Obama was in office, and the rest of Ukraine is now being taken under Biden. But let’s be serious: Trump undermined Nato and grovelled to Putin. In 2018, shortly after [the Salisbury poisonings](#) and a (rigged) re-election, Trump insisted on calling him. An official gave him briefing notes with the words: “DO NOT CONGRATULATE ON ELECTION WIN”. The first thing that Trump did on the call? Congratulate Putin on his electoral win!

Dictators were never intimidated by Trump, whom they knew was all vanity and no strategy. It was on Trump’s watch that China’s [Xi Jinping cracked down](#) on Hong Kong, Belarus’s Alexander Lukashenko [brutally put down protests](#) and Saudi operatives [murdered Jamal Khashoggi](#).

All the while Trump was impotent. He did agree a deal with Xi, under which China would buy \$200bn more US exports by the end of 2021. We now know that China bought [none](#) of these. He tried to negotiate with Putin one-on-one using what the author Michael Wolff referred to as his “anchor-tenant strategy”, based on wooing a star brand to a property developer. He came out humiliated.

At the same time, Trump didn’t actually change Russia policy much. He imposed sanctions, because the adults in Washington insisted on it. But he couldn’t build alliances: he reportedly alienated Narendra Modi by telling the Indian leader, “It’s not like you’ve got China on your border.”

Trump had no answers to the tragedies of Afghanistan, Syria and Ukraine. Yet the original sin wasn’t his. Much of it belonged to his predecessor George W Bush, who, by invading Iraq, triggered humanitarian and geopolitical nightmares that occupy the west to this day. The Iraq war was the backdrop for Putin’s [infamous 2007 Munich Security Conference speech](#), in which he raged about unilateralism. Bush dirtied the idea of western military power, splintered the Atlantic alliance and stalled efforts to wean us off fossil fuels.

For all his idiocy, Trump arguably inflicted less lasting damage — not least because he was too incompetent to win re-election. How about that: the racist, coup-attempting clown was the least disastrous of the Republican party’s last two presidents. Can’t

...rown was the least disastrous of the Republican party's last two presidents. Can't
wait to see your candidate for 2024, guys!

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