

TIME FOR A RESET?

Barry Scott Zellen, PhD, examines what impact the Alaska Peace Summit will have on US-Russia relations and restores Arctic exceptionalism

It's no coincidence that August's peace summit took place in America's 49th state. Alaska has a long and proud heritage as part of the Russian Empire via the Russian-American Company, providing a historical bridge between past and present that also spans East and West.

America and Russia also jointly share a collective memory of the stabilising buffer the North provided during the Cold War when flashpoints of conflict elsewhere risked rapid escalation to World War III and nuclear winter, while along the long Ice Curtain between Alaska and the USSR, life went on much as it always had. Next came the post-Cold War dream that Russia would finally come in from the cold and become a new frontier for democracy and economic partnership with Alaska.

These were all compelling reasons for bringing President Trump's *summitry* to Alaska, where the White House successfully bet Alaska's unique Russian-American history could help reset the recently strained relationship between the two countries. Alaska was once the domain of Moscow, and peacefully transitioned to that of Washington, not by force or coercion but by fruitful, good-faith negotiations, after which Russia gladly withdrew from North America in exchange for what it viewed to be just and fair compensation. This is as good a blueprint for ending the bloodshed in Ukraine as one could hope for.

ARCTIC EXCEPTIONALISM SHINES BRIGHTLY TOWARD A FUTURE DEFINED MORE BY PEACE THAN WAR

The real story here and a key reason for bringing this newest chapter in Trump peacemaking to Alaska is the realisation in both Washington and Moscow that Arctic exceptionalism is still alive and well, with the certitude that the North Star still inspirationally points combative mankind toward peace. Such an ambitious and urgently needed peace summit couldn't happen on the European continent, where small thinking and old ideas refuse to die and where Russia remains vilified by most of its states, particularly so by those once captive to their gravitationally locked orbits of the former Soviet Union. But in Alaska, anything is possible. Like the Northern horizon, the Northern imagination stretches forever. This is because Arctic exceptionalism has never died.

Arctic exceptionalism is rooted in Arctic geography, climate and history. It is where the continents and hemispheres meet, where early humanity itself flowed from Eurasia into the Americas bringing civilization and its cultural richness to every corner of our world.



It is where our isolation builds not just strength and independence for which the Arctic is deservedly famous, but a warmth of character and a hospitable and welcoming mindset known all across the circumpolar North.

Arctic exceptionalism continues to shine brightly toward a future defined more by peace than war, accommodation and collaboration more than conflict and competition. We only have to listen to our own hearts as they beat in unison and harmony and not the pundits who tell us Arctic exceptionalism is part of the past and should be buried once and for all. President Trump, the perennial outsider, knows better and has instead sought to expand America's Arctic presence in many ways, and in so doing expand its greatness. Indeed, the summit's optics exuded a spirit of Cold War detente, signalling a reset between two great leaders of two great powers who seem to intuitively *grok* one another.

From the rolled out red carpet, to the B-2 and F-35 flyovers, to the F-22 escort safely back to Russian air space, this was most definitely a meeting for the history books. Trump's achievement in Anchorage includes winning consent from Moscow to reverse its longstanding rejection of an Article 5-like security guarantee for Ukraine from America and the West modelled on but separate from NATO.

While the critics are correct that Russia is being rewarded for its aggression, this is greatly offset by Ukraine gaining protections Moscow long rejected – and a far cry from Moscow's initial and overly ambitious war goals in 2022. Trump's intuitive acceptance of the necessity for territorial concessions to bring an end to the bloodletting and restore stability need not be portrayed as kowtowing to the Kremlin, but instead a visionary and bold breakthrough for peace. We should all welcome his effort with open hearts and minds, and hope he successfully achieves his vision of peace ●

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