

'This conflict is moral ... it is good versus evil'

Interview

Tasked by Trump with bringing peace to Ukraine, Lt-Gen Keith Kellogg is the man to speak to for clarity

By Lord Ashcroft

THE location for my meeting with Lt-Gen Keith Kellogg, a decorated war hero turned skilled diplomat, felt like a scene from a James Bond film.

Chosen by the security staff, the entrance was hidden beneath an unassuming city-centre bar, accessible only by a password. On arrival, I was led to a dimly lit basement where I was ushered behind a dark curtain.

Waiting for me was the three-star army general, a Vietnam and Gulf War veteran who, as a key adviser to Donald Trump, has been tasked with trying to bring peace to Ukraine.

Here in Kyiv, Gen Kellogg is fêted by most Ukrainians, so much so that there are a host of cartoons and memes portraying him as a great protector because Russia has, so far at least, not bombed the city while he was there.

Keith Kellogg is a man driven by principle. He also holds a uniquely powerful position, as the US special envoy to Ukraine, the only American to pursue peace while standing "on the side of good, fighting pure evil".

After speaking with him for an hour, I felt something that has been rare in recent times: a renewed sense of hope that the United States has not abandoned Ukraine. With people like Gen Kellogg guiding the course, the international rules-based order and the security of future generations seem in capable hands.

The president had wanted him to be special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, but he declined the offer. Instead, he was Vladimir Putin – a compliment to the latter role – a job that Kellogg, he said, realised "I'm not going to roll over".

He said with a smile. It was not long into my interview that I realised why perhaps the Russian media had taken such an interest in him as a "KGB agent", the general said. "He never stopped being one. He doesn't understand the West. He understands not to speak English, but he does, and we have caught him out several times before. He is a manipulator. The only thing to counter that is strength, power and force".

Asked whether he agreed with suggestions that the Russian invasion, the former US vice president, that if he had been in charge, he would have moved on to attack a NATO country, Gen Kellogg did not hesitate to respond. Kellogg has not had to travel to Russia and Putin is an expansionist, he said. He has not had to travel to Russia and Putin is an expansionist, he said. He has not had to travel to Russia and Putin is an expansionist, he said.

"It reminds me of the Second World War. In Munich in 1938, Hitler said he would not invade the Sudetenland, then he invaded the Rhineland, then Poland, then he was aiming for legacy. He quickly realised it's harder than expected – personalities matter. Ukrainians are ready for a deal but Putin isn't."

"The [Putin] is being misled. He unfortunately thinks that he is winning this war, but he isn't. So, Trump is just giving him latitude and the time to come to the negotiating table, but we still hold the cards."

When asked whether Ukraine would have to give up some of its territory for peace, the general stressed that any such decisions were Ukraine's alone.

"Trump isn't meddling on Ukrainian land. That's Zelensky's mandate. Nobody else's call. But let's be realistic. Donetsk is 60 per cent occupied. Luhansk is at 85 per cent. You have to accept reality. *De facto* doesn't mean *de jure*. Let's go back to history again before you. You are the last block. The responsibility is immense, and you'd better be ready to go."

Mr Trump's critics see his other foreign policy moves, including Steve Witkoff, the US special envoy for peace missions, as too pro-Illusion, but the general spoke well of him.

"Steve is a personal friend of Donald Trump, and he's got personal ties with Putin, Putin's economic guy. That's his lane. I attach to mine. We're side-by-side in offices, both in the White House and in the department of state, and we co-ordinate constantly. It's a very harmonious relationship."

Gen Kellogg sees himself as an optimist and he believes a peace deal can and will be achieved. However, unlike Mr Trump, he would prefer to see a ceasefire before the detailed peace negotiations. He was clear on the message: "Without a ceasefire, it's very hard to achieve peace. Putin thinks he's winning, so he won't agree to peace yet. Trump prefers peace talks first. I prefer stopping the shooting first, as once it stops, it's hard to restart it."

As for the president's frustration with the slow peace process? "He's aggravated. He thought his personal relationship with Putin would deliver results. Instead, Putin string him along. Behind closed doors, President Trump is much angrier than in public."

As he is so trusted and admired by Ukrainians, Gen Kellogg could find himself in a difficult position if Mr Trump proposes a peace pact that is unacceptable to Ukraine. However, the general told me unequivocally that only Ukraine, not an outside party, can make decisions on the concessions made in any peace deal.

The general believes the Russian casualties in Ukraine – dead and wounded – exceed one million. "That's staggering. Russia doesn't care about human life. The people don't either. That's what's terrifying. This is a nation that lost 60,000 in Stalingrad in 1942 and did not learn its own eyes."

As for the next front in this three-and-a-half-year struggle, the general said: "Putin will definitely seek to seize



Lord Ashcroft, right, greets Keith Kellogg, Lt-Gen Vladimir Putin visits a tank factory in Perm, below

As for future improved US-Russia relations, he said: "It will have to be lost Putin. Until Russia rejects the league of good nations, it remains a pariah."

I suggested many Ukrainians were losing faith after Mr Trump had given Putin at least four two-week deadlines "or else" type warnings, and had then done little or nothing to back them up.

In Trump's unwavering nickname of "Doc" – "Trump Always Chicks Out" – a fair one? Gen Kellogg bristled. "No, that's not fair. Trump's trying to give diplomacy every chance. When he said he could stop the war in 30 hours, he was aiming for legacy. He quickly realised it's harder than expected – personalities matter. Ukrainians are ready for a deal but Putin isn't."

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shaped by one day or one assignment. It's cumulative. Vietnam, the Gulf, the White House – each one is a building block. By the time you reach the White House, you are not on a no-bloody again before you. You are the last block. The responsibility is immense, and you'd better be ready to go."

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the totality of Donetsk and Luhansk. The southern regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia may be next. But from what we've seen so far, they can only be taken inch by inch, and casualties will be enormous."

The general is convinced that Europe is better equipped to stand on its own than before – "Trump's view has changed compared to his first term. European leaders now see Russia as an existential threat, whereas before they were dependent on its gas. Trump's relationship with current leaders like Germany's Friedrich Merz or Italy's Giorgia Meloni is much better than that with their predecessors. NATO members spend more on defence."

"That unity is real. We only have to look at the post-Alaska summit. Sunday call with the European leaders when they were in DC on Monday. Within 24 hours, the global leaders put everything aside to be in the Oval Office to discuss the future of Europe. Exceptional. Putin misjudged it."

Gen Kellogg said that Europe should prepare to support Ukraine without America in future. "Better to be prepared. I don't think America will withdraw fully, but it's best that Europe stands on its own two feet. At this point, Europe is almost self-sufficient in sustaining Ukraine's war effort through the cohesion we haven't seen before."

At the end of my interview, I quoted Gen Kellogg's book *War by Order*. Moore, where he says foreign policy is itself a form of war, one that demands clarity, toughness, as better strategy. So, who is winning that war? "The West is winning, as better ideas, and we are cohesive. But the danger remains," he replied.

As for his frustrations with the Washington elite? "They act like politicians, not soldiers. At the edge, do you go for the throat or do you fold? Washington would?"

Asked what he hopes his legacy will be, he said simply: "I hope people remember I fought to keep the faith in those ideas. This conflict is either. It's good versus evil. Putin is evil. If Ukraine comes out strong, I can rest easy knowing I fought the good fight."

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