

# [***Orban meeting offers preview of Trump's 2nd-term strongman idealizations***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BH5-1981-DY7V-G2VD-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Byline:** Analysis by Stephen Collinson, CNN

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; [*Viktor Orban*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/28/europe/orban-hungary-eu-unity-ukraine-russia-intl-cmd/index.html) is taking his blueprint on dismantling democracy to Mar-a-Lago.

The Hungarian prime minister first won power through a democratic election, then proceeded to weaken the institutions of that democracy by eroding the legal system, firing civil servants, politicizing business, attacking the press and intimidating opposition parties and demagoguing migration.

Former President Donald Trump has left no doubt that he'd try something similar in the United States if he wins a second term - so the presumptive GOP nominee will presumably be eager to compare notes when he hosts Orban in Florida on Friday.

The prime minister isn't meeting Biden administration officials. (A Biden administration official told CNN's Betsy Klein that no invitation for a meeting between the current US president and Hungarian leader was extended.) Instead, he's choosing to meet the man he hopes will again be US president next year. The two men have a long history of mutual admiration. The fact that one of Trump's first moves since becoming presumptive GOP nominee this week is to meet a European autocrat speaks volumes.

Trump sees Orban as the kind of strongman - unencumbered by legal and political restraints - that he'd like to be. Orban also frequently genuflects to Russian President Vladimir Putin - just like the former US president. Orban supports Trump's vow to end the war in Ukraine if he's elected within 24 hours - a process that could happen only on Putin's terms and reward his illegal invasion. Their relationship is also helped by the Hungarian leader's frequent praise for Trump. He knows the way to the ex-president's heart. At a rally in New Hampshire in January, Trump diverted from his regular stump speech to laud Orban in a way that offered a chilling glimpse into his own intentions. "Some people don't like him because he's too strong. It's good to have a strong man at the head of a country," Trump reflected.

Orban's far-right populism, fierce anti-immigration rhetoric, Christian nationalism and hostility to LGBTQ rights has made him a popular ideological model for Trump's "Make America Great Again" followers. He has [*spoken*](https://www.cnn.com/2022/08/04/politics/cpac-texas-donald-trump-viktor-orban/index.html) in the past at the Conservative Political Action Conference - an annual gathering of pro-Trump forces - and Hungary will host another edition of CPAC's overseas conferences next month.

In many ways, Orban pioneered a demagogic style of leadership that is identical to that of Trump long before the ex-reality star and property mogul went into ***politics***. His country is a member of NATO and the European Union but, like Trump, he has often taken steps that cut against the interests of the western democracies. He has, for instance, long feuded with the EU over his anti-immigration policies and slowed the entry of Sweden into NATO, which finally took place this week.

Ahead of his meeting with the former president, Orban endorsed Trump's views on Ukraine, in what will have been music to Putin's ears and will have added to alarm in Kyiv about what a second Trump term would mean. "It is not gambling but actually betting on the only sensible chance, that we in Hungary bet on the return of President Trump," Orban told an economic forum on Monday, [*Reuters reported*](https://www.reuters.com/world/hungarian-pm-orban-meet-trump-march-8-florida-2024-03-04/#:~:text=%22It%20is%20not%20gambling%20but,to%20who%20is%20the%20president.%22). "The only chance of the world for a relatively fast peace deal is political change in the United States and this is linked to who is the president."

Trump's antipathy to sending more US aid to Ukraine had prompted House Republicans to block President Joe Biden's [*latest $60 billion package*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/12/politics/senate-foreign-aid-bill-ukraine/index.html) and has led frontline soldiers fighting Russia to ration bullets. Trump is not even president, but he's already influencing US policy in ways that help Putin.

Biden used the early portion of his State of the Union address on Thursday night to castigate Trump over his hostility to NATO allies and affinity with the Russian leader. "My predecessor, a former Republican president, tells Putin, '[*Do whatever the hell you want*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/10/politics/trump-russia-nato/index.html),'" Biden said, referring to a comment by Trump to the effect that if NATO states didn't make military spending targets he wouldn't defend them. "A former American president actually said that, bowing down to a Russian leader. It's outrageous. It's dangerous. It's unacceptable."

Biden, who is anchoring his reelection bid on a warning that Trump would destroy US democracy in a second term, was quick to seize on Orban's visit to Florida. In a statement, Biden's campaign rebuked Trump for meeting "Hungarian dictator Viktor Orban, notorious for eroding his own country's democracy and cozying up to Vladimir Putin (sound familiar?)"

The juxtaposition of Biden using his [*State of the Union address*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/03/08/politics/biden-state-of-union-analysis/index.html) on Thursday to vow to fight to preserve American and global democracy and Trump's red carpet welcome for Orban eloquently encapsulates the political and geopolitical crossroads that America's presidential election represents.

Much of Europe is already recoiling in horror over the possibility of a second term for Trump. But in Budapest, at least, he's seen as a kindred spirit and his return would be greeted with great satisfaction.

Analysis by Stephen Collinson, CNN

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