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## **HOW MIGHT EFFORTS TO END THE WAR IN UKRAINE PROCEED?**

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In an article I wrote, published on the day President Trump was sworn in for his second term, I questioned which policy Trump would pursue to bring an end to the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine<sup>1</sup>. I wondered at that time whether President Trump would favour a deal based on the principles that underpin the global and European security order or instead prefer reaching an understanding with Russia that considers the dynamics of ‘realpolitik’ concerning the spheres of influence of the major powers, akin to Yalta.

The reflections on the meeting between Trump and his Russian counterpart, Putin, in Alaska last week once again highlight Trump’s tendency to choose the latter course. After the Alaska summit, President Trump announced that he had reached a putative peace agreement with President Putin. Within two days, he convened talks in Washington with President Zelensky and several European leaders. During these discussions, the prospect of Ukraine joining NATO was formally withdrawn. The Washington meetings then turned to the question of post-war security guarantees for Kyiv. At first, Mr. Trump left open the possibility of a NATO role in Ukraine, but soon reversed himself, ruling it out and suggesting that Europeans should shoulder the responsibility. Russia, for its part, has consistently rejected European forces to be deployed by NATO members on Ukrainian territory.

On the matter of territory, it is important to recall that Russia formally announced to annex Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson in 2023 and shows no intention of relinquishing them.

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<sup>1</sup> Ildem, Tacan, HOW TO BRING AN END TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS ON EUROPEAN SECURITY [https://edam.org.tr/Uploads/Yukleme\\_Resim/-25-01-2025-09-58-42.pdf](https://edam.org.tr/Uploads/Yukleme_Resim/-25-01-2025-09-58-42.pdf)

Mr. Trump is now attempting to broker a meeting between Presidents Putin and Zelensky at a bilateral level in the first instance, with the aim of later holding a trilateral session. Moscow, however, insists such encounters require careful preparation, signalling there is no rush. Just last week, Foreign Minister Lavrov underscored that Russia must be included in all talks on Ukraine's security guarantees implying them to be under the auspices of the permanent members of the UNSC, thereby alluding to that China plays a role as a guarantor. President Zelensky, meanwhile, has made clear he would only meet with Putin once there is a prior agreement among allies on security guarantees for Ukraine. Altogether, the ambiguities and open questions surrounding the supposed "peace plan" suggest that Mr. Trump's confidence stemmed more from initial perceptions than from a realistic reading of Russia's position or the complexities involved.

One can only hope that the messages Trump received from those European leaders, who rushed to the White House by rescheduling their calendars, serve a purpose in tempering and injecting principled pragmatism into what Trump advocates. The ongoing Russian aggression, on the other hand, with the continued suffering of the Ukrainian people and material damage inflicted each day, should also persuade President Trump that insisting on what he believes to be best for peace would not be sustainable, if attainable at all. The recent statements, though some contradict the previous, may indicate uncertainty about his future actions.

Against the backdrop of these developments, I once again want to highlight those views that I shared in my earlier article for efforts to bring an end to the ongoing war with avenues for a just and durable peace.

First, it must be remembered that Russia invaded and annexed Crimea, which belonged to Ukraine, in 2014. Russia once again occupied large swaths of Ukrainian territory in February 2022, thereby repeatedly breaching the territorial integrity of an independent and sovereign nation. With such an illegal and illegitimate attack, Russia has acted contrary to its commitments to respect independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity, and to refrain from using force or threatening to use force, as outlined in the fundamental documents underpinning European security. It is important to recall that at the time Russia invaded Crimea, the focus was on Ukraine's political and economic orientation towards EU membership. Ukraine announced in December 2014 that it was abandoning its principle of 'permanent neutrality' following the annexation of Crimea, and in 2019, it incorporated NATO membership into its Constitution. Conversely, Putin's interpretation of history, which he previously alluded to in his 2005 speech—where he described the dissolution of the Soviet

Union as a catastrophe of the 20th century—precipitated his decision to initiate the war in Ukraine under the guise of a ‘special military operation’. This view of history, essentially an extension of his manifesto article titled ‘Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians’, written in 2021, reveals a flawed and dangerous mindset that some (specifically Ukraine) cannot exercise their sovereignty independently. In other words, countries like Russia should demonstrate greater sovereignty, while countries like Ukraine should have less, that is, an “Animal Farm” à la Russe.

The parameters of a ceasefire to be reached between Russia and Ukraine and a peace treaty to be agreed upon through negotiations can be enumerated as follows:

**(a)** Territorial concessions, which can be seen as the fundamental criterion for ending such a war of attrition, will not be easy for either side, given the fact that, though Russia controls certain territories, the absolute winner of the ongoing war is not clear.

**(b)** Therefore, it may be a better recipe to grant a ‘temporary status’ to the Ukrainian territories under Russian occupation at the first stage until the parties agree on the conditions that will ensure a permanent peace.

**(c)** It will be important that such a status does not lead to the creation of a new ‘frozen’ or ‘protracted’ conflict. Likewise, it may be considered to deploy an UN-mandated ‘deterrent force’ on the line of contact between Ukraine and the lands that will be accorded such a ‘temporary status’, which will be subject to lengthy negotiations within the UNSC. It would be essential to ensure that this force acts as a tripwire, prompting states that grant Ukraine a ‘security guarantee’ to use force to counter any future aggression or hostility.

**(d)** The international community will also need to continue its policy of non-recognition of the Ukrainian territories occupied and annexed by Russia claimed to be part of Russia.

**(e)** It would be appropriate to expand the narrow scope of the format envisaged for the Minsk negotiation process<sup>2</sup> following the annexation of Crimea, in a way that reflects the will of the

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew Lohsen and Pierre Morcos, Understanding the Normandy Format and Its Relation to the Current Standoff with Russia, CSIS Analysis, February 9, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/understanding-normandy-format-and-its-relation-current-standoff-russia>.

international community. This enlarged format may allow the participation of stakeholders who can be willing and able to contribute to the process (including Türkiye with its facilitating role).

At this point, the question of how to provide a security guarantee to Ukraine arises. It was observed that the guarantees given by the parties to the 1994 Budapest Memorandum did not achieve the desired preventive results for Ukraine during the annexation of Crimea in 2014, the second invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022, and throughout the ongoing conflict. Therefore, although it is not ideal for individual countries to offer bilateral and multilateral security assurances, it would not be unreasonable to expect that this approach might need to be pursued until conditions become ripe for Ukraine to be admitted to NATO. Unlike the standard procedure, the 'Membership Action Plan (MAP)', which a country aspiring to join NATO must complete, is no longer a requirement for Ukraine<sup>3</sup>. Achieving NATO membership will not be straightforward for Ukraine in the foreseeable future, as there is no consensus among Allies on this matter yet. However, suppose the complex negotiations over territorial issues remain unresolved at the time of a decision to admit Ukraine into NATO. In that case, it may become necessary to reassess the applicable rule that 'candidates with partly disputed territory cannot be accepted as members of the Alliance.' Consequently, it could be considered appropriate to prevent Russia from using its droit de regard to block NATO membership for aspiring states by exploiting the creation of a 'protracted conflict' when circumstances allow.

It will not be enough to attain a ceasefire and a peace agreement that will end the war in Ukraine within an abstract framework limited to Ukraine. In fact, Russia presented two separate treaty proposals directly implicating the Euro-Atlantic security to the US and NATO in December 2021<sup>4</sup>. The fact that the timing of the proposals coincided with the massive military buildup it carried out on the Ukrainian border testified to the fact that the issue was not limited to Ukraine. Of course, these proposals, which were not possible to accept by either the US or NATO, pushed the boundaries of reason too far, essentially including issues concerning the broad framework on which the now dysfunctional European security architecture was based. Therefore, the relevance of the problem to European security should never be overlooked in the search for a possible ceasefire and peace agreement. In other

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<sup>3</sup> Jim Gramone, "Leaders Agree to Expedite Ukraine's NATO Membership", U.S. Department of Defense, July, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/article/3455199/leaders-agree-to-expedite-ukraines-nato-membership/#:~:text=Finally%2C%20leaders%20reaffirmed%20that%20Ukraine.%2C%22%20the%20secretary%20general%20said>

<sup>4</sup> UKRAYNA KRİZİNE DİPLOMATİK ÇÖZÜM ARAYIŞLARI VE TÜRKİYE, Tacan İldem, Sinan Ülgen, Dr. Can Kasapoğlu <https://edam.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/220121-Ukrayna.pdf>

words, it is possible to claim that Ukraine's security, Europe's stability, and Russia's relations with the continent and its own defined hinterland are intertwined.

In a parallel format to the peace negotiations on Ukraine, it is necessary to examine how the arms control and confidence and security-building measures (CSBM), which are the foundations of the European security architecture, and which are now dysfunctional, can be improved and agreed upon. There are past instruments that have been valid, such as the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE)<sup>5</sup> and the Open Skies<sup>6</sup> Treaties with their legally binding provisions, as well as the Vienna Document<sup>7</sup>, which contains a series of politically binding CSBMs, which could inspire ideas for a new European security architecture. Indeed, the Vienna Document, the CFE, and the Open Skies Treaty were viewed by the OSCE as “an interlocking and mutually reinforcing network of arms control obligations and commitments that together increase predictability, transparency and military stability, and reduce the risk of a major conflict in Europe.” Such a renewed vision should certainly not rule out the clear need to extend New START.

In trying to envision a plausible vision for any future security arrangement for Europe, the military drivers of a potential Russia-NATO conflict include military activities or exercises in strategically sensitive locations; enhanced readiness; force build-up; violation of airspace or maritime borders (or perceived violation); proximity of forces or capabilities; deployment locations of long-range offensive weapons and threats to sensitive communication/connection lines. Innovative conventional arms control measures can address these factors, increase warning and decision-making time, make surprise attacks more difficult, and reduce general tension, all being subject to verification. In this context, it would undoubtedly be helpful to take measures to reduce the risk of conflict due to any misunderstanding or miscalculation.

While determining new restrictive measures for any future conventional arms control regime for Europe, maintaining those numerical limitations contained in the CFE Treaty in the categories of weapons would not be enough, since technological advancement in weapons systems could have diminished the sole importance of such numerical limitations. Therefore,

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<sup>5</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE)”, November , 1990. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/4/9/14087.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, “Treaty on Open Skies”, March , 1992. <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/1/5/14127.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), Vienna Document 2011 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures, reissued by Forum for Security Co-operation Decision on Reissuing the Vienna Document (FSC.DEC/14/11), November 30, 2011, <https://www.osce.org/files/f/documents/a/4/86597.pdf>.

emerging and disruptive technologies, AI being *primus inter pares*, and their impact on the future arms control regime should be part of the reflection and negotiation process. There is no doubt that in the future, when conditions are ripe, the negotiation and signing of a new treaty for intermediate-range nuclear forces (INF) in Europe would strengthen security and stability on the continent.

Suppose Russia continues to pursue its aggressive behaviour, driven by its interpretation of history and the challenge posed by its revisionist approach that has overturned the rules-based international order. In that case, it will not be possible to establish a new European security architecture that includes Russia. Although both NATO and the EU, considering recent experience, see Russia as one of the primary sources of threat, as reflected in their strategy documents, the West should not make the mistake of excluding Russia from any security arrangement forever. The realities dictated by geography and history require the West to have a long-term goal of ensuring that Russia returns to the security order supported by the fundamental principles enshrined in the UN Charter and the founding documents of the OSCE. This will, of course, depend on the new security environment that will emerge in the post-war period in Ukraine and on how Moscow chooses to act.

2025 marks the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, which has long served the European security architecture. In efforts to end the war in Ukraine and while defining the arms control and CSBMs that will form the basis of the new security framework, it will be important not to question the fundamental principles enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act for renegotiation. Among these principles, respecting the independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of states; refraining from the threat or use of force; the inviolability of internationally recognised borders; and the right of each state to choose its own security arrangements should be considered 'indispensable' commitments to uphold. If President Trump insists on ending the ongoing war no matter what while ignoring these fundamental principles, then the future of global order and European security architecture will be further shaken to the ground, lacking any guiding rule or principle, but instead subject to the power that any state will wield over others. Any apparent peace based on such a foundation would, as the title of David Fromkin's book on the Middle East suggests, be "A Peace to End All Peace"!