



By: *Iuliia Mendel*

# If Ukraine does not take the initiative towards peace, others will take the reins on its behalf



Discussions about peace in Ukraine are both persistent and, let's be honest, a bit unrealistic. The prospect of long-lasting tranquillity, no matter how alluring, seems unlikely to materialise quickly or endure for long.

For Ukrainians, the best they might hope for today is a shaky ceasefire—something akin to the fragile truce in Donbas that lingered for eight long years before the full-scale invasion began.

Recent discussions between world leaders, including Donald Trump's **remarks** following his **meeting** with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and French President Emmanuel Macron, hint at a potential shift in the narrative.

Trump's assertion that Zelenskyy is open to negotiations—in contrast to the rather moderate rhetoric of the Ukrainian leadership—gives us pause for thought: Are we witnessing the opening notes of a peace overture or just the haunting echoes of a conflict that refuses to abate?

## A striking turn

The political theatre took a remarkable turn when Viktor Orbán, the Hungarian Prime Minister, got involved in a sparring match with Zelenskyy—a duel that would be entertaining if it were not so serious.

Orbán's another call to Putin was met with Zelenskyy's biting commentary questioning Orbán's own validity in global diplomacy. "We all hope that PM Viktor Orbán at least won't call Assad in Moscow," Zelenskyy **tweeted**.

Orbán, who has long called for peace talks, responded with a spirited declaration that the Ukrainian president was dismissing opportunities for dialogue. "We proposed a Christmas ceasefire and a large-scale prisoner exchange. It's sad that President Zelenskyy clearly rejected and ruled this out today. We did what we could!" he **lamented**.

## Orbán is not alone in the call for negotiation among European politicians

Orbán is not alone in this call for negotiation among European politicians; Czech President Petr Pavel has voiced similar sentiments, while tendencies can be observed in Germany, France, Austria, Switzerland, Moldova, and even neighbouring Poland.

In Brussels, the idea of a peace agreement is being happily discussed—however with continuing support for Ukraine under the conditions of "as long as it takes" – a handy mantra that saves face in a bad game.

## A web of uncertainty

While European leaders seem eager for a pause in hostilities, Zelenskyy appears to be caught in a web of uncertainty about what the conditions of peace might entail.

He has **articulated** a willingness to end the conventional war phase if NATO could guarantee the sovereignty of Ukraine's government-controlled territories—essentially a diplomatic umbrella under which to negotiate the return of occupied lands.

But within a week, he rebuffed the idea of NATO membership as long as the occupied territories remain under the Kremlin's boot, emphasising the need for a full restoration of territorial integrity as a precursor to the Alliance.

## The cadence of the negotiations is not in Zelenskyy's hands alone

But the cadence of the negotiations is not in Zelenskyy's hands alone; Russia is playing its own chess game, shifting its positions in a Soviet cunning manner—**proposing** talks one day and **dismissing** them the next.

For Vladimir Putin, resuming negotiations

while the Ukrainian forces maintain a foothold in parts of the Russian Kursk region is a bitter pill that he finds hard to swallow.

And as if to make the dire situation even clearer, recent threats surrounding experimental weaponry make clear the stakes at hand—nuclear rhetoric shrouded in ominous ambiguity.

Recently, Putin pointed out that the emergence of the Oreshnik missile “minimises the need for nuclear weapons.”

## Shift in the Russian narrative

But following the dialogue between Zelenskyy and Trump in Paris, there emerged a subtle shift in the Russian narrative. Sergei Naryshkin, the director of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service, who is traditionally reticent, acknowledged that their set goals of the “special military operation” as the Russians call the war in Ukraine, have almost been achieved, raising the question of whether we are on the brink of a strategic announcement from Putin about the completion of military objectives.

Should such a declaration occur, what would that mean for Ukraine’s sovereignty and the West’s resolve?

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Vladimir Putin is still juggling threats about an experimental missile that could be a nuclear weapon and is supported by American intelligence.

This only amplifies the warning, creating a sense of déjà vu when the Americans warned of a full-scale invasion three years ago.

## The reality of concessions

While the global political landscape is changing, Ukraine is walking a fine line. The longing for peace must grapple with the reality of concessions. The stakes are high, and the prospect of a favourable resolution, steeped in external pressures, hangs heavy in the air.

The situation grows increasingly sombre. Ukraine is beleaguered, rapidly losing ground and human resources; the economy teeters on the brink of default. Escalating weapon threats and the spectre of a freezing winter linger ominously.



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Amidst such turbulence, many citizens are contemplating their futures elsewhere, made anxious by corruption and a lack of military reform.

Despite the impassioned cries for continuing the fight until total liberation of all territories is achieved, the brutal truth is that such an outcome currently feels unattainable.

Any negotiations that materialise might surpass the status quo, which could falter under diminishing support and resources. And in fact, this will be the best sign for Ukraine, which is rapidly losing on the battlefield, losing territory and people every day.

If the negotiations drag on for another year or a year and a half under the current conditions, the Russian army might advance deeper into Ukraine, perhaps even threatening Kyiv itself once again.

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event of peace talks, the U.S. won't "abandon" Ukraine.

Many sources confirmed to me during the three years of this bloody war that attempts to negotiate had taken place. They all failed without even reaching the point of direct contact between Zelenskyy and Putin. However, at some point, Zero time has to come.

With a bleeding, wounded democracy—struggling for understanding and direction—Ukraine's best hope lies in a ceasefire, which may offer a chance to reclaim lost territories and people, in time. However, this will require much groundwork, not least of which includes initiating dialogue with Russia. The urgency is palpable. If Ukraine does not take the initiative to engage in talks, others will certainly take the reins on its behalf.