



By: *Sergei Stepancev, TA Moscow*

# Negotiations with Russia are not possible unless it is forced to do so



During the **meeting** of the Ukrainian and Russian delegations in Istanbul this week, the first since 2022, the world seemed to have been holding its breath, as if something was finally going to change. However, it quickly became evident that there was no room for optimism.

Instead of serious statesmen with credibility and authority, Moscow sent Vladimir Medinsky, a man without diplomatic experience and authority, a writer of propaganda textbooks, the author of Kremlin propaganda, and, above all, a negator of the Ukrainian nation.

Sending Medinsky to the peace talks on Europe's worst conflict since the Second World War is like sending a magician to put out a fire. A show, an illusion, a pompous improvisation instead of a real political process. And nothing more than that.

Moscow made an effort to present the situation as formally serious, but beneath the surface, it was the same old story.

Medinsky presented positions that looked more like a continuation of the propaganda edition of "RT" than a negotiating platform. There was no recognition of the occupation, no acknowledgement of the crimes, and no concrete concessions. There were only calls to "understand the reality on the ground" and an expectation that the West will eventually "wear Ukraine down".

The only concrete result of the meeting in Istanbul was the **exchange** of prisoners of war—1,000 from each side. This was the largest exchange of prisoners of war since the start of the war. And undoubtedly humane.

But it was not a peace concession but a tactical gesture. Shortly after the negotiations concluded, a Russian drone **struck** a bus transporting civilians in the Sumy region of Ukraine. Nine people died. Including three children. The intentional attack sent a clear message – we can strike whenever we desire.

If the exchange was "a sign of goodwill," then

the Russian artillery immediately showed what Putin really thinks about peace.

## The goal is confusion

It is a pattern. Negotiations without results. A humanitarian gesture followed by a brutal attack. The goal is not peace. The goal is confusion, propaganda, and delay. And all this while the Russian armed forces are consolidating their positions on the Kherson and Kharkiv fronts.

Vladimir Putin does not send negotiators. He sends the contractors. People whose job it is to feign interest in peace while methodically destroying the Ukrainian infrastructure behind the scenes.

Medinsky is no **exception** – he is a symbol of the system. His appearance at the peace talks says only one thing: the Kremlin is not interested in ending the war but in its new phase, in which a weakened West, a divided Europe, and an exhausted Ukraine are to serve as preconditions for final pressure and capitulation.

**The aim is not to end the war, but rather to create a new reality in which the occupation is legitimised**

Today, Putin is waging a war using the same methods as the Soviet Union; while negotiators with official "peacemaker" badges appear on one hand, offensives, espionage, sabotage, and attempts to destabilise the Ukrainian political system are occurring in the background.

The aim is not to end the war, but rather to create a new reality in which the occupation is legitimised and the peace process is used to weaken pressure from the international community.

## Russia does not negotiate in

## order to make concessions

This is why the West's insistence on "dialogue at any cost" can be counterproductive. The issue is not the dialogue itself but that it is being conducted with a regime that uses it to manipulate.

Every time Moscow sits down at the table without a risk of losing anything, it comes back even more determined. We saw that after the Minsk agreements. We still see it today. If history teaches us anything, it is that Russia does not negotiate to make concessions – but to prepare the ground before the next strike.

The West, and the US in particular, should understand this logic. There can be no reasonable agreement with a regime that does not recognise borders, whether territorial or moral. There is no compromise with a government that regards its own army as expendable material and someone else's nation as a temporary mistake.

**The exchange of prisoners, however important and humane it may be, must not obscure the essentials**

The exchange of prisoners, however important and humane it may be, must not obscure the essentials. It must not become an excuse to delay important decisions. As the liberated prisoners arrived in Kyiv and Rostov, the digging of new trenches continued.

The Russian offensive did not stop for a minute. And Putin sent a message to the West at the same time: this is all you can get if you do not pressure us.

## Putin believes he has time, resources and allies

Peace with Russia will not be achieved through rhetoric. It will be achieved at a price. Putin will seriously sit down at the negotiating table

– but only when continuing the war becomes more expensive and dangerous for the regime than ending it.

That has not yet happened. He believes he has the time, resources, and allies to see it through. And as long as he believes that, the photo from Istanbul—with a smiling Medinsky in front of the camera—will just be another shot from a badly staged play.

Negotiations mean nothing if they have no consequences. If they do not lead to a step towards a ceasefire. If they do not include a minimum recognition of reality – that Ukraine is an independent, internationally recognised state and that the aggressor must be the first to withdraw. Without this condition, everything else is just an illusion.

Today, Putin is waging war using the same methods as his predecessors – negotiation on the one hand and pressure on the other.

Russian artillery activity on the front in Donetsk has increased in recent weeks, and the use of Iranian drones has **doubled** since the beginning of May. At the same time, spokespeople in Moscow are declaring that "Kyiv does not want peace"—a classic Russian switch of arguments.

## There is no agreement without real pressure

This is why the West's insistence on "dialogue at any cost" can be counterproductive. The problem lies not in dialogue but in the illusion that you can reach an agreement with someone like Putin without real pressure.

History is clear: Russia only agrees to peace when it can no longer wage war. That has always been the case. It must be the same today.





*Peace comes when the aggressor regrets having started the war. As long as this is not the case, Putin will send various Medinskys to simulate negotiations - Vladimir Medinsky*

Putin believes that there is still room for manoeuvre. That he can negotiate, send meaningless envoys, exchange prisoners – and at the same time bomb Kharkiv, shell Nikopol and attack civilians near Sumy. His calculations will work out until someone shows him that he was mistaken.

It should therefore be clearly stated: real negotiations with Russia are only possible when it is forced to sit at the table because it has to, not because it wants more time. The Istanbul talks represent another chapter in a series that history will recall for its symbols, not for its substance.

Peace comes when the aggressor regrets having started the war. When war turns into a loss rather than an investment. As long as this is not the case, Putin will send various Medinskys to simulate negotiations.