

War in Ukraine: Possible Breakthrough, Give Peace a Chance

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Peace talks between Ukraine and Russia are well underway and there are signs of a potential breakthrough. Europe has every interest in a speedy end to this conflict, but that does not seem to be the case for the US or the UK. Will peace logic succeed?

Possible breakthrough

Amid the horrific violence of war, there are signs of a potential breakthrough in Ukraine-Russia peace negotiations. According to the [Financial Times](#), significant progress has been made in the talks and a 15-point peace plan has been drawn up by both sides.

In exchange for a ceasefire and the withdrawal of Russian troops, Ukraine would assume neutral status, renounce its ambitions to join NATO and promise not to host foreign military bases on its territory. Kyiv could keep its army, but would ban certain groups (read neo-Nazi militias). Also, the names of streets referring to Ukrainian collaborators who fought with the Nazis against the Soviet Union during WWII would have to be changed.

Russia, for its part, would water down its demand that Ukraine upgrades Russian to the country’s second official language on the condition that Kyiv rolls back laws restricting the use of the language.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky made it clear that he is after peace. In a [public message](#) he indicated that he does not expect his country to join NATO soon, which is one of Moscow’s most important demands:

“For years we have been hearing about how the door is supposedly open [to NATO membership] but now we hear that we cannot enter. And it is true, and it must be acknowledged”.

There are still important bottlenecks. For example, the ongoing discussion about the status

of neutrality. Ukraine rejects Sweden or Austria models and wants solid security guarantees against future threats.

Another point of contention is the recognition of the 2014 annexation of Crimea and the independence of two separatist republics in the eastern border region of Donbas. Ukraine refuses to accept this, but is willing to deal with the issues separately.

Troublemakers

“The parties are close to an agreement on fundamental issues,” said Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut [Cavusoglu](#). All in all, these are hopeful messages, but unfortunately not everyone is in favour of this state of affairs.

Many observers say that behind the scenes the US is playing a crucial role in these talks. And it is highly questionable whether Washington will pursue a swift negotiated solution. The same goes for the British government.

“US pours cold water on hopes of diplomatic solution in Ukraine,” The [Financial Times](#) headlined this weekend. And US Secretary of State Anthony [Blinken](#) says about the peace talks:

“Diplomacy requires both sides to be in good faith to de-escalate, and I see no signs at this point that Putin is willing to stop.”

Blinken’s declaration came days after President Biden announced a new package of military aid to Ukraine, including anti-aircraft defence systems, anti-tank weapons and armed drones.

Hillary [Clinton](#), the former Secretary of State, opts for a prolonged war and toys with the idea of turning Ukraine into Russia’s new Afghanistan.

British Foreign Secretary [Liz Truss](#) thinks in the same direction. According to her, the conflict in Ukraine could last “a number of years” and we should be “prepared for a very long haul”.

War logic

Two logics are diametrically opposed here. You have the logic that fully prioritizes war. The enemy must be dealt with as hard as possible and weakened as much as possible. That means sending more and more powerful weapons, stationing troops and missiles in neighbouring countries, imposing tougher sanctions and razor-sharp rhetoric (“Putin is a war criminal”).

It was also following that logic that since the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and despite clear promises, NATO has systematically expanded eastward, leaving Russia feeling cornered.

The implications of this logic are threefold. A prolonged and fierce conflict will be felt first and foremost in economic terms. Energy and food prices will soar. High inflation will cause interest rates to rise. This is not only detrimental to [economic growth](#), but given the high mountain of debt as a result of the corona crisis, this could lead to a serious debt crisis.

In addition, trade flows with Russia will cease and arms expenditures will increase. A protracted war also causes uncertainty in the markets, which is detrimental to the investment climate. In any case, Europe is expected to experience a serious [slowdown of growth](#) due to the war in Ukraine.

Second, a fierce and protracted conflict will cause a large and long-lasting influx of refugees. This will put pressure on housing markets, education, social security, etc. The far right has managed to take political advantage of the refugee wave that came from Syria in 2015. If the current conflict drags on for a long time and Western Europe has to take in millions of refugees for a long time, then right-wing extremists will be able to reap even more profits this time.

The real winner

These two effects will particularly be felt in Europe and much less so in the US. The US economy has recovered faster than Europe after the corona crisis. Because of the stimuli, US economy is even struggling with overheating, which makes it welcome rising interest rates.

US economy even benefits from this war. It will be able to supply its [expensive shale gas](#) to Europe in future, in order to replace cheaper Russian gas. The tens of billions that Germany and other European countries will spend on armaments will be a boon for US war industry.

A third consequence of the war logic is that the US will get an even greater grip on Europe through NATO. After WWII, Europe was crammed into a (military) straitjacket through a NATO that is completely controlled by the US. "To remain the dominant global power, the US must use the European Union and NATO to establish its hegemony in Europe," [Christian Saint-Etienne](#) commented.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, there have been frequent voices in Europe for a more autonomous course in geopolitical and military terms, without any results.

Through its warmongering, NATO is now more than ever setting the geopolitical course in Europe. There is no longer any question of a separate, autonomous strategy.⁽¹⁾ Germany, which has traditionally been a *cool NATO lover*, with a pacifist tradition, and which will be the biggest loser in this conflict, has now completely changed its tack.

This conflict primarily affects Europe and weakens the continent. In this war, the United States is the real winner. Biden's presence at the European summit on March 24 should also be seen in this light. The question is whether he is after peace or whether he is going to stir up war.

Give peace a chance

Be that as it may, a different logic is necessary, a logic that puts a stop to militarist escalation, a logic that focuses on dialogue and strives for a sustainable security structure.

In the short term, active peace diplomacy is needed. The sooner the war ends, the better. To give the peace talks between Ukraine and Russia every chance, one must refrain from further inflaming the war by sending weapons or troops, by extending sanctions, or by using unnecessary war rhetoric.

Offering Putin a so-called “[golden bridge](#)” from Ukraine should also be considered. Ending the war must be made as attractive as possible. At present there are only threats of even more war violence and sanctions. The reverse is also possible and is more desirable now. For example, a ceasefire and a withdrawal from Ukraine could be linked to easing economic sanctions.

This conflict has not come out of the blue. The security structure on the European continent is unbalanced and unstable. The US still sees Eurasia as the chessboard on which the battle for world domination is waged.

Therefore, in the long run, Europe needs a new security architecture. This means taking security into its own hands and not accepting it to be dictated or imposed from outside. This must be a security architecture that focuses on the countries concerned and that is not developed for the sake of geopolitics.

Stability can only be achieved if *all* countries involved feel safe. If weapons agreements are made and conclusive security guarantees are given that all parties can live with.

The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) is best placed to set up such a security architecture. The OSCE has more than proved its worth in the past.

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Notes

(1) The announced new European intervention force, the so-called [rapid deployment capacity](#), is a good illustration of this. It involves barely 5,000 soldiers and will not be fully operational until 2030.

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