

No Symptoms of Peace

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Publication date: 3 March 2025

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The main political event of 2024 undoubtedly was Trump's victory in the US elections. Similarly to the months before Trump's first term, his 2024 presidential campaign was full of courageous plans and promises. The most ground-shaking initiative in the field of foreign policy was the peace deal between Ukraine and Russia who have been at violent war for three years now. The politician first mentioned it in his social media post in March 2023 and repeatedly expanded on this issue during his political rallies and in several interviews over the past two years.

By now, the internet is full of predictions and opinions on how the peace plan will look and what Trump will offer to the conflicting sides. A lot of people are positive about the success of Trump's initiative. However, the development of the War in Ukraine has already proved wrong dozens of predictions due to the observers' limited perception of the opposing forces' objectives, abilities, leaders' statements, and dynamics on the battlefield. If we take an inclusive approach to these factors this time, what is the chance of Trump's initiative leading to a dead end?

Twenty four hours since the inauguration have passed, but the canons are still firing in Ukraine. Trump has a reputation of a man whose words you shouldn't take literally. If in 2023 the runner for President described the solution as an easy 24-hour settlement, on January 31, 2025 (11 days after the inauguration), Keith Kellogg, Trump's official envoy to Ukraine, told Fox News that he believes that the White House will be able to restore peace between Ukraine and Russia in 100 days (Fox News, 2025). By now, the only revealed difference between the approaches of the previous and current administrations is when they want the negotiations to begin. However, the tools haven't changed: in the same interview, Mr. Kellogg stated that contradictions between the fighting countries will be solved by applying pressure to both (Fox News, 2025).

If Ukraine's pressure points (military aid) and success in manipulating the country's decision-makers are obvious, Russia is experiencing economic growth and advances on the front-line under the record-breaking amount of sanctions for the past 3 years (Janis Kluge, 2024). The leverage has failed to bring peace, but Trump seems to stick to it regardless.

In contrast, Vladimir Putin and his administration have been consistent and transparent about their terms of peace. Although Western media outlets and politicians avoid considering "denazification" and "demilitarization" as the real goals of the invasion, the Russian president hasn't changed his rhetoric since the beginning of the war. In 2024, Putin confirmed his position regarding his objectives at least 13 times during various interviews and forums (Diplomat.ru, 2024). Simultaneously, he welcomes negotiations and sees the Istanbul Agreement 2022 as the appropriate base (Diplomat.ru, 2024). In other words, Moscow states that if the long-ago-defined issues can't be solved through the talks, they will be solved through war.

Aside from the sides' objectives, the situation on the "ground" plays an important role in resolving the conflict. During the meeting with the cabinet of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on June 14, 2024, Vladimir Putin called the complete withdrawal of Ukrainian Forces from Lugansk (90% under the Russian army's control), Donetsk (70%), Kherson (70%), and Zaporozhye (70%) regions as the only realistic condition at the moment to begin the peace talks.

The president repeated that post-war Ukraine must be "neutral, non-aligned, non-nuclear" and added that in case of the refusal of the offer, the conditions are going to change in the future (Diplomat.ru, 2024) (Regnum, 2024). Half a year ago, the West and Ukraine didn't take it seriously. However, the new American administration doesn't agree with this position either. Furthermore, during the Munich Security Conference (MSC) 2025, Kellogg mentioned that his team expects "territorial concessions" from Russia (Anadolu, 2025). Just two days later, the two highest representatives of the Russian MFA stressed that the four mentioned regions are "irretrievably lost" and can't be a part of the discussion (Kommersant, 2025), (RBC, 2025).

Simply put, Russia has requests that it won't negotiate or compromise because, as Putin once said, "it is a matter of life and death" for Russia (Diplomat.ru, 2024). Based on the post-election rhetoric, Trump and his team aren't ready to respect those requests. If the common ground isn't found, sides will use pressure to bend the opponent's opinion.

The successful resolution of all issues through the war effort and the defeat of the Ukrainian Armed Forces is Putin's leverage. For the US, it would be a military and political defeat, reputational collapse, and the billions spent on Ukraine would turn out wasted. But does Trump believe the defeat is achievable? Kellogg mentioned that leverage is part of Trump's strategy to bring peace and identified its pressure points - sanctions, and reinforcement (Fox News, 2025). But does Putin believe in the effectiveness of those?

When the world's leading economies suddenly sanction your trade, it can't be painless. Still, Russia managed to go around the restrictions and find new markets, supply the army with breakthrough types of ammunition (drones and high-precision bombs), and improve the quality of existing ones (Iskander missile), to continue building the functionality of BRICS and achieve an overall economic growth (Military Watch Magazine, 2025) (Janis Kluge, 2024).

In comparison to the 2022 sanctions, the current American administration doesn't have a revolutionary restriction and can't impose it as unexpectedly. When speaking of military aid, there is hardly anything that the US hasn't offered Ukraine, but the previous reinforcements didn't turn back the Russian army or make it change its objectives. The continuous increase in American military support only affirms the Russian position regarding the conditions for peace and even sparks ideas of new offensives (like the one next to Volchyansk), instead of doing the opposite (RBC, 2024) (Anadolu, 2024).

The self-confident rhetoric of the Russian politicians reflects the dynamics on the front-line. The Russian army is moving forward. Although the offensive seems to be slow, the units are advancing through the area with the most sophisticated fortifications in Ukraine amid the pessimistic characteristics the Western and Ukrainian mass media gave to the Russian army, its casualties, and potential (Roman Melnyk, 2024) (Abdujalil Abdurasulov, 2023) (Kateryna Denisova, 2025) (GMK Center, 2024). Judging from these recent developments, there is a high probability that the invading force has enough potential to reach its goals through war.

After reviewing the sides' rhetoric, conditions for peace, and potential pressure points, it is clear that Putin's administration has the upper hand in deciding how the peace plan would look. At the moment, the American president doesn't have the tools to make Putin change his requests while the Russian army has gained momentum. Agreeing to Moscow's terms is unlikely due to the damage to the US reputation and strategic plans while Putin is confident that the military can reach the set goals. The outcome of this stalemate is war until the situation on the ground changes dramatically.

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