

Ukraine's Incursion into Russia: What's Next for the Peace Process?

By

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In August 2024, Ukraine launched a significant incursion into [Russia's Kursk Oblast](#), advancing up to 30 kilometers and gaining control of 1,200 square kilometers and 93 villages. [Analysts suggest](#) the offensive aims to pull Russian forces away from the eastern front lines and secure leverage for potential peace talks. However, Russia continues to make gains in eastern Ukraine, capturing the town of Niu-York near Donetsk and pushing Ukrainian troops to evacuate Pokrovsk. As both sides dig in, the conflict shows no signs of abating, resulting in a severe humanitarian crisis.

As the international community struggles to manage the escalating crisis, the prospect of a peace process remains distant. Russia maintains that peace is only achievable when its objectives are met. These [objectives](#), central to Moscow's stance from the beginning of the war, include the demilitarization and neutralization of Ukraine, as well as changes that align with Russia's security interests. These include control over Crimea and influence in eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelensky, [dismissed peace talks](#) with Russia, insisting that any resolution must involve the complete withdrawal of Russian forces from all Ukrainian territory, including Crimea.

He emphasized that Russia, as the sole aggressor, must be compelled to comply with international law and respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Despite ongoing military engagements and international diplomatic efforts, both sides remain entrenched in their positions, with Russia demanding territorial concessions and Ukraine insisting on sovereignty and territorial integrity.

A potential resolution could involve establishing a neutral zone in contested areas, facilitating a phased withdrawal of both Russian and Ukrainian forces. Ukraine's commitment to its territorial integrity should be upheld, while Russia could receive assurances regarding its security concerns, particularly concerning the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO) commitment to Ukraine's future membership. Such a balanced approach could open avenues for dialogue, encourage a more stable regional environment, and ultimately benefit both nations while contributing to broader international stability.

Russia's Domestic Situation

Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) outlined Russia's conditions for ending the war in Ukraine, which focus on Ukraine's full withdrawal from the entire territories of Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson, and Zaporizhzhia—regions Moscow claims as Russian land. He also demands that Ukraine abandon its bid to join NATO—addressing Russian concerns about NATO's eastward expansion. Furthermore, Putin called for Ukraine's demilitarization and insisted on the lifting of Western sanctions that, while not crippling, impact Russia's economy.

Domestically, Putin frames the war as essential to Russia's security and national identity, maintaining significant support despite economic hardships caused by sanctions. The extended nature of the war, however, is seeing inflation, falling living standards, and localized protests over conscription. Despite these pressures, Putin shows little interest in peace, viewing the war

as vital to Russia's strategic objectives. Without significant internal shifts or international pressure, it is unlikely that Russia will pursue peace soon. Putin's current stance suggests that the conflict will persist, with little sign of de-escalation unless broader geopolitical changes occur.

Ukraine's Domestic Conditions

In Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelensky maintains strong public support despite the immense challenges the country faces. The Ukrainian population remains united in their resistance against Russian aggression, bolstered by a deep sense of national pride and resilience. However, the ongoing conflict has taken a severe toll on the country's infrastructure, economy, and civilian population.

Ukraine's desire for peace is clear, but not at the cost of sovereignty or territorial concessions. Zelensky's government has repeatedly stated that any peace deal must include the withdrawal of Russian forces from all Ukrainian territory, including Crimea.

[President Zelensky](#) dismissed the idea of peace talks with Russia, urging for decisive global action to compel Moscow into peace. Speaking at a United Nations Security Council meeting, he emphasized that Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion violated numerous international laws and will not cease through negotiations. Zelensky's government consistently maintains that any peace deal must include the complete withdrawal of Russian forces from all Ukrainian territory, including Crimea. He argued that as the sole aggressor, Russia must be forced into peace, underscoring the need to uphold the UN Charter's principle of respecting every nation's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Collapse of Peace Proposals for the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Multiple international peace efforts failed to resolve the Russia-Ukraine conflict. [China's 12-point peace proposal](#) for the Russia-Ukraine conflict advocated for an immediate cease-fire and respect for national sovereignty. It called for the lifting of non-UN sanctioned sanctions, protection of civilians, and the promotion of dialogue while emphasizing humanitarian issues and global energy security. The plan also included a cease-fire that would freeze Russian troops in place on Ukrainian territory and urged cooperation among nations to achieve lasting peace.

However, it was dismissed by the West for favoring Russia and not addressing Ukraine's territorial sovereignty. The [Geneva talks](#) regarding the Russia-Ukraine conflict sought to establish a framework for dialogue aimed at addressing security concerns and finding pathways to a peaceful resolution. Key topics included NATO expansion, security guarantees for Ukraine, and managing the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. These discussions, however, have faced obstacles due to differing views among the parties involved, leading to limited progress and a continuing stalemate in negotiations.

[Hungary's attempts](#) to mediate in the Russia-Ukraine conflict faced significant challenges, culminating in the European Union's (EU) decision to strip Budapest of its right to host foreign and defense ministers' meetings due to Prime Minister Viktor Orban's meeting with Vladimir Putin. EU leaders viewed it as undermining a united European response to the war. As a result, Hungary's role as a mediator has been called into question, with criticism from various EU member states highlighting the lack of consensus around its diplomatic initiatives.

Is Peace Possible?

The prospect for peace in the Ukraine-Russia conflict remains vague at best. A potential resolution could involve creating a neutral zone, phased troop withdrawal, and maintaining Ukraine's territorial integrity while addressing Russia's NATO-related concerns. However, entrenched geopolitical dynamics may prolong the conflict for years, worsening devastation, and complicating diplomatic efforts.

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