

# UKRAINE'S CHANCES OF VICTORY UNDER TRUMP'S PRESIDENCY

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Received: 13.05.2025

Accepted: 13.06.2025

Published: 30.06.2025

**Abstract.** This article explores the potential consequences of Donald Trump's return to the presidency on the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, with particular emphasis on the resulting geopolitical shifts and implications for global security. The analysis examines Trump's stated positions, proposed peace plans, and their reception in both Kyiv and Moscow, shedding light on how his rhetoric and strategy may reshape the trajectory of the conflict. It further contextualizes his approach within broader transatlantic dynamics, including NATO's cohesion, European defense initiatives, and the global response to a reoriented U.S. foreign policy. By highlighting Trump's preference for transactional diplomacy, skepticism toward multilateralism, and emphasis on bilateral negotiations, the article considers how these tendencies may accelerate a reordering of the international system and challenge the existing liberal order. The discussion also assesses the potential ramifications for U.S. alliances and regional stability in Eastern Europe. The article concludes that while Trump's promises of a swift peace may have rhetorical appeal, their implementation could intensify volatility and long-term insecurity in the region and beyond.

**KEYWORDS:** PEACE NEGOTIATIONS, NATO AND EUROPEAN SECURITY, RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

## INTRODUCTION

In 2022, the war launched by Russia in Ukraine changed the geopolitical situation in the world. It is the largest and most multidimensional conflict since the end of the Cold War, which has put an end to the existing rules-based international system and laid the foundation for a new world

order. Given the multidimensional nature of the conflict, it involves all representatives of the civilized world, and its consequences directly or indirectly affect other states.

Two years after Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine has regained approximately 54 percent of the occupied territory, while Russia still holds onto 18 percent of the country's sovereign ter-

ritory.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Russia continues to bomb Ukrainian cities and blockades its Black Sea ports, while Ukraine has stepped up air strikes on Russian ships and infrastructure, including deep in the Russian territory.

Since January 2022, Ukraine has received about \$300 billion in aid, but recently, there has been a growing pessimism on the part of its supporting countries and a need for policy review, most clearly demonstrated by the election in the United States, where Republican Donald Trump returned to power. Trump's main message to the world was that he would end the war in Ukraine.<sup>2</sup> However, the ongoing processes and the unpredictable foreign policy of the United States leave question marks, based on which it has become very difficult for politicians or experts to predict the course of events. At times, Trump's statements do not coincide with each other, but his message is clear that he wants to end this war, which he reiterated during a meeting with the new German Chancellor Friedrich Merz in June 2025.

In one of his comments, Trump argued: "Sometimes you see two little kids fighting like crazy. They hate each other, and they're fighting in the square, and you're trying to help them. Sometimes, they don't want to be helped; sometimes it's better to stop and let them fight for a while and then help them. I told Putin on the phone, President, you might have to continue the war and a lot of suffering, because both sides are suffering before you help them, before you can help them. In some form, there will be additional fighting. He hit them, and they hit them very hard, deep into Russia. Putin made it very clear to me so we have no choice but to hit them, and it probably won't be pretty. I told him I don't like this. I said, 'Don't do this. You should not do this. You have to stop this'. But again, there is a lot of hatred between Russia and Ukraine. I stopped the war between India and Pakistan, and I want to do the same with Russia and Ukraine. At some point, it will happen. I believe in it. If it doesn't happen, or if I see someone deviate from this path, if Russia deviates, you'll be surprised how tough we will be".<sup>3</sup>

1 Center for Preventive Action. (2024). War in Ukraine.

2 Slattery, G., Landay, J. (2024). Trump's plan for Ukraine comes into focus: NATO off the table and concessions on territory.

3 FrontNews. (2025). Trump, I am with Ukraine, I am

## 1. RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR AND TRUMP'S POLICY

Trump laments the devastation of Ukrainian cities and the deaths on both sides, insisting that the real toll will ultimately be much higher than Kyiv and Moscow have so far claimed. "They're killing everyone, it's the worst massacre this world has seen since World War II. It has to stop", he said, adding that his administration would speak to both Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.<sup>4</sup>

Trump's team is working on a plan to bring Ukraine and Russia to the negotiating table, and their statements indicate that both Kyiv and Moscow will have to make compromises, although the Ukrainian president has repeatedly stated that the war cannot end at the expense of Ukraine's sovereignty and territory, and the only way to end it fairly is to increase pressure on Russia and increase aid to Ukraine, which is unlikely to happen under Trump's presidency.<sup>5</sup>

During the Russian-Ukrainian talks in Turkey, there was a feeling that the war might be coming to an end, or that a temporary ceasefire might be agreed upon, but the real outcome of the talks was only a prisoner exchange. At the same time, Trump believes that Ukraine and Russia are like two children who should be allowed to fight until they choose to behave otherwise. "Sometimes you see two little kids fighting like crazy, sometimes they don't want to be helped, and sometimes it's better to stop and let them fight for a while and then help them" – Trump said.<sup>6</sup>

Donald Trump has been paying closer attention to ending the war in Ukraine since being elected the 47<sup>th</sup> president of the United States. Based on comments made during his first term, Trump's thinking remains highly transactional on foreign policy in general and the Russia-Ukraine conflict in particular:

He promised to end the war quickly, within months of his presidency. Trump's operating mode has been to deal with the other "most powerful"

4 for stopping the killings, this is what I really want. Politico. (2024). Trump sees 'a little progress' toward ending war in Ukraine.

5 FrontNews. (2024). Zelensky: Ukraine must secure peace without trading territory or sovereignty.

6 FrontNews. (2025). Trump, I am with Ukraine, I am for stopping the killings, this is what I really want.

people in the room and often to ignore other stakeholders. Trump's operational approach has always been to deal with the other "most powerful" people in the room and often to ignore other stakeholders.<sup>7</sup>

This means that any peace talks are likely to be bilateral between Trump and Vladimir Putin, the dynamic which Putin seems to have supported. While Trump's meetings with Zelensky in New York and Paris may have signaled the possibility of revealing his thoughts, Trump may simply be positioning himself for the talks, but these expectations dramatically changed by the time of the talks between the Ukrainian and Russian delegations in Istanbul.

Trump's statements suggest that he plans to end the war with the status quo, with Russia retaining control of the occupied territories. By cutting off U.S. military and financial aid to Ukraine, by rejecting Kyiv's membership in NATO, and by recognizing Russian sovereignty over the occupied territories of Ukraine. Trump can project his power both at home and abroad.

Trump's statements also focus on the scenario of a breakdown in peace talks: Trump could step up arms and financial aid to Ukraine. The Biden administration gave Ukraine the opportunity to use its weapons to attack Russian territory, which in turn increases the risks of escalating the conflict as Putin escalates with tactical nuclear weapons.

Trump could pressure allies in this scenario to ease the Western sanctions regime against Russia and its oligarchs. This would not only directly help Russia but would also hinder Ukraine's war effort, as billions of dollars in interest from frozen Russian central bank assets are currently being funneled to Kyiv to finance reconstruction and rearmament.

Donald Trump will focus on achieving peace in Ukraine rather than returning occupied territories, saying Ukraine's focus should be on peace, not territory.<sup>8</sup> Brian Lanza, who worked on Trump's 2024 presidential campaign, said the administration would push for Zelensky to consider a "realistic vision of peace".

Given the current scenario, following Donald Trump's victory in the presidential election, there was concern that Ukraine could lose the continued support of its most important ally, the United States, which has spent \$108 billion in military, humanitarian, and economic aid since Russia's February 2022 invasion.

"We are preparing for the worst-case scenario, when [Trump] stops all aid", said Lieutenant General Ihor Romanenko, a former deputy chief of the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces.<sup>9</sup> Trump has promised to end the Russia-Ukraine war "within 24 hours", but has provided little explanation for the plan, saying he would cut off military aid to Kyiv unless it begins peace talks with Moscow.

Trump's "peace plan" remains vague, but experts say it likely involves giving up some or all of the territory occupied by Russia, nearly 19 percent of Ukraine's territory, in exchange for a peace deal or a freeze along the present front-line positions. They were made more stringent by Russia at the second round of talks in Istanbul.

Trump, who often describes himself as a masterful deal-maker, has also argued that if Moscow does not engage in peace talks, he will push ahead with the supply of advanced weapons to Kyiv. This approach implies a more forceful and hardline approach to international security issues and is focused on achieving concrete results with whatever means available. Trump's promise that the war will end is inevitable, because he might be thinking of two scenarios: a. forcing the conflict to freeze under the current status quo, which includes cutting off financial and military aid to Ukraine, or b., strengthening Ukraine militarily. In either case, the war will end, and the foundation for a new geopolitical order will be laid. However, the new German Chancellor has taken the initiative and lifted restrictions on Ukraine's use of long-range missiles, and he will also transfer Taurus missiles to Ukraine.

Earlier, one of President-elect Donald Trump's first congratulatory phone calls was to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on the day after the election. Both sides noted that the conversation

7 Kelly, M.J., Martin, C. (2024). Trump's Endgame for the War in Ukraine.

8 Santos, S.F. (2024). Trump ally says Ukraine focus must be peace, not territory, BBC News.

9 Al Jazerra. (2024). Russian-Ukrainian War. (2024). 'Worst-case scenario': Ukraine awaits Trump's presidency with trepidation.

was positive and focused on future peace. It was not until the following day that Trump spoke to Russian President Vladimir Putin, and even then, the Kremlin denied the dialogue had gone as smoothly as the Russian leader had hoped. The Washington Post, which first reported the call, citing five sources familiar with the matter, said that Trump “urged the Russian president not to start a war in Ukraine and reminded him of Washington’s significant military presence in Europe”. This is certainly not a message Putin would welcome.

Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance’s talk of a quick peace deal poses a major challenge for Ukraine. The Trump administration’s new peace plan would force both sides to compromise in order to avoid further war and destruction. However, recent actions and the dynamics of the war make it clear that the war is still going to continue. Trump’s future priorities and the current state of geopolitical dynamics could lead to a peace deal that still gives Ukraine positive leverage.

Although NATO has been promoting Ukraine’s membership prospects since 2008, it has repeatedly put the process on hold, but Ukraine’s size and its experience in hot war for more than a decade, not to mention the contribution of Ukrainian troops in the past, could be a valuable argument in its favor but Vladimir Putin emphasizes and the peace agreement memorandum he presented strictly defines Ukraine’s military neutrality and the inadmissibility of such forces.<sup>10</sup> This could be a particularly important element as Trump renews pressure on European allies in NATO to increase their defense spending and rely less on the United States. Fears of Trump’s waning support for the alliance itself also provide a backdrop for supporting Ukraine. In response to recent developments, NATO has begun rearmament and related exercises. European states are increasing their military industries, and much of their armaments remain strictly classified. Eastern European states, which face a direct military threat in the face of increased possible intervention, are especially preparing.

In addition to the recent developments around the military issue, a particularly heated confrontation has begun between Trump and Elon Musk,

which was fueled by Elon Musk’s resignation from his position and Trump’s criticism of him. Trump accuses Elon of using psychotropic drugs, which, in his opinion, was the basis for aggression. Elon Musk, on the other hand, has recently accused Trump of being in Epstein’s files.

The fierce public dispute between US President Donald Trump and his billionaire supporter, Elon Musk, intensified after Musk publicly accused Trump of mentioning his name in government files related to the crimes of financier Jeffrey Epstein. The Trump administration has admitted that it is reviewing tens of thousands of documents, videos, and investigative materials that its MAGA movement says will expose public figures complicit in Epstein’s crimes.<sup>11</sup>

## 2. GEOPOLITICAL RAMIFICATIONS AND THE NEW GLOBAL ORDER

Trump’s return to the presidency significantly affects not only the course of the Russia-Ukraine war but the structure of the global order itself. His transactional diplomacy, characterized by prioritizing bilateral deals with strongmen over multi-lateral alliances, signals a retreat from the established international norms shaped by post-World War II institutions such as NATO and the UN.

Under Trump’s leadership, key European countries—especially Germany under Chancellor Friedrich Merz—have moved toward strategic autonomy by increasing defense budgets and expanding military-industrial capabilities. Eastern European states, facing direct military threats, are particularly accelerating rearmament to hedge against potential weakening of U.S. guarantees. In parallel, global actors like China, Iran, and North Korea perceive opportunities in a more isolationist U.S. stance. Trump’s inconsistent signals toward allies like South Korea and Japan have prompted debates about nuclear deterrence and indigenous defense capabilities. Meanwhile, in the Middle East, the recalibration of power dynamics is evident in Gulf states balancing relations between Washington, Moscow, and Beijing.

The weakening of a rules-based international

10 Gienger, V. (2024). To ‘End’ War in Ukraine, Trump Might Be Tougher on Putin Than Critics Think. Just Security.

11 France24. (2025). Musk accuses Trump of being named in Epstein files as public row worsens.

order is a direct consequence of normalizing territorial acquisition through force. Trump's openness to recognizing Russia's control over Ukrainian territories risks setting a dangerous precedent, potentially encouraging other authoritarian regimes to pursue expansionist agendas. Thus, Trump's Ukraine policy has repercussions far beyond the immediate region. It accelerates a transition toward a multipolar world where power politics prevail over democratic values and international law, fundamentally challenging the liberal world order<sup>12</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Since 2022, the war has only escalated with devastating consequences not only in terms of human lives and infrastructure, but also the erosion of the rules-based international system. Each step taken towards peace talks escalates the situation, as Russia's real goals in this war are gradually expanding. Despite Trump's attempts to end the conflict in a short time, he has failed to change

the situation, which means that the war continues. European security is also clearly at the center of the negotiations, where Germany, with its new Chancellor supporting Ukraine and expressing its readiness to create the most powerful army in Europe. Leaders around the world, be it in the Middle East, Asia-Pacific countries, and beyond, are watching the results and signs of the US position to determine their future.

Trump's diplomacy to end the war and lay the foundation for a lasting peace creates a positive outlook, although given the recent developments, it is still questionable. Trump's policy is result-oriented and assumes a compromise between both sides, since the escalation of this conflict was largely determined by decisions that took into account the interests of both sides and a process that took place over time. According to Trump, there is no alternative to peace, which is an important statement against the backdrop of increased threats and destabilization in the world.

Thus, it is impossible to predict the end of the brutal war waged by Russia against Ukraine. One outcome is clear, though: the collapse of the international system, the arms race, and militarization pose a threat to peace and global stability in the long term.

12 Avdaliani, E. (2022). *New World Order and Small Regions. The Case of South Caucasus*. Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 17-72.

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