



How to Win

A Seven-Point Plan for
Sustainable Peace in Ukraine

ABOUT CEPA

The Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, public policy institution headquartered in Washington, DC with hubs in London and Brussels.

CEPA's mission is to ensure a strong and democratic transatlantic alliance for future generations. CEPA is focused on strengthening the transatlantic alliance through cutting-edge research, analysis, and programs. CEPA provides innovative insight on trends affecting democracy, security, and defense to government officials and agencies; helps transatlantic businesses navigate changing strategic landscapes; and builds networks of future leaders versed in Atlanticism.

Executive Summary

The Center for European Analysis's high-level advisory group, the International Leadership Council (ILC), meets annually to strategize on the top priorities for the transatlantic alliance. This report is the product of those discussions held in the fall of 2024 and does not necessarily reflect the specific views of any individual ILC member. A full list of ILC members is appended.

CEPA's ILC proposes the following seven priorities to transatlantic allies for securing sustainable peace in Ukraine:

1. The United States and its European allies should negotiate with Russia only from a position of strength, which requires gaining greater leverage over Moscow. To achieve this, transatlantic allies should **adopt a maximum pressure strategy** to bring Russia to the negotiating table in good faith.
2. The United States and its allies should **provide immediate materiel support to Ukraine without caveats**, aiming to wear down Russia's military and thereby improve Ukraine's negotiating position.
3. The United States and its allies must increase sanctions on Russian financial institutions and energy sector entities, release frozen Russian assets to support Ukrainian defense and reconstruction, and enact secondary sanctions to **intensify economic pressure not only on Russia but also on the authoritarian regimes of China, Iran, and North Korea**.
4. If Moscow genuinely engages in peace talks, the United States must **set conditions that ensure a secure future for Europe**, most importantly including the participation of Ukraine and Europe in peace talks.
5. Should negotiations result in a ceasefire, the United States should **support a European-led coalition of the willing to enforce the ceasefire line with an international force**.
6. To support Ukraine's defense and bolster their own military capabilities for future conflicts, **the United States and Europe must increase investment in Ukraine's defense industrial production — as well as their own — and leverage those partnerships to learn critical lessons from this new frontier of warfare**.
7. European allies must **make consistent and as rapid as possible progress toward Ukraine's accession to the European Union**.

Introduction

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine marks a critical geopolitical inflection point with far-reaching and long-lasting consequences for international security and US global leadership. The transatlantic alliance's handling of the war's conclusion will directly influence the frequency and severity of future confrontations with authoritarian regimes, including Iran, North Korea, and most notably, China. The United States and its allies must seize this moment to demonstrate their resolve to defend free nations and impose costs on authoritarian states that seek to subjugate sovereign countries.

Thus far, the transatlantic allies have largely failed to capitalize on the moment. Economic and materiel support for Ukraine has been too little and has come too late, leaving Ukrainian forces in a precarious position as they enter the fourth year of a costly defense against Russian aggression. Allies have given Vladimir Putin no incentive to de-escalate; instead, US and European self-deterrence — primarily in response to the Kremlin's nuclear saber-rattling — has emboldened the Russian president to escalate with impunity. Some of the wealthiest and most influential alliance members appear more afraid of escalation than of the consequences of Ukraine's defeat. Weak support for Ukraine has allowed Russia to inflict greater losses, undermining US and European security by signaling to the world that nuclear blackmail is effective. It also conveys indifference to the rights of millions of Ukrainians living under Russian occupation, subjected to a brutal regime that dismisses Ukrainian identity as a fallacy.



The year 2025 presents an opportunity for allies to turn the page. With a new administration taking office in Washington, **President Donald Trump has the chance to correct the previous administration's cautious policy, which has led to a war of attrition that neither side can win.**

Trump is clear in his pursuit of peace, as are Ukrainians and Europeans.

The only thing standing in the way of peace in Ukraine is Putin and his maximalist demands. However, the Russian position is weaker than many believe. Inflation, interest rate hikes, labor shortages, and currency weakness all signal significant strain on the Russian economy. Russian military capabilities are also suffering — estimated Russian casualties in the war have surpassed 700,000 since the start of the 2022 invasion, and Russia is losing an average of 1,500 soldiers per day. Nevertheless, Putin has shown no interest in serious efforts to end the war. Allies must present Moscow with the prospect of severe consequences should it continue its war course. **Now is the time for allies to exploit Russia's vulnerabilities and apply maximum pressure through unwavering military support for Ukraine, economic sanctions on Russia, and tough diplomacy.** Any alternative risks a protracted Afghanistan-like conflict that will cost the United States and its allies far more in blood and treasure.

Importantly, increasing pressure on Russia will weaken and fracture the growing alliance of authoritarian states led by Beijing while strengthening US alliances in the Indo-Pacific. The best way to signal to China that attacking US allies is a red line is by enforcing that red line in Ukraine. Sustainable and lasting peace should be the ultimate goal for the United States and its allies, but to achieve it, the new administration will need to make difficult choices and execute a coherent, comprehensive strategy for victory. Below is a seven-point plan on how to get there.





1. Adopt a strategy of maximum pressure on Russia

Allies must be prepared for the Kremlin to reject any proposal for sustainable peace. Putin's maximalist demands include political control through a forcible regime change in Kyiv, a permanently neutral Ukraine with NATO membership excluded, international recognition of Russia's annexation of Ukrainian territories, and the removal of Western economic sanctions. **In effect, Russia demands the destruction of Ukraine's existence as a sovereign state.**

Putin's demands must be regarded as nonstarters, and allies need to present their own clear positions that protect US and European national security interests.

First, allies must make clear that Ukraine's NATO membership is not a bargaining chip. Putin must not be granted a de facto veto over Ukraine's aspirations. Permanent Ukrainian neutrality, including any limitations on defense cooperation with the United States and allies, is unacceptable. Allies would be wise to consider the West German model during peace talks and agree that NATO membership can be decided at a later date.

In the meantime, allies must also make clear to Moscow that any escalation will trigger immediate security commitments to Ukraine — particularly accelerated integration into NATO.

2. Impose military pressure on Russia with immediate materiel support to Ukraine

A peace deal notwithstanding, the quickest and most effective way to pressure Russia and strengthen Ukraine's negotiating position is through the rapid provision of weapons and military capabilities without caveats, prior to any negotiations. To this end, allies should:

- **Ensure Ukraine's battlefield superiority by providing more:**
 - Artillery rounds
 - Air and missile defense systems, such as Patriots
 - Armored attack vehicles, such as Bradleys and Leopards
 - Combat aircraft, such as F-16s
 - Armored personnel carriers, such as Mine Resistant Ambush-Protected vehicles, commonly known as MRAPs
- **Improve Ukrainian command awareness with US and European ISTAR capabilities:**
 - Intelligence
 - Surveillance
 - Target acquisition
 - Reconnaissance
- **Enable more long-range strikes into Russian territory:**
 - These are central to Ukraine's plan for victory. They disable the Kremlin's war economy, disrupt logistics, hamper attacks, soften defenses, and drive home the cost of Putin's war to Russians.
 - Ukraine's own drones and other weapons already strike targets deep inside Russia. Ukraine's defense industrial base can enhance its production and effectiveness with US and European investment.
 - Lifting restrictions on the use of US and European-supplied long-range strikes while providing more of them will further amplify existing efforts.
 - The possibility of wholly or partially ending these strikes is an important negotiating chip for Ukraine.
- **Improve Ukraine's ability to conduct and sustain combined arms and joint operations:**
 - Provide in-country training support.
 - Provide contract maintenance and logistics support that replicates a theater support command.
 - Provide an air defense umbrella for western Ukraine to secure training and logistics facilities similar to the protection provided to Israel against Iranian drones and missiles.

3. Increase economic pressure on Russia and its supporters

Allied sanctions have so far allowed Russia to enjoy short-term economic stability while devoting more than 6 percent of its gross domestic product — one-third of the state budget — to military spending.

Allies must enact new, more painful sanctions on Moscow. The ILC suggests:

- **Expanding sanctions on global payment systems to cover all Russian banks**
- **Expanding sanctions on Russian oil providers and their holdings**
 - The previous US presidential administration imposed extensive sanctions targeting Russian oil production and exports in its final days. The incoming administration and European allies should uphold and expand on these latest sanctions.
- **Introducing visa and other sanctions on “enablers” — individuals and companies outside Russia who facilitate sanctions evasion**
- **Enacting secondary sanctions on foreign (most notably Chinese) companies supporting Russia’s war effort**

Kyiv’s refusal to renew its gas pipeline agreement with Moscow will limit Europe’s ability to import Russian gas. However, during the first three years of Putin’s full-scale invasion, many European countries bolstered Moscow’s war economy through the Russian gas market. European countries not only purchased Russian gas — sometimes through third-party exporters — but also continued importing other commodities from Russia, such as fertilizers. In addition to imposing new, more painful sanctions, enforcing existing sanctions is crucial to disrupting Moscow’s war effort.

Allies shouldn’t stop with Russia. The Chinese Communist Party’s leadership has emerged as a key supporter of the Kremlin’s war effort in logistics, technology, and financial payments; Iran has supplied large quantities of drones and missiles; and North Korean troops have joined the battle in Kursk. These authoritarian allies all support Russia’s war machine and should face sanctions from the United States and Europe as well.

Rebuilding Ukraine, battered by four winters of war, will take years and cost an estimated \$1 trillion or more. The price is steep even with buy-in from allies on both sides of the Atlantic. Therefore, allies must find legal and political means to use the \$300 billion in frozen Russian central bank assets held in Western financial institutions to support Ukraine’s reconstruction.

Positive developments are already underway. The G7’s commitment to a \$50 billion loan to Ukraine, backed by profits generated from the interest on frozen Russian assets, is a step in the right direction — just as the United States’ commitment of \$20 billion in seized Russian assets is. However, these figures represent only a fraction of the available capital. New leadership in Washington and Brussels must find a way to allocate every cent of those frozen Russian assets to Ukraine’s reconstruction.





4. Establish parameters for good-faith negotiations

If Moscow shows a willingness to engage in serious negotiations, the transatlantic alliance must establish conditions to ensure a secure future for Europe. First and foremost, peace talks must involve Ukraine and European allies, as the outcome will affect Europe's security. Negotiations cannot be limited to just the United States and Russia. Including allied representatives will demonstrate European solidarity and unity to Moscow while reminding Americans that supporting Ukraine is a shared responsibility. Such a display of transatlantic fortitude will help prevent negotiations from devolving into an unjust peace that caters to Russia's maximalist demands.

Allies must follow through on robust security commitments to Ukraine to ensure sustainable peace. The goal should be to wear down Putin and the Russian public's confidence in the war, making them believe that defeat is inevitable. Any serious talks must begin with NATO allies committing to increased materiel support for Ukraine and heightened economic pressure on Russia.

Allies do not need to wait for Ukrainian battlefield superiority to initiate negotiations. Concrete commitments from NATO to bolster aid to Ukraine and intensify sanctions on Russia will strengthen Ukraine's bargaining position.

Moreover, allies must prepare for prolonged negotiations and manage public expectations of a swift resolution. Strategic patience is essential. Throughout the process, allies must actively counter misinformation by publicizing Russian aggression and war crimes, exposing the absurdity of Russian demands, and reaffirming the alliance's resolve.

5. Establish a coalition of the willing to defend a ceasefire line

Should negotiations result in a ceasefire, allies must be prepared to enforce the demarcation line. This requires a European-led, pre-established coalition of partners willing to send troops to the buffer zone. The United States must be ready to deploy, at a minimum, trainers and military advisors, and preferably military personnel, to support this coalition.

Once the line is secure, additional measures can further strengthen Ukraine's short-term security, including military aid, support for its defense production, and the extension of air defense over all or part of independent Ukraine.

- Experts at King's College London have developed a promising approach for creating a Ukrainian air shield involving a phased introduction of bilateral air-defense zones:
 - First, over Ukraine's western border territories
 - Then, over all western Ukrainian territories, excluding Kyiv
 - Then, over Kyiv
 - Finally, over critical infrastructure, including the Yuzhnoukrainska nuclear power plant in Mykolayiv and the Ukrainian humanitarian sea corridor in Odesa.





6. Invest in allied and Ukrainian defense industrial bases; learn lessons for innovation

To ensure Ukrainian battlefield superiority and bolster Ukraine's negotiating position, transatlantic allies will need to boost their defense industrial output. European and US weapons stockpiles are low, while Ukraine faces a major munitions shortage that hinders defensive capabilities and battlefield effectiveness. The Ukrainian military has managed thus far, thanks to the masterful deployment of its drone fleet, but frontline soldiers are suffering heightened casualties due to the shortage of artillery. Ukrainians will need much more US and European weaponry to turn the tide of the war before peace talks occur. Currently, allies are not producing arms fast enough. They must ramp up production of artillery, armored vehicles, air defense and precision-strike systems, and drones — without delay.

Meanwhile, Ukraine must significantly expand the production of its advanced weapons technology to counter the seemingly endless waves of Russian soldiers that Putin is willing to sacrifice for his war. Ukraine's defense industrial base requires substantial investment from its allies to ensure Ukraine can continue to defend itself in the long term. Given the valuable lessons that can be learned from Ukraine's military, allies should be eager to invest in Ukraine's defense industry.

US and European defense contractors have a vested interest in learning from Ukraine's battlefield experiences and collaborating with the Ukrainian Armed Forces. Russia's war in Ukraine has introduced many new methods of warfare and represents the first conflict in decades against a highly sophisticated adversary employing maximum effort. Allies have much to learn from the use of autonomous weapons, electronic warfare, and battle management software in the conflict. Assisting Ukraine in scaling its defense capabilities will foster innovation and better prepare allied defense industries for future conflicts.



7. Ensure Ukraine's rapid EU accession

Ukraine's European aspirations extend beyond NATO integration and the security it provides. Ukrainian integration into the European Union (EU) is mutually beneficial — not only from an economic perspective but also as a stabilizing force for the entire continent. Brussels should welcome and encourage these aspirations and avoid being bogged down by the obstacles that have plagued the Western Balkans' accession process. Swift action is key; the EU must prioritize supporting Ukraine's reformers and civil society and not allow the ongoing conflict or impending negotiations to impact decision-making in Brussels.

EU accession for Ukraine is just one piece of the puzzle. The EU must accelerate talks with other prospective countries that Russia is attempting to influence, such as Moldova and the Western Balkans. Advancing those talks will send an essential message of support for democracy and the rule of law and demonstrate steadfast resistance to Russia's authoritarian influence in the region.

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CEPA's International Leadership Council (ILC) is a high-level group of global thought leaders and decision-makers who share CEPA's core mission of strengthening the transatlantic alliance and advise on CEPA's strategic vision.

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Photo: Destroyed Russian tank on the Mykhailivs'ka Square, Kyiv, Ukraine. Credit: Irina Pislari / Alamy Stock Photo

Photo: Soldiers of an artillery crew of the Rifle Battalion Special Unit of the Main Department of the National Police in Zaporizhzhia region fire a 122-mm howitzer D-30 at the positions of Russian troops in the Zaporizhzhia direction, Zaporizhzhia region, southeastern Ukraine. Credit: Ukrinform / Alamy Stock Photo

Photo: Railway tank cars with oil in Moscow, Russia. Credit: JSPPhoto / Alamy Stock Photo

Photo: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy meets with U.S. President-elect Donald Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron on Saturday, December 7, 2024, during a trip to Paris where he will attend the re-opening of Notre Dame cathedral, five years after a fire nearly destroyed the cultural icon. Credit: Photo via Republic of France Presidential Press Office/UPI Credit: UPI/ Alamy Live News

Photo: French troops training in attack and defence tactics during the exercise Hemex-Orion 2023 - Photo: Erwin Bouteillier/French Army/Defence

Photo: Airman Faith Grayson, 436th Aerial Port Squadron ramp operation specialist, loads cargo during a security assistance mission at Dover Air Force Base, Delaware, Feb. 3, 2023. Credit: Staff Sgt. Marco A. Gomez/ US Air Force

Photo: Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, (Right) meets with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on a trip to Ukraine



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