

UKRAINE IN A NEW NEGOTIATION REALITY: AN ASSESSMENT OF EXISTING PEACE NEGOTIATION FORMATS



ANALYTICAL
REPORT

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The purpose of this study is to collect expert opinions and recommendations regarding the Second Peace Summit — a high-level international event that serves as a platform to promote the Ukrainian Peace Formula and to strengthen international support for Ukraine in its resistance against Russian aggression. It also addresses the negotiations launched in February 2025 between the United States and Russia, initiated by President Donald Trump. In addition to providing a general assessment of the existing negotiation formats, the study analyzes the potential participation of Russia in the upcoming Peace Summit, associated risks, and possible manipulations — tools currently and actively employed by Russia on the international stage and within negotiation processes.

This research was developed by analysts from the Ukrainian Centre for Independent Political Research and the War:Observe initiative, based on recommendations from 25 international and Ukrainian experts collected through in-depth surveys and interviews. We express our sincere gratitude to every expert who provided commentary and participated in this research.

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Cover photo: Working visit of the President of Ukraine to Switzerland to participate in the Peace Summit. **Source:** Office of the President of Ukraine

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The Peace Summit as a Mechanism for Multilateral Resolution of the Russia–Ukraine War

The Peace Summit is an international platform initiated by Ukraine in support of the Ukrainian Peace Formula. In January 2024, it brought together representatives from 92 countries and 8 international organizations. The Summit focused on three points of the Peace Formula: nuclear safety, food security, and the release of prisoners and deportees.

Intended as a logical extension of the first, the Second Peace Summit remains central to Ukraine's diplomatic strategy aimed at securing a real and lasting peace through a multilateral negotiation process. It also seeks to prevent future wars and conflicts, both in Ukraine and across the broader European region.

However, recent changes on the international political stage have raised questions about the prospects of holding a second summit. Among the key developments:

- **The inauguration of Donald Trump as the new President of the United States, which has transformed Washington's approach to Russia's war against Ukraine and to diplomatic formats more broadly;**
- **The launch of direct U.S.–Russia meetings excluding Ukraine;**
- **Russia's manipulative behavior and persistent unwillingness to end the war on the basis of a just peace.**

The aspects above have introduced uncertainty regarding both the timeline and organization of the Second Peace Summit, and an official date remains undetermined. In this new context, Ukraine and its international partners are placing a greater focus on the development of alternative negotiation platforms. Ukraine's participation in these emerging formats is critical not only to achieving a just and lasting peace within its own territory but also to ensuring the stability of the entire European region.

As such, the Peace Summit, while remaining a viable and significant international event, faces both opportunities and challenges in contributing to the success of Ukraine's Peace Formula. Based on expert opinions gathered for this study, the following strengths and weaknesses of the Summit can be identified:

Opportunities of the Peace Summit:

- Consolidating international support for Ukraine and coordination of future assistance;
- Forming a coalition of states backing Ukraine's territorial integrity and a just peace based on the 10 points of the Ukrainian Peace Formula;
- Sustaining international attention on the war and emphasizing its global implications;
- Developing and establishing concrete security guarantees for Ukraine;
- Remaining a platform for advancing dialogue grounded in international law, serving as a preventive measure against future wars and conflicts.

“The Second Peace Summit must be viewed in the context of other diplomatic efforts aimed at ending Russia’s war against Ukraine.”

Potential weaknesses of the Peace Summit:

- Loss of relevance in the context of the U.S. presidential elections and the return of Donald Trump to office, as peace negotiations are now largely taking place between the U.S. and Russia, with Ukraine sidelined (U.S.–Ukraine meetings occur separately);
- The absence of key international players reduces the overall impact of the Summit;
- Repetition of past diplomatic initiatives (including recurring mistakes from similar events), and the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms to compel the aggressor to comply with decisions;
- The risk of Ukraine being pressured into accepting unfavorable ceasefire terms, potentially resulting in an unstable peace and future resumption of Russian aggression;

- The possibility that Russia may refuse to participate in the Summit, eliminating even the theoretical opportunity for dialogue;
- The threat of Russia's manipulation during the negotiations, as it is likely to insist on the adoption of its own conditions and simulate readiness for peace. Russia could also promote its agenda through friendly participating states, as observed in current U.S.–Russia and Turkey-hosted negotiations.

“Russia may use alternative platforms to create the illusion of goodwill, presenting Ukraine as the main obstacle to peace. Moreover, any summit — including Ukraine’s own concept — risks being perceived as a superficial demonstration of support without substantive discussions. This may alienate neutral states, many of which did not assess the outcome of the first Peace Summit as particularly optimistic.”

Russia’s Role in the Summit: The Viability of Dialogue

According to expert assessments, Russia’s participation in the Peace Summit is currently **both unlikely and undesirable** due to the following reasons:

- The Kremlin is not genuinely interested in negotiations, but rather in achieving a military victory or forcing Ukraine’s capitulation.
- Russia refuses to recognize Ukraine as an equal partner — as evidenced by its rhetoric questioning President Zelenskyy's legitimacy and denying Ukraine’s status as a sovereign state with its own historical identity.
- Vladimir Putin and his inner circle are ideologically committed to the destruction of Ukrainian statehood.

“How can negotiations be held with a state that seeks your annihilation? It’s akin to Jews sitting down at the negotiating table with Adolf Hitler. It’s simply unrealistic, as Putin is blinded by his obsession with Ukraine. There is no room for rationality here, regardless of how some attempt to portray him as cold and calculating.”

Currently, during the ongoing U.S.–Russia talks, Russia is employing the following instruments and approaches that could further reinforce its position at the Summit:

- ***“Peace Offensive” Strategy***

Russia creates the illusion of a willingness to negotiate and reach peace while in fact manipulating international public opinion to buy time and regroup for the next phase of its military campaign. Moscow seeks to weaken sanctions and reduce international pressure through disinformation and deliberate stalling, while simultaneously accusing Ukraine of being unwilling to negotiate.

- ***Militarization of International Affairs***

Russia reframes issues of ordinary policy into the security domain to justify emergency actions such as military interventions or restrictions on freedoms. This shift toward the “right of force” poses a substantial challenge to liberal democratic regimes, which are constrained by internal democratic mechanisms and were not prepared for such shifts in the international order.

- ***Rise of Far-Right Sentiment in Europe and the U.S.***

Far-right ideologies have increasingly entered mainstream political discourse and election campaigns, marked by growing nationalism, anti-migrant sentiment, populism, anti-globalization narratives, and climate change denial. These dynamics destabilize domestic political systems and often bring pro-Russian political forces to power. Russia capitalizes on this trend by presenting Europe as ready for compromise and negotiations.

- ***“Hijacking of Democracy” Strategy***

This strategy involves Russia exploiting the vulnerabilities of Western democratic systems to advance its own interests. Tactics include disinformation, cyberattacks, election interference, and the financing of radical political forces. By manipulating democratic instruments such as freedom of speech and media, Russia seeks to deepen political polarization, weaken institutions, and erode public trust in democratic governments. In doing so, it leverages the openness of democratic societies to advance its geopolitical goals.

At present, most experts regard any negotiation format involving Russia as a “trap” for Ukraine is a method for Moscow to buy time. There are no clear indications that Russia is genuinely seeking peace. On the contrary, it continues massive shelling and attacks on civilians and infrastructure, advances into new Ukrainian territories, and engages in nuclear blackmail and threats involving weapons of mass destruction.

To change the current situation and create the necessary conditions for potentially engaging Russia in a meaningful dialogue, experts recommend “to focus the Summit on strengthening Moscow’s diplomatic isolation, rather than engaging in dialogue with it.”

Challenges Ukraine and Its International Partners May Face If Russia Participates in Dialogue

If Russia does participate in the Summit, it may exploit the platform to:

- **Discredit the peace process** by creating the illusion that it is Ukraine — not Russia — that is prolonging the war and rejecting peace;
- **Manipulate international opinion** by presenting itself as “ready for compromise,” while promoting proposals that would effectively amount to Ukraine’s capitulation;
- **Increase pressure on neutral states** to adopt pro-Russian positions and lift sanctions;
- **Form its own coalition** of allied states and attempt to legitimize its invasion as an act of self-defense and resistance against the so-called “Nazi regime in Kyiv” and the perceived threat of NATO expansion.

In addition, Russia may employ a variety of coercive and manipulative tools:

- **Prisoner blackmail** — withholding Ukrainian prisoners of war and civilian detainees to use them as leverage in negotiations;
- **Child blackmail** — retaining illegally deported Ukrainian children, including those taken from temporarily occupied territories;
- **Energy blackmail** — manipulating global oil and gas prices through instruments such as OPEC+ to pressure other countries economically;
- **Influence via allies** — leveraging countries such as China, Iran, and Global South nations to exert diplomatic and economic pressure on Ukraine and its supporters;
- **Use of the Russian diaspora** — promoting Russian interests abroad through networks of expatriates as part of a “soft power” strategy;
- **Information operations, propaganda, and potential provocations** designed to undermine international unity and distort perceptions of the war.

Moreover, there remains a significant risk that Russia will fail to uphold any commitments made as a result of the Summit — a pattern it has repeatedly followed in past agreements.

Countering Russian Manipulations

Russian manipulations and its fabricated narrative about the war and its origins will inevitably shape its negotiation strategy.

In order to effectively counter these tactics, Ukraine must:

- **Alert the international community** to the risk of Russian provocations;
- **Engage key energy actors** such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE to stabilize global energy markets;
- **Strengthen military-industrial cooperation** with non-NATO countries such as India, South Korea, Japan, and Nigeria;
- **Restrict the influence of Russian media and disinformation** through coordinated information policy with partner nations;
- **Enhance expert diplomacy**, both with allied and more neutral or skeptical states, and conduct in-depth analysis of Global South and Asian countries' policies to identify areas of mutual interest and build partnerships aimed at ending the war on just and lawful terms.

“It is important to note that the above-mentioned manipulative strategies are already being employed by Russia in its ongoing negotiations with the United States. This has negatively affected Ukraine’s position and significantly altered the previously declared framework for a just peace. As a result, international support for Ukraine’s territorial integrity is weakening, rhetoric around protecting Russian-speaking populations is resurfacing, Russia’s war crimes are being downplayed, and calls to hold the aggressor accountable are fading.

Although a ‘quick deal’ and an immediate end to the war remain unlikely, the rhetoric of the U.S. has shifted markedly under the new Trump administration. This change requires Ukraine to seek new approaches and build new alliances, particularly with European nations.

If no swift results are achieved, the United States risks losing its leadership role in the peace process, and the Peace Summit format may regain relevance by adapting to the new geopolitical landscape.”

Key Issues Ahead of the Second Peace Summit

Experts have identified the following major challenges that may arise ahead of the Second Peace Summit:

1. **Lack of a fixed date** and **absence of a clear strategic vision** for the Summit's development;
2. **The start of direct U.S.–Russia dialogue**, which introduces new challenges for Ukraine, Europe, and the Summit format itself;
3. A **new U.S. administration** that is fundamentally changing Washington's approach to Russia's war against Ukraine and to diplomacy overall;
4. **Apathy among neutral countries**, with the Global South, Latin America, and parts of Asia remaining under-informed about the war's realities;
5. **Lack of strategic aid planning**, as support is delivered in a fragmented and reactive manner, without long-term logistics or sustainability;
6. **Insufficient consolidated Western support for Ukraine**, falling short of the volumes necessary for victory — a weakness perceived and exploited by Russia to prolong the war;
7. **No real indication that Russia is prepared to make concessions** or abandon its goals for the sake of ending the war;

With the return of Donald Trump to office, the prospects for peace have entered a phase of fundamental recalibration. In contrast to the multilateral Peace Summit model based on wide international participation and the Ukrainian Peace Formula, priority is increasingly being given to closed-door bilateral talks between Washington and Moscow, as well as to so-called “great power diplomacy.”

“The new format envisions direct consultations between the U.S. and Russia, with no clearly defined role for Ukraine as a party to the conflict. According to preliminary reports, U.S. discussions are primarily focused on achieving a ceasefire, not on restoring Ukraine’s territorial integrity or establishing long-term security guarantees. Ukraine is not involved in setting the agenda for these talks, while the EU is largely relegated to post-factum briefings.

Ukraine’s participation is often presented as optional or secondary, creating a dangerous precedent in which the future of a sovereign state is negotiated without its direct involvement. This approach risks legitimizing Russia’s return to the international system without accountability for its aggression, violations of international law, or war crimes.”

Moreover, the **opacity of this bilateral format** undermines transparency, weakens trust in its outcomes among international partners, and opens the door to backroom deals that fall short of the principles of a just peace. If such practices continue, Russia may gain maneuvering space, entrench its occupation of Ukrainian territories, and pursue a “frozen conflict” strategy under terms favorable to its interests.

Key Challenges of the U.S.–Russia Negotiation Format in the Context of Ending Russia’s War Against Ukraine

Experts have identified the following key challenges associated with the current U.S.–Russia negotiation format:

- Exclusion of Ukraine from the talks despite its status as the primary party to the conflict;
- Marginalization of multilateral formats, particularly the Peace Summit, in favor of behind-closed-doors bilateral deals;
- Disregard for the role of the European Union as a key guarantor of continental security;
- De facto legitimization of Russia as a legitimate negotiating actor, despite its role as the aggressor.

“A negotiation format ‘without Ukraine’ could inflict serious geopolitical damage not only on Ukraine itself, but also on the broader Western alliance. Russia, in turn, would use these talks to portray itself as diplomatically proactive, potentially easing sanctions pressure and improving its global image. There is also a risk that such a process could establish a precedent for freezing the conflict — a ‘Korean scenario’ in which active hostilities end but Ukraine’s territorial integrity remains unresolved.”

Principal Risks of Such a Format:

1. **Frozen conflict without a real peace agreement**, without full de-occupation of Ukrainian territory, and without holding Russia accountable for its aggression and war crimes;
2. **Geopolitical fragmentation of the European Union**, as certain countries (e.g., Hungary, Slovakia) may pursue direct negotiations with Moscow based on their national interests, bypassing EU common policy;
3. **Weakening of Ukraine’s role on the international stage** and a potential regression toward a “Yalta 2.0” model of great-power decision-making;
4. **The change in U.S. administration undermines prospects for a Second Peace Summit** aligned with Ukraine’s interests, making support from European and Global South nations even more critical;
5. **Loss of U.S. credibility as a guarantor of European security**, signaling the end of Pax Americana and the reemergence of global spheres of influence;
6. **Bilateral U.S.–Russia dialogue** risks sidelining Ukraine or reducing its agency, setting a dangerous precedent for handling future conflicts, and emboldening the Kremlin;
7. Emergence of **alternative platforms** such as those led by Turkey, Saudi Arabia, or China, that may legitimize Russia’s position without Ukraine’s participation or consent.

“The direct dialogue between Washington and Moscow has effectively dismantled Russia’s diplomatic isolation.”

Conclusions and Recommendations Ahead of the Peace Summit in Light of Current Negotiation Realities

Given repeated (though widely regarded as unlikely) signals from the U.S. administration suggesting a potential withdrawal from active involvement in the negotiation process to end Russia's war against Ukraine, the Second Peace Summit remains a potentially effective multilateral platform. It is essential for advancing Ukraine's interests, increasing international pressure on Russia to end the war, achieving a just peace, and building a new security architecture for Europe.

“It is important to recognize that for the new U.S. Administration — and for Donald Trump personally — ‘peace settlement’ is understood primarily as a ceasefire arrangement. Further negotiations on security guarantees are now seen as a European, rather than American, responsibility. Therefore, the implementation mechanism for the Peace Formula should be aligned, both in content and structure, with European negotiation initiatives.”

Key Arguments:

- ***Maintaining international attention:*** As global crises multiply, there is a real risk that Western interest in the war in Ukraine could wane. Active efforts are required to keep Ukraine's war in the global spotlight, ensure accountability for Russian crimes, and expand the international coalition of support (including the "Coalition of the Willing").
- ***Defining a peace agenda based on Ukraine's interests:*** Ukraine must resist pressures to accept a peace settlement “at any cost.” Instead, it should clearly articulate non-negotiable criteria for a just peace, including: full restoration of territorial integrity, reparations, and accountability for aggressors.
- ***Sending a signal to the aggressor and the world:*** The Summit should reaffirm that the international community does not accept territorial conquest by force and continues to uphold international law.

To ensure that the Second Peace Summit and any potential multilateral negotiation formats effectively serve Ukraine's strategic objectives, experts recommend the following:

1. **Center the Summit on mobilizing support for Ukraine** and ending the war under just terms, rather through direct negotiations with Russia. This includes preparing and aligning positions in advance with allies, especially the EU.
2. **Shift the focus from compromise** to achieving peace through the restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and securing long-term security guarantees.
3. **Update the Summit format and adapt the Peace Formula** to current geopolitical realities by integrating it into European and global security initiatives.
4. **Strengthen work with allies in Europe** to build security alliances and form strong security guarantees.
5. **Synchronize positions between Ukraine and EU** member states to prevent internal divisions within the European Union.
6. Engage with Russia **only after it demonstrates a genuine willingness to cease aggression.**
7. **Anticipate and counter Russian provocations**, including disinformation campaigns.
8. **Expand the coalition of participating states** by involving countries that can exert real influence over Russia, and engage them in advance to align strategic positions.
9. **Design deterrence mechanisms** to prevent Russia from manipulating the negotiation process.
10. **Prepare a long-term reconstruction plan for Ukraine**, which can serve as a basis for sustained post-war international support.

Our team sincerely hopes that these recommendations will serve as a valuable guide not only for organizing and conducting the upcoming Peace Summit, but also for shaping Ukraine's broader strategic positioning on all future negotiation platforms.

We believe that the emphasis must not be on compromise with the aggressor, but on securing a just peace — through the return of all Ukrainian territories, the establishment of clear and enforceable security guarantees, and the adaptation of the Peace Formula to the evolving geopolitical context. It is essential to coordinate closely with key allies, especially the EU, to avoid internal fragmentation and to bolster unity in confronting Russian aggression.

A strategic approach — based on tailored regional engagement, expanded partnerships, preemptive mitigation of provocations, and long-term reconstruction planning — will not only help ensure the Summit's effectiveness, but also strengthen Ukraine's standing in the global negotiation process and contribute to the establishment of a sustainable, just, and security-assured peace.

List of Experts Who Contributed to the Study

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This list includes experts who agreed to disclose their participation in the study; six other experts expressed a wish to remain anonymous.

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