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Outcomes of Ceasefire Negotiations – Russia’s Perspective

The negotiations put in motion by the Trump administration have changed the political dynamics around Russia’s war against Ukraine. For Moscow, they constitute an opportunity to reach their war aims without the arduous task of winning a war of attrition.

The ongoing negotiations are shrouded in contradictory statements. There is no consensus on whether what is at stake is a peace deal or a more modest step on the way, a partial ceasefire. After the most recent talks in Riyadh, the parties appear not even to be agreeing on what they agreed upon.¹ Moscow hopes that Trump’s eagerness to reach a “deal” will make him accept terms that in effect will force Ukraine to surrender.

The very delegation that Russia sent to Riyadh signaled its contempt to its partners in negotiations. It sent not even a deputy foreign minister, but rather a former deputy foreign minister, Grigorii Karasin. To add insult to injury, Russia also sent Sergei Beseda, an advisor to the Director of the Federal Security Service and someone who was very much involved in preparing the invasion in 2022. Russia also insisted on terming the negotiations “expert talks.”

The overall impression is that Moscow is in no hurry to reach the actual negotiating table before everything is in place that will make it possible to attain all its war aims. Rather than outright dismiss US overtures, Russia keeps both adding conditions and dangling additional lucrative economic deals before Washington.

So far, Russia has improved its position without yielding anything substantial. US representatives have suggested that Russia is not to blame for the war² and that Ukraine will probably have to give up territory to Russia.³ All signs of increasing tensions between Washington and its European allies are good news to Moscow.

The two alternative outcomes from the negotiations described below are not scenarios. Rather, the descriptions attempt to explore, on the one hand, what an ideal deal would look like for Russia and, on the other, what a poor deal would involve. An additional possibility would be to explore a “medium deal,” but it is perhaps analytically more rewarding to examine the maxi/mini alternatives rather

¹ Russia claimed a ceasefire on attacking each other’s energy infrastructure was already in effect; Ukraine was setting out to compile lists of what constitutes energy infrastructure; and Washington stated that it had agreed to “develop measures” together with Ukraine to ban strikes on energy infrastructure. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/03/outcomes-of-the-united-states-and-ukraine-expert-groups-on-the-black-sea/>

² <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/23/witkoff-ukraine-russia-trump-war-nato-00205626>

³ <https://ua.interfax.com.ua/news/general/1056247.html>

than to find refuge in what Swedes would term a *lagom* option (the in-between one).

1. Russia Gets Maximum Return in Peace Deal

*L'appétit vient en mangeant*⁴

Russia's goals in the war have been consistent. The overarching aim is to control all of Ukraine, preferably without having to waste military resources as it is currently doing for each hundred meters of advancement. Moscow has been clear about not accepting any kind of security guarantees for Ukraine from the West or European troops on Ukrainian territory.⁵ Furthermore, demilitarization of Ukraine would mean that Kyiv would not be able to defend itself against a renewed Russian invasion. Gaining control over the territories that Russia has so far annexed on paper – as well as international recognition of this – would thus only be a step on the way toward total control over Ukraine as a whole. Ukraine would cease to exist as a state.

Furthermore, Moscow has demanded that NATO revoke the 2008 Bucharest statement on future NATO membership for Georgia and Ukraine together with a number of demands that we recognize from December 2021.⁶ If accepted, they would amount to something approaching real Russian influence on NATO decision-making. Control over Ukraine and what Russia sees as a Russian sphere of influence is thus part of a larger goal of forcing a new security architecture upon Europe. For a number of countries – especially those on Russia's borders – this could mean something akin to a “Finlandization,” with limitations on their freedom of action both in international affairs and domestically. Further, Russia would continue with the influence operations it is already conducting to undermine cohesion among European countries and within their societies.

Moreover, Russia would like to see its narrative on the invasion as a defensive war accepted.⁷ This would, among other things, open up the possibility for Russia to demand war damages. It would also be an ideal way for Russia to demonstrate *kto kogo* – that Russia dictates the terms to the weaker states.

The lifting of sanctions will also be a Russian condition for going along with a peace deal. The main objective behind agreeing to discuss a new “grain deal” as part of ceasefire talks is likely the chance of producing the first real crack in the sanctions consensus in the West, and most importantly in Europe, eventually leading to a normalization of relations with the West.⁸

⁴ Appetite comes with eating (“Аппетит приходит во время еды”).

⁵ <https://tass.ru/politika/23323459>

⁶ https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/rso/nato/1790803/?lang=en

⁷ <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67843>

⁸ <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-gets-us-agree-help-lift-curbs-food-fertilizer-shipping-2025-03-25/>

Russia signaled early on that it would like to see a “grand bargain,” not just a ceasefire agreement or peace deal on Ukraine; a deal where Washington, Moscow, and perhaps also Beijing divide the spoils among them. Moscow suspended its participation in New START with reference to the war in Ukraine in 2023.⁹ It now ties negotiations on Ukraine to renewed strategic arms talks as well as to affairs in the Middle East. In addition, Russia appears more than ready to include a handshake on dividing the Arctic between Washington and Moscow. Putin recently referred to the “deep historical roots” behind the US claims to take over Greenland and stated that it was no business of Russia but rather something for two states to settle.¹⁰ Meanwhile, that same month, a Russian politician suggested renaming Svalbard the “Pomor Islands.”¹¹ Moreover, the Head of the Russian Fund for Direct Investments, Kirill Dmitriev, has hinted that Russia and the United States are negotiating on cooperating on mining rare minerals, including in the Arctic and “new territories,” i.e., in occupied territories.

All in all, Russia would get everything it set out for, but it will also probably keep on adding additional conditions and terms while sweetening the deal for individual US companies as long as it thinks it possible. The consequences of such a “grand bargain” would be felt not only in and around Ukraine but have consequences for countries throughout Europe, for the Middle East, and for at least the littoral Arctic states, perhaps for international relations globally.

2. Russia Gets Minimum Return in Peace Process

*Хотелось как лучше, получилось как всегда*¹²

The least satisfying outcome for Russia would be if the United States decides to continue its support to Ukraine at the same time as Europe steps up its military production. This will allow Europe to build its own armed forces while simultaneously helping Ukraine to increase its military capability. This would force Russia to continue to pour resources into its military industry. Furthermore, it would make it necessary for Moscow to prioritize sending military units to Ukraine, whether to participate in fighting at the current level or to reinforce a 1,000-kilometer contact line. The cost will continue to be substantial – in both economic and humanitarian terms.¹³ Russia will most likely need to push its goal of building a force of 1.5 million into the future.¹⁴

⁹ <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/23/witkoff-ukraine-russia-trump-war-nato-00205626>

¹⁰ <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/76554>

¹¹ Sergei Mironov, head of the party Spravedlivaya Rossiya.

<https://ru.thebarentsobserver.com/provoennyj-deputatksenofob-predlozil-pereimenovat-svalbard/424062>

¹² “We wanted to do well, but it turned out as it always does.” Viktor Chernomyrdin reportedly used this phrase in August 1993 to describe how economic reforms had panned out in Russia.

¹³ https://en.zona.media/article/2025/03/28/casualties_eng-trl

¹⁴ Originally scheduled to be attained by 2024. <https://www.ifri.org/en/studies/russian-military-manpower-after-two-and-half-years-war-ukraine>

A Ukraine that is strong in military terms would make any future renewed Russian invasion impossible. If Ukraine was able also to build its economy and even proceed toward EU accession, it would constitute a difficult model of progress for Russian authoritarianism to deal with. It would happen at a time when repression and centralization of power is higher than ever before since 1991. It would happen a year before Russia is gearing up to manage a remarkably boring Duma election – the election result will not be the main problem, but rather generating any interest whatsoever from the voters (the target is 55 percent of the vote for United Russia and a 55 percent turnout overall).¹⁵ In 2026, the average age among the permanent members of the Russian Security Council will reach 69. Even the enthusiasm for the annexation of Crimea petered out by 2019.¹⁶ The gathering of lands in eastern Ukraine never generated the same patriotic fever as Crimea did in 2014.

Russia will remain in confrontation with the West to keep dissent inside Russia in check. However, if Ukraine remains independent, questions are bound to be asked with time about why at least 100,000 lives were lost and for what.

Russia will likely continue to devote resources to military reconstitution. Partly because it will need to replenish depleted arms stocks, but also because turning the money tap off for the defense industry could risk triggering an economic crisis – something that, in turn, could put Putin’s carefully managed political system in danger, triggering a political crisis.

With a preserved sanctions regime, Russia would face the prospect of falling increasingly behind in the global technology race. Russia’s economy would probably manage, but underwhelmingly so. The sanctions are successful not least in a long-term perspective since they hinder direct investment and the technology transfer from the West that would go along with such investments. The sanctions also force Russia to accept less revenue for its energy exports. Moreover, Russia would probably need Western cooperation to be able to open new oil and gas fields in the High North.

The fruits of Russia’s aggression will constitute partial control of Ukrainian regions that only a handful of states have recognized as Russian. In effect, Russia’s territorial borders will remain unclear. Ukraine will be less likely than ever to “rejoin” the Russian world. The regional integration projects launched by Russia will be less compelling for other countries in Central Asia, in the Caucasus, and for Moldova as well. In a longer-term perspective, this will also be true for Belarus.

¹⁵ <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7344159> (In 2021, 50 percent voted for United Russia and voter turnout was 52 percent overall.)

¹⁶ Putin’s ratings were the lowest ever (59 percent) measured after he came to power in 2020; at the highest level in 2015 (89 percent) and in February 2025 (88 percent).
<https://www.levada.ru/indikatory/>