

THE “NEW YALTA” FRAMEWORK: GREAT-POWER BARGAINING IN THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE WAR AND THE TRANSACTIONAL GEOPOLITICS

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Abstract

This article critically examines the structural transformation of the transatlantic security architecture and the severe erosion of the post-Cold War international order during the latter stages of the Russo-Ukrainian War. Following years of unified Western military deterrence and strict adherence to the principles of territorial sovereignty, the 2025 inauguration of the Trump administration catalyzed a profound geopolitical rupture. By analyzing back-channel diplomacy, the Anchorage summit, and the restrictive 28-point American peace proposal, this study traces Washington’s rapid pivot toward transactional, bilateral negotiations with Moscow. The analysis reveals how this superpower-centric mediation systematically marginalized European allies and applied coercive diplomatic pressure on Kyiv to accept maximalist Russian territorial demands. The paper argues that the United States has actively retreated from the universalist doctrine of international law, adopting a nineteenth-century spheres-of-influence model. Ultimately, this emerging “New Yalta” framework implicitly validates military conquest as a legitimate tool of statecraft, institutionalizing a highly volatile, frozen conflict while simultaneously forcing a rapid, continent-wide militarization of Europe in direct response to an increasingly unreliable American security umbrella.

Keywords: *Russia-Ukraine War, Transatlantic Security, Spheres of Influence, Great-Power Bilateralism, New Yalta.*

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Introduction

The structural transformation of the transatlantic security architecture during the Russo-Ukrainian War presents a critical case study in the mechanics of great-power diplomacy and the erosion of the post-Cold War international order.¹ While a unified Western strategy of military deterrence, economic containment, and strict adherence to the principle of territorial integrity characterized the conflict's initial phase (2022–2024),² the Trump administration's ascent in 2025 catalyzed a severe rupture in this geopolitical consensus.³ This paper examines the rapid transition from collective allied support for Kyiv to a framework of transactional, bilateral US-Russian negotiations. The central research question guiding this analysis asks: How does Washington's pursuit of a superpower-centric peace settlement that systematically marginalizes European stakeholders and pressures Ukraine into structural concessions, redefine the sovereign parameters of the post-Soviet space? By tracing the evolution of back-channel diplomacy, formal summits, and imposed peace memorandums throughout 2025, this study argues that the United States has actively retreated from the universalist doctrine of international law. Ultimately, the emerging diplomatic paradigm suggests a calculated reversion to a nineteenth-century spheres-of-influence model, wherein the geopolitical alignment and territorial boundaries of Eastern Europe are unilaterally negotiated between Washington and Moscow.

To systematically parse this shifting geopolitical landscape, this study establishes its analytical foundation upon structural realism and hegemonic stability theory. Within this theoretical paradigm, a “sphere of influence” operates as an institutionalized arrangement where a primary great power establishes an exclusive security veto over its contiguous geographic perimeter, thereby directly constraining the foreign policy options and sovereign alignments of smaller neighboring states. This dynamic intersects closely with the mechanics of “transactional diplomacy,” which evaluates foreign policy choices through the lens of immediate bilateral utility, material trade-offs, and relative gains, prioritizing these tangible metrics over enduring multilateral frameworks or universalist legal norms. Together, these concepts form the basis of the “New Yalta” framework. This model captures a systemic shift

¹ Allison, Graham. “The New Spheres of Influence: Sharing the Globe with Other Great Powers.” *Foreign Affairs* 99, no. 2 (March/April 2020): 30–40.

² Isabel Bramsen and Isak Svensson, “Peace Talks in the Russia-Ukraine War: When, Who, and How?,” *International Negotiation* 30, no. 1 (2024): 97–122, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-bja10106>.

³ Daehnhardt, Patricia. “The Euro-Atlantic Security Order and the War in Ukraine.” *Jean Monnet Atlantic Network 2.0* (2022).

back toward a classic great-power concert, where dominant states prioritize global equilibrium over the political independence of smaller nations.

Since assuming power in the early 2000s, Vladimir Putin and his political circle have pursued the overarching objective of reasserting Russian hegemony across the post-Soviet space. A decisive element of this geopolitical strategy involved dismantling the post-Euromaidan administrations in Ukraine that had emerged from the Orange Revolution and the 2014 Euromaidan.⁴ Open hostilities commenced in 2014 with the forceful annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and the subsequent emergence of self-proclaimed republics in Donetsk and Luhansk. Over the following years, the localized crisis steadily escalated into a comprehensive interstate war.

The conflict's immediate prelude crystallized in December 2021 amid a massive Russian military buildup along the Ukrainian border. On December 17, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued draft mutual security agreements directed at the United States and NATO.⁵ Moscow demanded a definitive halt to NATO enlargement, specifically precluding Ukrainian accession, and a prohibition on deploying additional allied forces or long-range weaponry in Eastern European member states. The drafts further insisted that Washington cease military cooperation with post-Soviet republics and abandon any prospective military bases in those territories. Washington and NATO categorically rejected these proposals, characterizing them as an unacceptable ultimatum. Western officials condemned the demands as a direct infringement on the sovereign right of independent states, including Ukraine, to determine their own security alignments.

Following the collapse of these diplomatic overtures, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The anticipated swift military victory failed to materialize, instead triggering unprecedented Western sanctions. The earliest concerted effort to negotiate a settlement took place in Istanbul between March and April 2022. By April 15, negotiators had outlined a draft agreement stipulating a ceasefire, permanent Ukrainian neutrality, sweeping reductions to its armed forces, and binding security guarantees from the permanent members of the

⁴ Hamilton, Daniel S., and Stefan Meister. "The Eastern Question: Russia, the West, and Europe's Grey Zone." *German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP)* (2016).

⁵ "Russian Foreign Ministry Publishes Draft Security Agreements with NATO and the United States," *Vedomosti*, December 17, 2021, accessed December 5, 2025, in Russian: ["МИД России опубликовал проекты договоров с НАТО и США по безопасности," *Ведомости*, 17 декабря 2021, (дата обращения: 05.12.2025)], <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2021/12/17/901297-mid-rossii-opublikoval-proekti-dogovorov>.

UN Security Council.⁶ The framework also proposed recognizing Russian as an official language while temporarily deferring Crimea's territorial status. Concurrently, Moscow withdrew its forces from the Kyiv and Chernihiv axes, framing the retreat as a goodwill gesture. Ultimately, the prospective treaty was abandoned, a collapse widely attributed to the intervention of Ukraine's European allies, particularly British Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Simultaneously, the revelation of mass civilian casualties in newly conquered areas like Bucha triggered massive domestic outrage, fundamentally altering the political calculus in Kyiv. These atrocities stripped the Zelensky administration of the domestic political capital required to sell severe territorial or security compromises to a deeply traumatized and radicalized Ukrainian public.

The diplomatic landscape shifted further in September 2022, when President Volodymyr Zelensky presented the "Ukrainian Peace Formula" to the UN General Assembly. The proposal rested on two core pillars: the restoration of Ukraine's pre-2014 borders, necessitating the return of Crimea, and structural accountability for Russian aggression.⁷

Trump's Strategic Realignment and the Resumption of US-Russia Negotiations

The year 2023 defined the primary attritional phase of the Ukraine war.⁸ Throughout this period, the Biden administration and the European leaders maintained a unified front, relying on sustained military support and robust sanctions to degrade Russian capabilities. Diplomatic engagement remained virtually nonexistent. This paradigm fractured following Donald Trump's inauguration in January 2025. His electoral victory the previous November was heavily anchored in a platform critical of massive foreign military expenditures and focused on an immediate cessation of hostilities. Consequently, Washington's pivot toward direct diplomatic in-

⁶ "Full Text of the Istanbul Agreement Between Russia and Ukraine Published: What Were the Main Disagreements," *Lenta.ru*, June 15, 2024, accessed December 5, 2025, in Russian: ["Обнародован полный текст стамбульского договора между Россией и Украиной. В чем крылись главные разногласия," *Лента.Ру*, 15 июня 2024, (дата обращения: 05.12.2025)], <https://lenta.ru/news/2024/06/15/obnarodovan-polnyy-tekst-stambulskogo-dogovora-mezhdu-rossiei-i-ukrainoy-v-chem-krylis-glavnye-raznoglasiya/>.

⁷ "Ukraine's Peace Formula: Global Dimension and Shared Principles." *Foreign Policy Council 'Ukrainian Prism'* (2024), <https://prismua.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Peace-Formula%E2%80%9393final.pdf>.

⁸ Franz-Stefan Gady and Michael Kofman. "Ukraine's Strategy of Attrition." *Survival* 65, no. 2 (2023): 7-22. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00396338.2023.2193092>.

tervention was highly anticipated, ultimately materializing in an initial phone call between the two heads of state.⁹

Occurring in February 2025, just weeks into the new administration, this bilateral discussion represented a diplomatic success for Vladimir Putin. It effectively pierced the isolation imposed by the West since the invasion began. More significantly, it initiated negotiations over Ukraine's future in the exclusive, superpower-to-superpower format Moscow has long preferred. Policy analysts observed that even if Trump rejected the Kremlin's maximalist demands, the dialogue itself delivered immediate strategic dividends for Russia. The conversation inherently signaled a fracturing of Western consensus and functioned as a mechanism to pressure Kyiv into acknowledging shifting battlefield and geopolitical realities.¹⁰

The Kremlin swiftly capitalized on this outreach, framing the direct contact as the foundation for a broader strategic convergence between Washington and Moscow. As Alexander Baunov suggests, Russian leadership envisions this dynamic mirroring the World War II-era alignment between Roosevelt and Stalin, capable of transcending ideological divides to forge a new global architecture akin to Yalta and Potsdam. Such a bipolar realignment aligns perfectly with Putin's enduring ambition to overwrite the legacy of the Cold War and reverse its resulting systemic humiliations.¹¹ This revisionist intent is evident in how Moscow portrays the Ukraine settlement: not merely as a localized peace process, but as the inauguration of a restructured world order. The glaring marginalization of European stakeholders in both US and Russian readouts of the February call reinforces this bilateral exclusivity. Trump's own rhetoric further facilitated Moscow's narrative. By asserting that the war would never have occurred under his prior leadership and pub-

⁹ A. Gaponenko, "Russian-Ukrainian Conflict: Interests of the Participants, Internal Limitations, External Environment and Resolution Scenarios," *Zavtra*, January 9, 2025, accessed January 17, 2026, in Russian: [Гапоненко А., "Российско-украинский конфликт: интересы участников, внутренние ограничения, внешняя среда и сценарии разрешения," *Завтра*, 9 января 2025, (дата обращения: 17.01.2026)], https://zavtra.ru/blogs/rossijsko-ukrainskij_konflikt_interesi_uchastnikov_vnutrennie_ogranicheniya_vneshnyaya_sreda_i_stsenarii_razresheniya.

¹⁰ Tatiana Stanovaya, "The Long-Awaited Call: What Putin Is Counting On in Negotiations with Trump," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 2025, accessed December 7, 2025, in Russian: [Татьяна Становая, "Долгожданный звонок. На что рассчитывает Путин в переговорах с Трампом," *Фонд Карнеги за Международный Мир*, февраль 2025, (дата обращения: 07.12.2025)], <https://carnegieendowment.org/-russia-eurasia/politika/2025/02/putin-trump-phone-call?lang=ru>.

¹¹ Alexander Baunov, "Killing With Kindness: Why Putin Is Proving So Amenable to Trump," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 2025, accessed December 7, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/02/putin-trump-relationship-goals?lang=en>.

licly praising Putin's willingness to engage, the new administration's messaging subtly deflected culpability away from the Kremlin, transferring the ultimate blame for the conflict onto the preceding Biden administration.

Following the initial phone call, the Russian and American delegations convened in Riyadh on February 18, 2025. These early discussions primarily centered on restoring severed diplomatic channels and stabilizing bilateral contacts.¹² By March, the Saudi capital hosted a subsequent round of negotiations. This diplomatic acceleration followed a highly contentious White House reception where Donald Trump and Volodymyr Zelensky openly clashed.¹³ In a stark departure from established diplomatic protocol, the Ukrainian president faced direct and public criticism from the American president. Recognizing the severe vulnerability of his administration's position, Zelensky ultimately yielded. Shortly thereafter, he authorized an agreement granting the United States highly preferential extraction rights to Ukraine's mineral reserves.¹⁴ Within weeks of the new administration assuming power, the geopolitical dimensions of the conflict were partially subordinated to a transactional dispute over rare earth metals. Control over Ukraine's vast, untapped reserves of lithium, titanium, and uranium presents a critical asset in the broader Sino-American technological competition.¹⁵ For the new US administration, securing exclusive extraction rights offered a tangible, domestic political victory to justify continued diplomatic engagement, framing the resolution of the war not as a defense of democratic ideals, but as a highly profitable acquisition for the American industrial base. Kyiv leveraged its resource base to secure reconstruction financing and bilateral security guarantees. Moscow countered by proposing joint extraction ventures targeting deposits in both Russia and the recently annexed

¹² "Russia and the US Agreed to Restore Embassy Staff in Moscow and Washington — Rubio," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, February 18, 2025, accessed December 6, 2025, in Russian: ["РФ и США договорились восстановить штат посольств в Москве и Вашингтоне — Рубио," *Независимая газета*, 18 февраля 2025, (дата обращения: 06.12.2025)], <https://www.ng.ru/news/810974.html>.

¹³ "Quarrel of the Year: What Are the Consequences of the Zelensky-Trump Conflict and Will Europe Save the Situation," *Odessa Media*, accessed December 6, 2025, in Russian: ["Ссора года. Какие последствия конфликта Зеленского и Трампа и спасет ли ситуацию Европа," *Одесса-Медиа*, (дата обращения: 06.12.2025)], <https://odessamedia.net/news/ssora-goda-kakie-posledstviya-konflikta-zelenskogo-i-trampa-i-spaset-li-situatsiyu-evropa>.

¹⁴ "Treasury Announces Agreement to Establish United States-Ukraine Reconstruction Investment Fund," *U.S. Department of the Treasury*, May 22, 2024, accessed December 6, 2025, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0126>.

¹⁵ NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence (ENSEC COE). "Ukraine's resources. Critical raw materials." December 10, 2024. Accessed via NATO ENSEC COE: <https://www.enseccoe.org/publications/ukraines-resources/>.

Ukrainian territories. A potential monopoly over these critical supply chains rapidly dominated the negotiating agenda, a shift the American president publicly endorsed as a diplomatic resolution.¹⁶

The Riyadh summits notably lacked direct bilateral engagement between Kyiv and Moscow. Instead, Washington assumed a formal mediating role, conducting separate consultations with each delegation. American negotiators focused on de-escalating strikes against energy infrastructure and brokering a localized ceasefire in the Black Sea to establish a foundation for future comprehensive talks. These efforts yielded a temporary suspension of maritime hostilities. While both belligerents signaled a willingness to accept a provisional truce, the broader conventional war persisted.¹⁷ Throughout this process, European leaders remained entirely marginalized. While capitals across the continent maintained an uncompromising stance advocating sustained military pressure without territorial concessions, Trump actively distanced his administration from the European allies. Unlike his counterparts in Berlin, Paris, and London, the American president eschewed the role of a steadfast Ukrainian ally. He instead positioned the United States as a detached third-party broker, explicitly willing to negotiate substantive territorial concessions directly with the Kremlin.

From the outset of these negotiations, the Russian strategy extended beyond the immediate theater of Ukraine. The Kremlin actively sought to broaden the scope of bilateral cooperation with Washington, aiming to exacerbate existing transatlantic fissures and ultimately fracture the cohesive Western alliance¹⁸. Russian officials overtly capitalized on this emerging divide, favorably highlighting Vice President J. D. Vance's address at the Munich Security Conference. Rather

¹⁶ Mikhail Korostikov, "Trump's Dream of a Rare Earths Deal With Kyiv or Moscow Is Wishful Thinking," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 2025, accessed December 7, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/02/russia-usa-ukraine-metals-agreement?lang=en>.

¹⁷ "Results of Negotiations with the US in Riyadh: Key Takeaways," *RBC*, March 25, 2025, accessed December 6, 2025, in Russian: ["Итоги переговоров с США в Эр-Рияде. Главное," *РБК*, 25 марта 2025, (дата обращения: 06.12.2025)], <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/25/03/2025/67e143199a79474f8ec31a75>.

¹⁸ The current US administration's foreign policy approach has prompted a broader reassessment of the transatlantic security architecture. Recent initiatives—including a recalibration of Washington's strategic priorities regarding the Ukrainian crisis and direct bilateral engagements with Russia—suggest a shift in the traditional US role concerning European defense burden-sharing. Consequently, diplomatic relations between the US and major European powers (Germany, France, Italy, and the UK) are increasingly exhibiting competitive dynamics alongside their traditional alliance structure. Furthermore, localized geopolitical disputes, such as those concerning Greenland, continue to test NATO's internal cohesion.

than condemning Russian aggression, Vance used the platform to castigate European allies for alleged domestic censorship and a failure to manage internal security threats.¹⁹ Concurrently, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth publicly dismissed the feasibility of restoring Ukraine's pre-2014 borders or facilitating its accession to NATO. Facing this coordinated rhetorical pressure from its primary benefactor, Kyiv was compelled to recalibrate its strategic requirements for border restoration. Ukrainian leadership had to quietly acknowledge the necessity of territorial concessions, the indispensable nature of American aid, and the fading prospect of a decisive military victory. This pressure culminated in the US president characterizing Zelensky as a "dictator" bearing personal responsibility for instigating the conflict. While Moscow celebrated this severe deterioration in US-Ukrainian relations as a fatal blow to the collective West, the shifting landscape presented new strategic liabilities for the Kremlin. The fracturing of Western consensus and the unpredictability of an "America First" doctrine catalyzed an immediate hardening of European defense policy.²⁰ Throughout the year, capitals like Berlin, Paris, and London responded with significantly intensified defense rhetoric, substantial defense budget increases, and renewed debates regarding the deployment of European combat troops directly to the Ukrainian frontline.²¹ This aggressive recalibration was particularly pronounced in Berlin, where the newly installed conservative government decisively abandoned the prior administration's incrementalism in favor of rapid, structural militarization. Recognizing that the American security umbrella was no longer a guaranteed baseline, European leadership realized that building an autonomous, continent-wide deterrence capability was an immediate existential requirement rather than a long-term theoretical goal.

There is another crucial dynamic to consider: the negotiation process is slowing down largely because a pro-Trump faction has yet to emerge within Ukraine's

¹⁹ "The US in the World," *Munich Security Conference 2025*, accessed December 7, 2025, <https://securityconference.org/en/msc-2025/agenda/event/the-us-in-the-world-2/>.

²⁰ The Trump administration—involving key figures such as Marco Rubio, Steven Witkoff, Keith Kellogg, Jared Kushner, and Vice President J.D. Vance—has sought a primary mediating role in efforts to resolve the conflict in Ukraine. However, achieving a durable resolution likely requires the consensus of major European allies. Consequently, unilateral diplomatic initiatives by the US are frequently accompanied by close consultations with key European leaders, including Emmanuel Macron, Keir Starmer, Friedrich Merz, and Giorgia Meloni, highlighting the ongoing necessity of transatlantic coordination.

²¹ "Not So Much About Ukraine: What Putin Hopes to Gain from Normalizing Relations with the US," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, February 2025, accessed December 7, 2025, in Russian: ["Не столько об Украине. Чего Путин добивается от нормализации отношений с США," *Фонд Карнеги за Международный Мир*, февраль 2025, (дата обращения: 07.12.2025)], <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia- Eurasia/politika/2025/02/russia-usa-talks-goals?lang=ru>.

political elite. This void stems from a mix of factors, including Kyiv's deeply entrenched strategic partnerships with Western democratic institutions... Civil society leaders and pro-democracy advocates continue to hold significant sway in Ukrainian politics, viewing Washington's new direction with deep suspicion. Since early 2014, Ukraine's political establishment has heavily favored the Democrats; following the Euromaidan revolution, the newly formed government desperately needed American support, which at the time was provided by the Obama administration.²²

Several other roadblocks are making it difficult for Trump and Ukrainian politicians to find common ground. Current and former representatives of various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continue to hold significant sway in Ukrainian politics. These civil society figures view Washington's new direction with deep suspicion, a sentiment that escalated following recent pressures and crackdowns on the USAID and other American foundations that fund these groups in Ukraine.²³ Furthermore, this resistance at the top is heavily backed by public opinion. Recent polling shows that 73 percent of Ukrainians view Trump's presidency as a negative development for their country.²⁴ Given this climate, expecting a robust pro-Trump camp to take shape in Kyiv is highly unrealistic. The absence of sympathetic interlocutors within the Ukrainian elite severely constrains Washington's ability to exert soft power or utilize back-channel diplomacy. Driven by this structural limitation, the American administration has increasingly relied on coercive public ultimatums to force compliance, a tactic that only further alienates the Ukrainian populace and solidifies institutional resistance.

At the negotiating table, the next major hurdle is the narrative that "NATO expansion caused the war." Within certain political factions in the West, the narrative that the alliance's growth provoked the conflict has gained traction. This specific interpretation of events fundamentally shapes Trump's vision for peace. He has argued that the Biden administration's push to integrate Ukraine into NATO triggered the Russian attack, and therefore, officially closing NATO's doors to Ukraine will eliminate the root cause of the war. However, within his first 100 days in office, Trump's administration realized that Moscow's definition of "root caus-

²² Konstantin Skorkin, "Where Is Ukraine's Pro-Trump Camp?," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, April 2025, accessed December 11, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/04/ukraine-trumpist-elites?lang=en>.

²³ Skorkin, "Where Is Ukraine's Pro-Trump Camp?"

²⁴ Anastasia Prots, "73% of Ukrainians Negatively Evaluate Trump's Presidency — KIIS," *Ukrainska Pravda*, April 1, 2025, accessed December 11, 2025, in Russian: [Анастасия Проц, "73% украинцев негативно оценивают президентство Трампа — КМИС," *Українська правда*, 1 апреля 2025, (дата обращения: 11.12.2025)], <https://www.pravda.com.ua/rus/news/2025/04/01/7505488/>.

es” is much broader. Russia is essentially aiming to rewrite the outcomes of the Cold War. In response, Trump has already signaled his willingness to make major concessions—including formally recognizing Crimea and other occupied regions as Russian territory, initiating the removal of sanctions, normalizing trade and diplomatic ties, and welcoming Moscow back to the table for global decision-making. In other words, the groundwork is actively being laid for a “New Yalta” agreement. Such an arrangement would effectively resurrect a nineteenth-century spheres-of-influence model, explicitly subordinating the sovereignty of smaller Eastern European states to the strategic comfort of recognized great powers. By entertaining this framework, Washington signals a potential retreat from the universalist, rules-based international order it championed post-1945, substituting it with a transactional realism that legitimizes territorial conquest as a valid tool of statecraft.

The Ceasefire Question and the Russian-Ukrainian Meeting in Istanbul

The biggest roadblock to peace remains the absolute clash between Russian and Ukrainian demands. US Special Envoy Steven Witkoff spent three months trying to hammer out a final American proposal for both sides. However, as became clear after a meeting in Paris on April 17,²⁵ Kyiv and its European allies firmly rejected it. Subsequent counter-offers did not bring anyone closer to a compromise, and by late April, Washington’s peace efforts had hit a dead end.

On May 10th, Kyiv, backed by European partners, issued an ultimatum: Moscow must agree to an unconditional 30-day ceasefire or face a fresh wave of sanctions. The Kremlin could have just ignored this and kept fighting, but instead, they decided to launch their own peace initiative while simultaneously pushing for a full restoration of diplomatic ties with the US. Moscow declared a three-day truce to coincide with the May 9th Victory Day holiday, using the opportunity to lobby the Americans for a high-level bilateral summit. In a face-to-face meeting between the two presidents, the Kremlin hoped to convince Trump that the war could not end without regime change in Kyiv and a complete halt to military aid for Ukraine. The underlying premise of Russian diplomacy was that the current Ukrainian leadership is fundamentally incapable of seriously negotiating Russia’s peace terms. This operating assumption stems from Moscow’s deeply entrenched ideological conviction that Kyiv lacks genuine political agency, functioning solely as an expendable proxy for Western intelligence apparatuses. Consequently, the Kremlin calculates that

²⁵ Kira Krasovskaya, “Negotiations Between the US, Europe, and Ukraine Held in Paris,” *DW*, accessed December 18, 2025, in Russian: [Кира Красовская, “В Париже прошли переговоры США, Европы и Украины,” *DW*, (дата обращения: 18.12.2025)], <https://www.dw.com/ru/v-parize-prosli-peregovory-ssa-evropy-i-ukrainy/a-72279339>.

any durable settlement can only be forged directly with the architect of that proxy relationship, bypassing Ukrainian officials entirely to negotiate directly with Washington.

Throughout May and June, Russian diplomats scrambled to lock in their geopolitical gains, either through sheer force or by securing external legitimacy. During this period, the ceasefire question took center stage. Zelensky insisted that stopping the fighting was an absolute prerequisite for talks. Putin, on the other hand, remained convinced that any pause would simply give Ukraine time to regroup and launch a new counteroffensive. While President Trump publicly supported the idea of a 30-day ceasefire,²⁶ Putin proposed a totally different path: starting negotiations without stopping the fighting, or picking up where the stalled Spring 2022 Istanbul talks left off, talks that had also occurred while combat was ongoing.

For Russia, reviving the aborted Istanbul process is the most convenient way to legitimize its victory on the world stage. The 2022 negotiations were essentially about securing Ukrainian concessions in exchange for halting the Russian advance, in other words, dictating the terms of a Russian win. Back then, neither Ukraine nor the West was willing to rubber-stamp Russia's conquests. Now, however, there is a greater willingness to entertain the idea, largely because Trump is directly pressuring Ukraine to yield.²⁷

This dynamic birthed the idea of inviting the Ukrainians to meet in Istanbul, ostensibly to resume the talks that collapsed in April 2022. Moscow signaled its readiness to engage directly with Kyiv, conveniently pushing the question of Zelensky's legitimacy to the background. This shift was not primarily driven by the fear of new sanctions; rather, the Kremlin simply did not want to jeopardize its broader dialogue with Washington on other issues.

The US-brokered mediation efforts of May and June culminated in a new summit in Istanbul on June 2. The positions of the parties going into the meeting were starkly different. First, Trump had pushed hard for both Putin and Zelensky to attend in person; Zelensky showed up, but Putin stayed home. The Russian delegation arrived demanding international recognition of its newly annexed territories,

²⁶ Gennady Svidrigailov, "The US Demands a 30-Day Ceasefire in Ukraine. Trump Threatens New Sanctions," *Gazeta.ru*, May 9, 2025, accessed December 15, 2025, in Russian: [Геннадий Свидригайлов, "США требуют 30-дневного прекращения огня на Украине. Трамп угрожает новыми санкциями," *Газета.Ру*, 9 мая 2025, (дата обращения: 15.12.2025)], <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2025/05/09/21007112.shtml>.

²⁷ "If Trump Abandons Ukraine, Can Europe Help Kyiv Fight On? The Clock Is Ticking to Answer That," *AP News*, accessed December 15, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/ukraine-europe-trump-defense-putin-zelenskyy-862fe7f477d372024d22cb74508adf6f>.

strict Ukrainian neutrality, massive cuts to Ukraine's military, official status for the Russian language, the lifting of all Western sanctions, and the waiving of any claims for war reparations.²⁸ Ukraine, meanwhile, demanded binding international security guarantees, formal recognition of its right to join NATO, and the return of all occupied territories.²⁹ In essence, both sides just traded maximum demands.³⁰ Russia actually brought two separate documents to the table: one detailing their vision for a long-term peace settlement, and another focused solely on ceasefire terms. The full scope of their maximalist demands was laid out in a proposed peace memorandum titled "Basic Parameters for a Final Settlement."³¹ Ultimately, the June talks in Istanbul only produced an agreement on exchanging prisoners of war and the remains of fallen soldiers. The only real breakthrough was that, for the first time in three years, Ukrainian and Russian officials actually sat down together for direct talks.

Among policy experts, the prevailing view is that this second round of Istanbul talks simply confirmed the obvious: Putin is not interested in a temporary ceasefire because he wants a final treaty that cements his victory. Relying on Russia's sheer numerical advantage and seemingly unbothered by heavy casualties, Putin is increasingly confident that he can simply grind Ukraine down into capitulation.³² The Kremlin sees clearly that the Trump administration has no intention of asking Congress to fund new aid packages for Kyiv. Furthermore, the threat of new sanctions is increasingly viewed as an empty gesture in Moscow, especially since Washington is not even rushing to penalize countries that are helping Russia by-

²⁸ "Full Text of Russia's Memorandum 'On the Settlement of the Ukrainian Crisis' Published," *Meduza*, June 2, 2025, accessed December 11, 2025, in Russian: ["Опубликован полный текст меморандума России "по урегулированию украинского кризиса", *Meduza*, 2 июня 2025, (дата обращения: 11.12.2025)], <https://meduza.io/feature/2025/06/02/opublikovan-polnyy-tekst-memoranduma-rossii-pouregulirovaniyu-ukrainskogo-krizisa>.

²⁹ "Reuters Published the Text of the Ukrainian Ceasefire Memorandum," *RBC*, June 1, 2025, accessed December 11, 2025, in Russian: ["Reuters опубликовал текст украинского меморандума о прекращении огня," *РБК*, 1 июня 2025, (дата обращения: 11.12.2025)], <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/01/06/2025/683c6a149a794732b1af799e>.

³⁰ Alexander Baunov, "Diplomatic Theater: Who Are the Russian Negotiators Trying to Please," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, accessed December 11, 2025, in Russian: [Александр Баунов, "Дипломатический театр. Кому пытаются угодить российские переговорщики," (дата обращения: 11.12.2025)], https://storage.googleapis.com/crng/russia-trump-peace-talk-confusion.html?utm_source=telegram&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=post

³¹ Baunov, "Diplomatic Theater."

³² Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). "Russia's War in Ukraine: The Next Chapter." September 30, 2025. Accessed May 1, 2026. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/russias-war-ukraine-next-chapter>.

pass the current restrictions. After all, Russia has been living under sanctions since 2014, and Putin approaches each new round of restrictions with confidence, betting that the Russian economy can weather the storm.³³ This resilience has been heavily subsidized by a rapid macroeconomic pivot toward Asian markets, specifically through discounted hydrocarbon exports to China and India. Furthermore, the institutionalization of parallel import networks and the reliance on shadow maritime fleets have systematically insulated the domestic Russian consumer base from the severe financial deprivations initially projected by Western treasuries. This underlying confidence explains why Putin essentially ignored Trump's ultimatum for a ceasefire and kept the offensive against Ukraine rolling. Acceding to these demands would have required the alliance to formally abrogate its foundational Open-Door policy, fundamentally violating the core tenets of the 1949 Washington Treaty. Furthermore, retreating to pre-1997 force postures would have immediately compromised the defensive integrity of the Baltic states and Poland, effectively fracturing the alliance's internal cohesion.

The Trump-Putin Summit in Alaska

The collapse of the ceasefire negotiations did not deter Trump. Undeterred, he dispatched his special envoy, Steve Witkoff, to the Kremlin with a clear message: the US president was genuinely interested in Vladimir Putin's proposal for a one-on-one meeting, and he already had a time and place in mind.

The choice of Alaska as the venue carried immense symbolic weight for both nations.³⁴ Holding a geopolitical summit on the very territory that serves as a geographic and historical bridge between Russia and the United States was, in itself, a radical move. Both leaders are deeply fixated on the perceived past glory of their respective nations. For Russia, Alaska represents the absolute zenith of its continental empire.³⁵ For the US, it marks the golden age of American expansionism.³⁶ Trump naturally views the acquisition of Alaska as the ultimate real estate deal, but

³³ Nate Reynolds and Eugene Rumer, "Europe Must Lead to Prevent the Worst in Ukraine," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, July 2025, accessed December 26, 2025, <https://carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2025/07/ukraine-russia-drone-missile-strikes-europe-weapons-defense-plan?lang=en>.

³⁴ Brandon M. Boylan, "Alaska in U.S.-Russian Relations from the Alaska Purchase to the Russo-Ukrainian War," in *GlobalArctic*, ed. G. Rekvig and M. Finger (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-96-4868-9_2.

³⁵ Ilya Vinkovetsky, *Russian America: An Overseas Colony of a Continental Empire, 1804–1867* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 13–28.

³⁶ Andrei Znamenski, "History with an Attitude: Alaska in Modern Russian Patriotic Rhetoric," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 57, no. 3 (2009): 346–373.

it also serves as a historical reminder of a Russian territorial concession. The location selection was likely also a subtle flex aimed at neighboring Canada and Denmark. By choosing an Arctic staging ground, Washington and Moscow implicitly projected their shared dominance over the polar region's emerging maritime routes and unexploited resources. This secondary messaging served to sideline other Arctic Council members, reinforcing the summit's overarching theme of exclusive, superpower-centric diplomacy dictating global security terms.

The highly anticipated summit took place on August 15, 2025, at a military base in Anchorage, Alaska. The two leaders spoke for three hours. While the meeting produced no signed agreements, it undeniably marked the high-water mark of US-Russian diplomatic engagement over the Ukraine conflict. The outcome of the Anchorage summit can be boiled down to a simple binary: if Trump had managed to bully or coax Putin into a ceasefire, the summit would have been an American victory. Any other outcome was a win for Putin. By that metric, Putin won; the meeting ended without a ceasefire agreement.

The exact details of what Trump and Putin discussed behind closed doors remain highly classified, though Reuters managed to leak several key details.³⁷ According to their reporting, the two presidents haggled over a potential compromise on Ukraine. Russia reportedly offered a slight territorial concession, indicating a willingness to return portions of the Sumy, Kharkiv, and Dnipropetrovsk regions. However, Moscow refused to budge on its core maximalist demands: Ukraine must abandon its bid for NATO membership, drastically slash the size of its military, legally prohibit the stationing of Western troops on its soil, undergo what Moscow terms "demilitarization and denazification," enshrine its non-nuclear status, and officially recognize all remaining Russian-occupied territories. Furthermore, the Kremlin demanded the total lifting of all Western sanctions. Reuters had also previously flagged several other Russian conditions floated in Alaska, including the possibility of Ukraine receiving non-NATO security guarantees from the West, granting official state status to the Russian language, and guaranteeing unrestricted operations for the Russian Orthodox Church within Ukraine.

Perhaps the most significant takeaway from Alaska was that Trump fundamentally conceded to Putin's framing of the conflict. Trump agreed that chasing a fragile, temporary ceasefire was a waste of time and that negotiations should bypass it entirely, moving straight toward a comprehensive peace treaty. Crucially,

³⁷ "Reuters Explained What Compromise Russia is Ready for in a Deal with Ukraine," *RBC*, August 21, 2025, accessed December 26, 2025, in Russian: ["Reuters объяснил, на какой компромисс готова Россия в сделке с Украиной," *РБК*, 21 августа 2025, (дата обращения: 26.12.2025)], <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/21/08/2025/68a73c8b9a79471e0adf-1d4d>.

Russia's definition of "peace" requires addressing the "root causes" of the war and establishing "equal and indivisible security." In Kremlin parlance, this means Russia must have veto power over the security arrangements of other nations if it deems them threatening. By implicitly accepting this framework, Trump effectively abandoned the unified stance held by Ukraine and its European allies, aligning himself much closer to Moscow's worldview.³⁸

In the immediate aftermath, the summit and a subsequent meeting between Zelensky and European leaders in Washington sparked a brief wave of optimism that the war might actually be drawing to a close. For the first time in years, the belligerents and their backers were discussing tangible steps toward a settlement.

However, the ensuing months proved that the long-term outlook had not fundamentally shifted. While diplomats could point to minor tactical wins, the strategic picture remained grim. The brutal fighting on the ground did not skip a beat, and the European triad of Starmer, Macron, and Merz continued to steadfastly support Ukraine's position against territorial concessions. For these European leaders, validating Russian territorial annexations poses an existential threat to the continent's entire security architecture. They harbor a collective anxiety that allowing border modifications via military force in Ukraine will establish a fatal legal precedent, inevitably inviting future Russian incursions against more vulnerable states along the eastern flank.

Many geopolitical analysts accurately noted that the surprise Anchorage summit primarily revealed that neither Washington nor Moscow had the appetite for a major, uncontrolled escalation. Trump essentially admitted that he no longer believed sanctions alone could force Russia to capitulate. Putin, meanwhile, was desperate to keep a direct line open to Trump, recognizing him as the only Western leader willing to engage in bilateral dialogue. There was no grand bargain, but Putin achieved a massive strategic shift: he successfully dragged the negotiating framework toward Russia's vision for ending the war. This victory manifested in two crucial ways. First, Trump internalized the belief that a nuclear-armed Russia simply cannot be decisively defeated on the battlefield, leading to the conclusion that the war in Ukraine has no viable military solution. Second, the White House dropped its demand for an immediate ceasefire, accepting Putin's core argument

³⁸ Alexander Baunov, "Alaska Summit Leaves Ukraine a Hostage to Russia's Demands of the West," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 2025, accessed January 3, 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/08/alaska-summit-putin-trump?lang=en>.

that the parties must skip a truce and immediately negotiate the terms of a long-term, structural peace.³⁹

Post-Alaska, both Moscow and Washington operate under the shared assumption that continued, escalating confrontation serves neither side. This understanding forms the bedrock of their future relationship: deep disagreements over Ukraine will persist, but they are superseded by a mutual determination to prevent a direct US-Russian military conflict. Meanwhile, the European capitals, which had hoped that Trump would eventually grow frustrated and abandon his outreach to Putin, were left disappointed.⁴⁰

The Post-Alaska Diplomatic Landscape

By September 2025, the international community was desperate for a breakthrough. The White House, hoping to capitalize on the momentum of the bilateral summit in Alaska, began pushing hard for a three-way meeting between Trump, Putin, and Zelensky. The goal was to solidify Trump's image as the ultimate dealmaker. The Kremlin, however, had other plans. Moscow began implying that it would simply refuse to sign any final peace treaty with Zelensky, consistently asserting that his mandate had expired and he was no longer the legitimate president of Ukraine.

This maneuvering was a clear signal: the Kremlin wanted elections in Ukraine, and they wanted them soon. Russian strategists calculated that forcing a wartime vote would inevitably trigger a massive political and social crisis in Kyiv. Consequently, the sheer logistics of getting the Russian and Ukrainian presidents in the same room became the primary battleground of the US-brokered peace talks. Trump demanded a summit; Zelensky, eager for a resolution, agreed. But Putin engaged in a masterclass of diplomatic evasion. He could not flat-out reject the American president, so he stalled, constantly attaching new preconditions to any potential meeting with his Ukrainian counterpart.⁴¹ Zelensky, acutely aware of his

³⁹ Tatiana Stanovaya, "Tactical Victories in Ukraine Peace Talks Will Only Lead to Strategic Defeat," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, August 2025, accessed January 3, 2026, <https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/08/russia-usa-ukraine-alaska-goals?lang=en>.

⁴⁰ Jonathan Martin, "How to Avoid the Putin Slow-Walk: A New Trump Ultimatum," *Politico*, August 20, 2025, accessed January 3, 2026, <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2025/08/20/trump-putin-negotiation-ultimatum-bill-00515477>.

⁴¹ Andrey Pertsev, "Why Is the Kremlin Insisting on Ukraine Holding Elections?," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 2025, accessed January 13, 2026,

precarious position, was racing the clock—he needed to secure a peace deal before any forced elections took place, knowing that without one, his political survival was practically zero.

The turning point of 2025 came on November 20, when Washington finally dropped its formal vision: a comprehensive, 28-point American peace proposal. A delegation of high-ranking US military officials, led by Dan Driscoll, flew to Kyiv to formally present the blueprint to Zelensky.⁴²

In essence, the proposed framework demanded a radical restructuring of the geopolitical landscape, beginning with severe territorial concessions. The United States offered formal recognition of Crimea, Luhansk, and Donetsk as de facto Russian territory, proposing the partition of the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions along the active line of contact. In exchange for a Russian withdrawal from peripheral occupied zones, Kyiv would abandon its remaining foothold in Donetsk to establish a Russian-controlled buffer. Militarily and structurally, the plan required capping the Ukrainian Armed Forces at 600,000 personnel and constitutionally prohibiting NATO integration, though it permitted the pursuit of European Union membership. This was coupled with an agreement barring all NATO troops from Ukraine and restricting allied aviation to Poland, compensated by a Russian non-aggression pact and a definitive halt to NATO's eastward expansion. The financial dimensions were highly transactional: \$100 billion in frozen Russian assets would fund Ukrainian reconstruction, yet the United States demanded a 50 percent cut of the generated profits and required Europe to match the initial sum, while funneling the remaining seized assets into a joint US-Russian investment vehicle. To finalize the settlement, the blueprint mandated a phased rollback of Western sanctions, Moscow's readmission to the G8, comprehensive blanket amnesties, forced Ukrainian national elections exactly 100 days post-signing, and an immediate, binding truce upon ratification.

To sweeten this bitter pill for Kyiv, Trump's plan included a robust set of security guarantees modeled explicitly on Article 5 of NATO. These guarantees would legally obligate the US and its European allies to treat any attack on Ukraine as an attack on the entire "transatlantic community." The text stipulated that any "significant, deliberate, and sustained armed attack" by Russia would trigger an

<https://carnegieendowment.org/russia-eurasia/politika/2025/09/russia-ukraine-zelensky-replacement?lang=en>.

⁴² "Trump's Peace Plan for Ukraine Published – Read the Full Text: The US Promises Ukraine Security Guarantees, But Not NATO Membership," *Yle*, accessed January 13, 2026, in Russian: ["Опубликован мирный план Трампа для Украины – читайте полный текст. США обещают Украине гарантии безопасности, но не членство в НАТО," *Yle*, (дата обращения: 13.01.2026)], <https://yle.fi/a/74-20195384>.

immediate response from the US and its allies, up to and including military force. These guarantees would lock in for ten years, with the option for renewal. According to US officials, the Trump administration genuinely viewed this security umbrella as a “massive victory” for Ukraine’s long-term survival.⁴³ From Kyiv’s perspective, however, substituting formal NATO integration with bilateral paper guarantees resurrected the spectral trauma of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum. Ukrainian strategists argued that without the physical presence of allied tripwire forces or immediate Article 5 deterrence, any localized security pact would inevitably degrade into a temporary armistice. Such an arrangement, they feared, would merely grant the Russian military the operational pause required to reconstitute its forces and rectify its logistical failures for a future offensive.⁴⁴

Objectively, the 28-point plan was a radical, heavily compromised document. It had the genuine potential to freeze the conflict and permanently alter the geopolitical map of Eastern Europe. Think tanks and policy circles were deeply divided on its merits, and it remains unclear whether the finer points of this proposal were secretly hammered out during the Alaska summit.

The reaction in Kyiv was bleak. In a somber video address to the nation, Zelensky described the moment as one of the darkest chapters in Ukrainian history, vowing he would never sign a deal that humiliated his country. The pressure campaign from Washington was brutal; Western media reported that the US had explicitly threatened to cut off all intelligence sharing and weapons shipments if Kyiv balked. Trump, projecting trademark confidence, publicly declared that a peace deal could be finalized by November 27. Putin, meanwhile, calmly confirmed that Moscow had received the proposal and coyly suggested it “could serve as a basis” for peace.

Instead of rejecting the American plan outright, Kyiv took out a red pen. They heavily edited the document, slashing it down to a 20-point counter-proposal. Shortly after, Zelensky publicly unveiled these 20 points, which were now the subject of furious, three-way negotiations between Kyiv, Moscow, and Washington. In a press conference with Ukrainian journalists on December 24, Zelensky framed this revised 20-point plan as the “foundational document for ending the war.” However, he admitted that several massive hurdles remained, pointing specifically to the unresolved status of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant and the ultimate fate of the occupied territories.

⁴³ “Trump Ukraine Peace Plan: 28 Points,” *Axios*, November 20, 2025, <https://www.axios.com/2025/11/20/trump-ukraine-peace-plan-28-points-russia>.

⁴⁴ Institute for the Study of War. “Russian Offensive Campaign Assessment, November 20, 2025.” November 20, 2025. Accessed May 1, 2026. <https://understandingwar.org/-research/russia-ukraine/russian-offensive-campaign-assessment-november-20-2025/>.

Conclusion: The Anatomy of a Deadlock

Ultimately, the diplomatic whiplash of 2025 failed to produce a viable off-ramp for the Ukrainian crisis. The high-stakes negotiating track between Washington and Moscow collapsed under the weight of its own contradictions, and 2026 opened exactly as the previous year had: with the relentless grind of combat operations on the ground.

Europe's political establishment outright rejected Trump's 28-point blueprint. In its place, the EU floated a counter-proposal that effectively gutted Washington's core concessions to Moscow. The European framework refused any caps on the Ukrainian military, insisted that territorial negotiations be strictly confined to the current line of contact, and fiercely protected Kyiv's right to future NATO accession.

What followed was a dizzying, globe-trotting diplomatic theater. US and Ukrainian delegations held supposedly "productive" talks in Geneva, but the only tangible result was the surgical removal of the most contentious issues from the draft, effectively kicking the can down the road. Meanwhile, thousands of miles away in Abu Dhabi, American and Russian envoys sat down for parallel discussions. Moscow's message was unambiguous: the Kremlin viewed the original, unedited 28-point American plan as a highly acceptable "foundation for a peaceful settlement."

Desperate to bridge this widening chasm, the US hosted another round of talks with the Ukrainians in Florida, but the structural roadblocks remained immovable. An American delegation then flew straight to Moscow for direct, closed-door talks with Vladimir Putin. While the exact readouts remain classified, the ensuing silence was deafening: no compromise had been reached.

Recognizing the futility of forcing a single, omnibus treaty, Washington pivoted. The monolithic peace plan was fractured into four distinct, siloed documents: one addressing Ukrainian sovereignty, another tackling the territorial carve-up, a third outlining the resumption of Western-Russian economic cooperation, and a final, sweeping framework for a new European security architecture.

Yet, late-stage negotiations between the US and Ukraine continued to trip over the twin hurdles of land and leverage. A heavily revised 20-point draft surfaced, notably introducing the concept of a demilitarized zone (DMZ) in the Donbas. Buoyed by the unwavering support of the Macron-Starmer-Merz triumvirate, Zelensky attempted to fundamentally rewrite this document during a tense summit in Berlin with US Special Envoy Steve Witkoff and European leaders. The only major concession Washington yielded was the promise of "platinum security guar-

antees” for Kyiv, a euphemism for a binding bilateral defense pact closely mirroring NATO’s Article 5.

The final diplomatic gasp of 2025 took place in Miami, where Witkoff shuttled between separate, back-to-back meetings with the Russian and Ukrainian delegations. It was a final exercise in futility. In the immediate aftermath, the Kremlin slammed the door, officially declaring that the aggressive amendments pushed by Kyiv and its European backers had fatally poisoned Trump’s peace initiative.

Ultimately, the diplomatic trajectory of 2025 illustrates a profound systemic regression in international relations, characterized by the abandonment of collective defense architectures in favor of transactional great-power bilateralism. Washington’s aggressive push for a rapid, superpower-brokered settlement that is anchored in the 28-point proposal and the Anchorage summit demonstrates a calculated willingness to sacrifice Ukrainian territorial integrity and European strategic autonomy to achieve immediate geopolitical realignment. By accommodating Moscow’s structural demands and implicitly validating the use of military force to alter sovereign borders, this emerging “New Yalta” framework effectively dismantles the post-Cold War security consensus. This paradigm shift leaves Europe acutely isolated, catalyzing a rapid, continent-wide militarization as allied capitals recognize the American security umbrella is no longer guaranteed. Rather than establishing a durable peace, this exclusionary mediation process is positioned to institutionalize a volatile, frozen conflict, cementing a dangerous international precedent that legally subordinates the sovereignty of independent states to the strategic conveniences of competing hegemonies.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical Standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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