

Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic Future: Paving the path to peace & security

**Presented by the International Taskforce on Ukraine's
Security and Euro-Atlantic Integration**

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Executive Summary

For the path to Ukraine's NATO membership to be credible, short, and solid, this report recommends:

- Issuing an invitation at the NATO Summit in Washington D.C. for Ukraine to start accession talks to join the alliance and inviting the NATO-Ukraine Council to define specific conditions for membership.
- Setting a clear timeframe for Ukrainian NATO membership of no later than July 2028, provided specific conditions are met.
- Containing the war as a first step to ending the war, by strengthening Ukraine and its allies' efforts to deny Russia's operational success on land, at sea, and in the air.
- Lifting all caveats on types of conventional weapons delivered to Ukraine and all caveats on their use against military targets inside Russia.
- Bringing the web of bilateral security agreements between Ukraine and its partners under the framework of an international compact.
- Building Ukraine's future force so that it can reach – before the end of the decade – a size and structure robust enough to defend against a future conventional attack by Russia and positively contribute to NATO's collective defence plans.
- A commitment by NATO Allies to spend the equivalent of 0.25% of their GDP on military assistance to Ukraine.
- Unblocking the \$300 billion of frozen Russian assets and using them to support Ukraine.
- Setting clear reform and governance benchmarks for Ukraine, fully aligned with the EU accession process.
- Developing a set of assurances on the defensive nature of Ukraine's future NATO membership.

How to deal with a revanchist Russia

Russia has invaded Ukraine twice within the last decade. This has caused enormous human suffering and destruction in Ukraine, and major instability for the Euro-Atlantic area.

This aggression is a clear violation of the UN Charter, as well as Russia's own security guarantees to Ukraine. Under international law, Ukraine has the right to defend itself but also the right to request assistance from other states to resist aggression.

Vladimir Putin's wars are part of a broader agenda by Russia to undermine European security and undo the international rules-based order. From Moldova to Georgia, to Ukraine, Moscow has demonstrated that there is no security or stability in the grey zone between Russia and the EU and NATO.

The West has responded to Russia's full-scale invasion with unprecedented support for Ukraine – both in terms of military assistance and economic sanctions against Moscow. These actions are fully in line with international law.

Despite this support, Russia still occupies almost 20% of Ukrainian territory and is making further progress on the battlefield.

Even if military parity can be restored by the end of this year, the current approach by Ukraine's allies lacks a clear strategy to end the war on acceptable terms. The risk of an open-ended war turning into a slow failure for Ukraine – and its allies – cannot be underestimated.

Russia is launching daily missile and drone attacks against Ukraine's civilian population and critical infrastructure. Putin has put his country's economy on a war footing, militarised society, and aligned closely with rogue states such as Iran and North Korea. Meanwhile Russia continues to benefit from the active economic and diplomatic support from other global players.

Moscow's authoritarian and aggressive trajectory seems unlikely to change in the near future. A strong deterrence posture is therefore needed to guard against a militaristic and revanchist Russia.

Given the persistent threat to Ukraine's security and sovereignty, NATO leaders must develop a new containment strategy with Ukraine at its heart, rather than its periphery.

The need for a new security paradigm

The past year has shown that the current level of support is not sufficient to guarantee the viability of Ukraine as a sovereign and independent country. Moscow's calculus is that its commitment to weaken and subdue Ukraine can outlast the West's commitment to support it. Russia's war against Kyiv is fundamentally a test of Allies' resolve. Recent delays in Western military assistance and indecisiveness on the timing of Ukraine's invitation to join NATO have encouraged Moscow to think it can outlast Ukraine and its allies.

This report concludes that to avoid an open-ended war, NATO leaders must demonstrate their irreversible, collective commitment to Ukraine. To do so they should invite Ukraine to start accession talks to join NATO. A credible NATO membership perspective is a means to persuade Russia it will not gain from continuing its illegal war. Inviting Ukraine now to start accession talks can pressure Russia to end the war and to give Ukraine a fair chance at winning the peace.

Further delaying an invitation would have the opposite effect. It would encourage Moscow to double down on its aggression in Ukraine, disregard potential peace initiatives, and test the Allies' resolve elsewhere.

Concerns about the risks of extending NATO's collective defence arrangements to a country at war are legitimate and call for careful attention when beginning accession talks. But continuing the current strategy and failing to commit to Ukraine's long-term sovereignty also comes with significant risk and decreases the possibility of peace. As long as Russia feels it can withstand current levels of Western support and pursue its military campaign, while making gradual gains, it will have no incentive to enter any talks on a potential peace settlement.

This approach will not only have terrible consequences for the people of Ukraine but also for Euro-Atlantic security. The United States will be seen by adversaries across the world as lacking sufficient strength and will.

This report proposes a series of steps, to contain the war, pave the path to eventual Ukrainian NATO membership, and ultimately restore peace and stability in Europe.

Contain and then end the war

The current front line in Ukraine stretches more than one thousand kilometres. Russia continues to occupy almost 20% of Ukraine's territory. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea provides Moscow with a critical base to support the land war and deny Ukraine's freedom of navigation in the Black Sea. Russian dominance in the air domain, through a mix of manned aircraft, cruise and ballistic missiles, and drones, means it can exert considerable pressure on Ukraine's frontline positions, while waging a campaign of destruction against population centres and critical infrastructure.

Ukraine's situation on the frontline has deteriorated in recent months, with forces running low on munitions and air defence interceptors. The passing of the US supplemental after a six-month hiatus provides Ukraine with a critical lifeline. Still, it is not enough to fundamentally alter the trajectory of the war.

The immediate priority must be to strengthen Ukraine's defensive position. Ukraine's allies must take concerted steps to reduce the scale and scope of the war and deny Russia the possibility to operate in critical domains. Containing the war is thus the first step to end the war on acceptable terms.

These measures do not entail NATO ground troops operating inside Ukraine or engaging Russian forces directly, although nothing should be off the table.

These measures could include:

1. Commitment by NATO Allies to spend the equivalent of 0.25% of their GDP on military assistance to Ukraine, amounting to around \$100 billion per year in support.
2. Unblocking the \$300 billion of frozen Russian assets and using these funds to support Ukraine's war efforts and reconstruction.
3. Lifting caveats on types of weapons delivered from Allies to Ukraine. This should also include lifting caveats on their use against military targets inside Russia and limits on intelligence sharing with Ukraine. Strategic ambiguity toward Russia should be the new common approach.
4. Creation of an extended air-defence shield along Ukraine's western border. This would protect NATO from Russian missile and drone strikes, but also Ukrainian civilians and military infrastructure in a well-defined area of responsibility inside western Ukraine. This would allow Ukraine to move air defence systems to the frontline and to protect key cities such as Dnipro and Kharkiv.
5. NATO Allies deploying a freedom of navigation and demining mission to the Black Sea. Deploying a mission that could combine Allies' aerial and naval assets to provide escorts to freighters travelling to and from Ukraine. Escorts would facilitate the restoration of normal commercial shipping in the Black Sea, alleviating global food shortages.

6. Ramping up the training of Ukrainian forces by NATO Allies, including with a potential mission on Ukrainian territory. This will help to scale and accelerate training of fresh forces and help build a feedback loop on operational needs.
7. NATO Allies providing forward logistics support – deploying either civilian contractors or military specialist teams to ‘fix forward’ equipment in Ukraine, rather than hauling back to NATO countries.

Taken together, these measures would help Ukraine deny Russia the possibility to escalate its conventional war. They would also constitute an enhanced commitment to Ukraine's security in the interim period between an invitation and full membership.

NATO as the primary security guarantor

Improvements on the battlefield will help Ukraine regain some control and reduce the risk of escalation. But this will not be enough to assure Ukraine's long-term security and sovereignty. Russia has proven on many occasions its capacity to learn from tactical and operational failures, rebuild its forces, and launch new attacks.

In the best-case scenario, the current approach can help restore some form of balance on the battlefield. In the worst-case, it will simply slow Russia's advance. Ultimately, an open-ended war increases the risk of failure for Ukraine over the long term and means heightened instability in the Euro-Atlantic area.

Only eventual NATO membership can provide Ukraine with a fundamental guarantee for its sovereignty and its right to pursue a Western strategic orientation. It signals to Russia that Western leaders are committed to Ukraine and its defence in perpetuity.

Therefore, NATO membership for Ukraine must be part of the West's strategy for ending the war – not something that can be considered only after the war is over.

A credible membership perspective will signal clearly to Russia that there is no gain in continuing the war.

How and when to invite Ukraine into NATO

This report recommends integrating Ukraine in NATO, and its defence plans, as quickly as possible, as the most effective way to enable Ukraine to defend itself, control escalation, and bring this war to an acceptable conclusion.

To begin that process, NATO Allies should invite Ukraine to begin accession talks at the upcoming summit in Washington D.C., with a clear timeframe for membership by no later than July 2028, provided all conditions are met.

Collective defence plans

Moscow would seek to test and probe Allies' commitment to Ukraine's defence. This would require careful planning to manage a range of scenarios and control escalation. Accession talks should include the development of credible defence and deterrence plans between NATO and Ukraine.

The risk of NATO membership for Ukraine leading to full-scale hostilities between Russia and NATO cannot be excluded and should not be taken lightly. But this risk is low provided NATO Allies and Ukraine pursue the sequence of actions above. Likewise, the more credible and robust NATO's deterrence is, the lower this risk will be.

Russia is in no position to win a war against NATO; Vladimir Putin knows this. NATO leaders should have confidence in the Alliance's power of deterrence, which has been central to peace and security in Europe for 75 years.

Sharing responsibility

The readiness and robustness of Ukraine's forces will be critical to both its own defence and the Alliance's overall security. This starts with the current mobilisation efforts and more broadly in building a robust future force posture. As a result, Ukraine can become a substantial contributor to NATO's collective defence plans, on par with major European allies. Ukraine is already one of the most battle-hardened and battle-tested forces in Europe. This will ultimately make a significant contribution to NATO, including its defence plans, acting as a security provider for other Allies. Ukraine's membership will also contribute to strengthening the community of Black Sea states in NATO.

A fair sharing of responsibility between the transatlantic allies will be important as well – with European allies providing the bulk of the resources and forces, and the United States providing strategic enablers and infrastructure. This includes a greater role for Europe in the development and alignment of its defence industry, especially artillery and ammunition, with that of Ukraine. The EU accession process also contributes to fairer burden sharing by transforming and supporting a modern Ukrainian economy.

Continuing reforms

An important part of Ukraine's path to membership is effective reforms. A road map for reform and good governance for Ukraine will strengthen security and create useful synergies between the EU accession process and Ukraine's recovery and reconstruction.

Despite the immense challenges stemming from the war, Ukraine is continuing to implement reforms across a range of sectors. As part of its EU accession process, Ukraine is implementing reforms covering the rule of law, good governance, public administration, market economy, and judiciary, as well as tackling corruption.

Ukraine has already made significant progress in fighting corruption, notably by establishing several anti-corruption institutions. Between 2013-2023, Ukraine rose 40 places in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index.¹

Much work remains to be done. In particular, Ukraine should continue security and defence sector reforms, strengthening democratic civilian control, the rule of law, and improving efficiency and transparency across security institutions and defence industries.

Certain security sector reforms, such as reform of the Security Service of Ukraine, require a long-term engagement and will continue after Ukraine becomes a NATO member.

Alternative models and scenarios

Future European Union Membership

Ukraine's future membership of the European Union brings some security guarantees. The Treaty on European Union contains a mutual defence clause, Article 42.7, under which EU member states are committed to come to the aid of another member state in the case of aggression.

However, Article 42.7 has never been tested and the EU has limited capabilities in terms of military planning. The Union does not have a dedicated command structure. So, EU membership without NATO membership would do little to bolster Ukraine's security and deterrence posture towards Russia.

Ukraine's EU accession process does play an important role in driving reform and modernisation. It also signals to the United States government, the contributions by European partners, outside NATO, to Ukraine's resilience.

Bilateral Security Agreements

The bilateral security agreements signed between Ukraine and its partners comprise an additional layer of security. This approach was outlined in the Kyiv Security Compact and endorsed by the G7 on the sidelines of the NATO Summit in Vilnius in 2023.

These agreements were not conceived as a replacement for NATO membership, but as an interim solution before NATO membership is attained. This web of bilateral security agreements could be strengthened and better coordinated by bringing them together under the framework of a single international compact. This compact could be agreed on the sidelines of the NATO Summit in Washington D.C., alongside the invitation to begin NATO accession talks.

¹ Transparency International. [Corruption Perceptions Index](#). 2024

Armed Neutrality

The model of armed neutrality, similar to that of Finland during the Cold War, is often presented as an alternative to NATO membership. Proponents of this model argue that Ukraine giving up its NATO ambitions could form the basis for an understanding with Russia. They argue that like Finland during the Cold War, armed neutrality could allow Ukraine to embed its democracy and market economy and pivot westwards in trade, potentially joining the European Union.

However, Putin's own words and Russia's actions indicate Moscow would not accept a Ukraine outside NATO but seeking EU membership. Russia annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine in response to Ukraine moving closer to the EU, not NATO.

Vladimir Putin opposes NATO membership because it would cement Ukraine's sovereignty and its position outside of Russia's sphere of influence, as well as hamper Russia's imperial ambitions towards its neighbours.

Even Finland has recognised that armed neutrality does not provide sufficient security in the face of Vladimir Putin's revanchist Russia.

NATO membership

NATO membership remains the most effective way to guarantee Ukraine's security and sovereignty and deter future military aggression. The vast majority of countries in Central and Eastern Europe, kept under Russian imposed authoritarianism during the Cold War, recognised this and joined NATO decades ago. In the face of a renewed threat from an aggressive and imperialistic Russia, Sweden and Finland have come to the same conclusion.

Stability and assurances

The invitation to begin accession talks with Ukraine at the NATO Summit in Washington D.C. should be underpinned by bridging measures to ensure Ukraine's security. These should be accompanied by clear signals to Russia about their implications. This is an essential part of deterrence. There should also be specific assurances to Moscow about the implications of Ukraine's future NATO membership.

This could include assurances that neither Ukraine nor the Alliance have territorial claims against Russia nor intends to attack Russia, provided that Russia accepts Ukraine's 1991 internationally recognized borders. Moreover, Ukraine and NATO could explicitly assure Moscow that it does not seek regime change.

China's reaction to Ukraine joining NATO is an important risk factor to anticipate and manage. Behind the scenes, Beijing has been a significant force in moderating Moscow's nuclear sabre rattling.

Efforts to engage China in Ukraine's peace formula should be re-doubled, including by placing NATO membership into a broader peace framework of assurances and confidence building measures.

Global benefits of sustainable peace in Ukraine

Ensuring Ukraine's long-term sovereignty and security is not only essential for stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic but also important for the global community.

The war has demonstrated the importance of Ukraine as a producer and exporter of agricultural products to the world market. Russia's full-scale invasion led to a massive disruption of production and export of food staples such as corn, wheat, and cooking oils. This resulted in significant price increases, hitting the world's poorest in the 'Global South' particularly hard.

A Ukraine that is embedded firmly in the Euro-Atlantic area can be a significant source of growth and a supplier of essential produce to world markets. A stable Ukraine can therefore contribute strongly to stability in global food prices.

If Russia succeeds on the battlefield against Ukraine, it sets a dangerous precedent. Regimes around the world will learn that military aggression and nuclear blackmail work. It would undermine the fundamental principle that sovereign countries have the right to choose their own alliances, further weakening global rules and the international order.

The benefits of Ukraine's NATO membership and how it fits into the wider Peace Formula need to be explained clearly to the global community – focusing on the benefits a sovereign and prosperous Ukraine can bring to the world.

This should start at the Global Peace Summit in Switzerland in June 2024.

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