



# DIPLOMACY FOR PEACE

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## **PART I** - The Threat of the Russian-Ukrainian War and Prospects for Peace



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## **DIPLOMACY FOR PEACE THE THREAT OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR AND PROSPECTS FOR PEACE**

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## *Introduction*

Today's international context has become definitively multi-polar and globalised. The planet faces insidious climate change, widening economic disparities and the harmful exploitation of natural resources. If left unchecked, each of these forces will become yet another source of dispute. Already, myriad armed conflicts are currently raging in what Ignacio Romenet prophetically defined in 1997 as the "geopolitics of chaos".

China's ascent on the global stage and the expansion of a varied, yet increasingly influential group like BRICS are the two big developments of our time, in which the equilibriums that solidified in the almost half-century of the Cold War have been shaken. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has played, and continues to play, a crucial role in this context. Many countries that were previously labelled "unaligned" during the Cold War see Russia's invasion of Ukraine not so much as an attack on international law as an act of rebellion against a West clinging to policies characterised by the weaponisation of human rights, a double standard when judging countries' conduct based on how close they are to the metropole and an often unjustified and disproportionate use of force.

The UN General Assembly's vote on 2 March 2022 condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine was welcomed by the governments of the Atlantic countries and the mainstream media as a victory for the West. But it was Pyrrhic victory, in that it merely reflected the tally of countries that had voted to condemn the Russian invasion: 141 countries in favour, five against and 35 abstentions (12 were absent). However, the picture changes dramatically when we examine the countries not by their number, but by their economic, political and demographic weight in the world. This is because the political significance of the UN vote lies not in the large number of countries that voted in favour of the motion nor in the small number of those that opposed it. Rather, it lies in the characteristics of the countries that abstained, which are neither few in number nor, more importantly, inconsequential. The delegations that did not condemn Russia's violation of the United Nations Charter represent countries – the "expanded BRICS" resulting from its expansion into a group much larger than the original bloc – that alone boast three and a half billion people. With economies generating a combined value of \$30 trillion, they account for 36% of global GDP.

More than evidence of their agnosticism towards the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, their abstention in the vote to condemn Moscow's conduct (and the support they have given Russian trade in flagrant disregard of the sanctions) should be seen as evidence of their growing impatience with the strategic policies of the US (policies that can hardly be expected to garner more popularity in international public opinion when they support excessive Israeli reactions in Gaza, Lebanon and Syria). The result is that – even without considering Xi Jinping's China, at this point a *de facto* Russian ally – the self-declared "impartiality" of the BRICS bloc encompasses countries without preconceived hostility for the West, such as Modi's India, Lula's Brazil and even Erdogan's Turkey (a key member of NATO). Clear confirmation of this shift came with the BRICS summit held in Kazan (Russia) in October 2024, hosted by Putin himself. The event should have encouraged reflection, but instead appears to have inspired a head-in-the-sand strategy among Euro-American political leaders and media.

The situation *within* the Western world is hardly more encouraging, where, from the United States to Europe, populist, isolationist, protectionist and denialist pressures grow ever stronger, challenging the principles of international law and contradicting the founding values of the West, particularly those of the European Union, whose Treaty on European Union promised its citizens (and others) what was to have been "the area of freedom, security and justice".

A symptom of this geopolitics of chaos is the marginalisation of the UN, its agencies and the regional organisations modelled after it. The permanent members of the UN Security Council's use of their veto power has crippled – and continues to cripple – initiatives not to their liking and, in this time of abundant conflict, that is almost everything. The only policies left standing are unilateral and based on relationships of convenience, and often even force, between states.

The situation in Ukraine is symptomatic of this. Here, the *casus belli*, consisting of the unresolved handling of Russian-speaking, Russophile minorities in Ukraine neatly inserted itself into Moscow's growing hostility against US and NATO policies. Refusing to provide the political, financial and organisational resources that the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) would have needed in 2014-2022 to manage the crisis in Crimea and Donbas sowed an aversion to multilateralism throughout the region, fuelled by the global superpowers. As we will see in the second chapter, neither Russia nor NATO's European member states (let alone the European Union) offered any genuine support to the OSCE's intervention, with the consequence that the Minsk Agreements were disregarded on the basis of a tacit "no case to answer", as much by the protagonists (Russia and Ukraine) as by the mediators (France,

Germany and the European Union). The result was, first, civil war, followed by Russia's invasion, then the war of attrition we have been witnessing for three years now.

It is a war that should never have happened, and the response using arms and sanctions that were meant to punish and isolate Russia are punishing and isolating the West as well, particularly Europe. The time has therefore come to turn a critical, yet open-minded, eye to the analyses and proposals that the Russian-Ukrainian War has inspired – including those put forth by societies outside the West – for a political solution. Indeed, the matter at hand is important for all of the West, crucial for the North Atlantic Alliance and truly vital for Europe, but it is also critical for the rest of the world as well, for reasons ranging from the (relatively) *local* one of Ukrainian grain exports to African nations to the *global* threat of a potential nuclear war.

For this purpose, the Report has surveyed and collated the extensive array of analyses and proposals, including those from what was once called the Third World but is now taking its place on the international stage as a coordinated group of newly industrialised countries. The West might, in turn, consider the various reasonable options among this group's political positions, avoiding the (most misguided) option of ignoring them.

With specific regard to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, it is worth emphasising that certain BRICS and other countries have, in recent years, advanced interesting positions and proposals for peace in Ukraine. Additional proposals have come from various civil society organisations which have poured significant efforts into ending the armed conflict, through both practical proposals and humanitarian support missions in the places affected by the conflict, as well as the many peaceful protests held in recent years across Europe. The first part of this Report is based on a close examination of the main analyses and proposals that have emerged in these three years of war. The second part will address the current situation and possible solutions for the other major conflict under way at present, the war in Gaza, within the context of the Middle East crisis, with an eye to Europe's future role.

## *1. Conflicts in the new millennium: military spending, armaments and wars*

### ***Wars and their victims: military and civilian fatalities***

It has often been observed that, after the Second World War, despite hanging in the balance of terror fomented by the threat of the atomic bomb and the bipolar opposition of East versus West, the northern half of the globe experienced an historic phase of relative peace, albeit armed peace, based on risky nuclear deterrence.

This observation applies fairly well to Europe (which, even during the Cold War, had experienced Soviet repression in the wake of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956 and the Prague Spring of 1968) until the fall of the Berlin Wall. From that moment on, with the dissolution of the USSR and the consequent crisis of the bipolar system, Europe began to see intense armed conflicts flaring up in theatres like the Balkans, the Caucasus and, today, Ukraine.

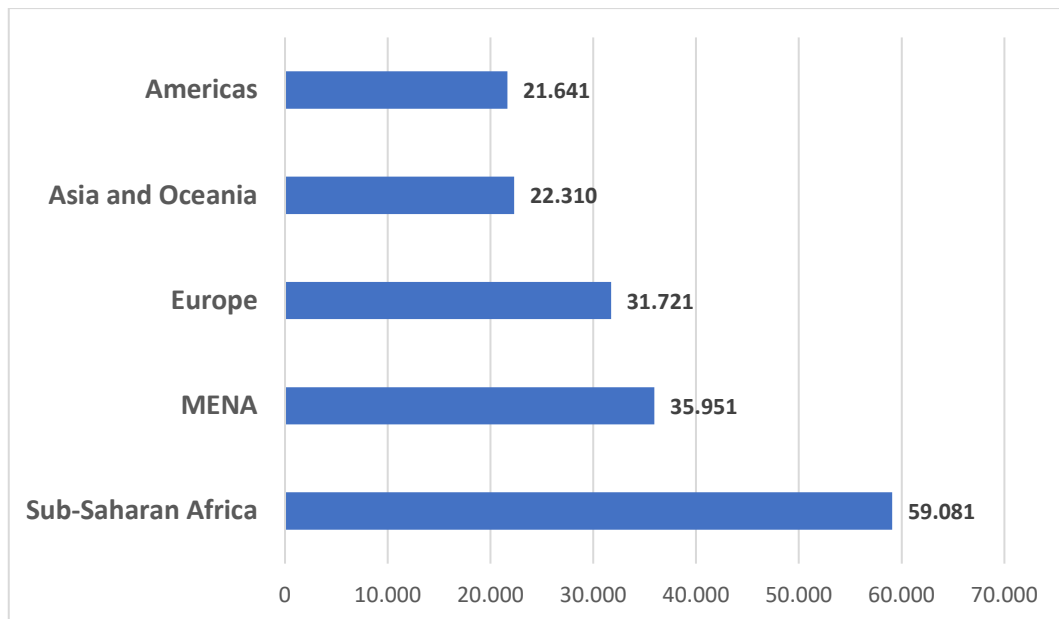
Armed conflict proved to be endemic in the rest of the world as well. Before long, the international scenario was showing signs of instability triggered by the end of the paradoxical balance of the Cold War now that, for the first time, newly industrialised nations began moving towards the centre of the stage, some of which were on the path to becoming global powers, like China and India, or regional powers, like Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Brazil, etc. After the turn of the millennium, armed conflicts became an increasingly global phenomenon, to the extent that Pope Francis' coinage, a "third world war in pieces", became a popular way to describe the connections between the various crises (from Afghanistan to Iraq, Libya to Syria, Somalia to Sudan, etc.).

According to data released by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), over 50 countries are involved in armed conflicts. To be precise, there were 52 in 2023, four of which were considered "serious" (i.e., with at least 10,000 fatalities associated with the conflict in the year): Myanmar, Sudan, Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Palestine. These were followed by "high-intensity" armed conflicts (between 1,000 and 9,999 fatalities), which numbered 23 in 2023, up from 17 in the previous year. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries hold the record for the region with the largest number of armed conflicts (10). SIPRI has also reported that the mortality rates of these conflicts



are rising, as the 170,700 fatalities of 2023 was the highest number since 1979. With such a high cost in human lives, especially civilian lives, Gaza has become emblematic of another negative trend, defenceless populations being used as preferred targets in today's wars, regardless of how forgotten or relatively "remembered" they are. The war in Ukraine put Europe in third place in the tragic ranking of victims in 2023 (fig. 1).

**Fig. 1 - War victims by region - 2023**



Source: our processing of 2024 SIPRI data

Analysing the victims in the Russian-Ukrainian war, researchers come up against contradictory data, which can, however, be explained by Moscow's secrecy policy. There is a vast divide between the number of victims reported by the two belligerents, with extremely high numbers for Ukraine and negligible ones for Russia.

From the outset, this war has been characterised – as, moreover, is typical of wars between nations – by the more or less official statements released by the two governments involved. These statements tend to cite numbers that are glaringly implausible, in that they largely overstate the enemy's losses while giving equally improbable estimates of trifling losses in their own ranks. In an attempt to select the most reliable estimates possible, we have used data released by two international sources: SIPRI, which is cited repeatedly in this Report, and ACLED, an NGO that surveys data on conflicts around the world.

The two sources give estimates of Ukrainian losses that show similar trends but different totals, whereas they both present an irremediable flaw in their

estimates of Russian victims due to Moscow's policy of concealing all statistics on military and civilian deaths caused by the war.

According to SIPRI, Ukraine had 33,307 victims (military and civilian) in 2022 and 30,673 in 2023, putting the total number of fatalities in the 2022-2023 two-year period at 63,980. However, SIPRI's estimates of Russian victims are so negligible as to be highly dubious, ranging from 114 in 2022 to 249 in 2023.

According to the ACLED database, in the three years between 2022 and 2024, there were 33,801 Ukrainian victims in 2022, 35,990 in 2023 and 68,070 in 2024. The total number of deaths for that period came to 136,366. However, looking at Russia's losses, even ACLED reports implausibly low numbers, with Russian deaths apparently totalling 94 in 2022, 223 in 2023 and 4,470 in 2024.

### ***Wars and their beneficiaries: arms and budgets***

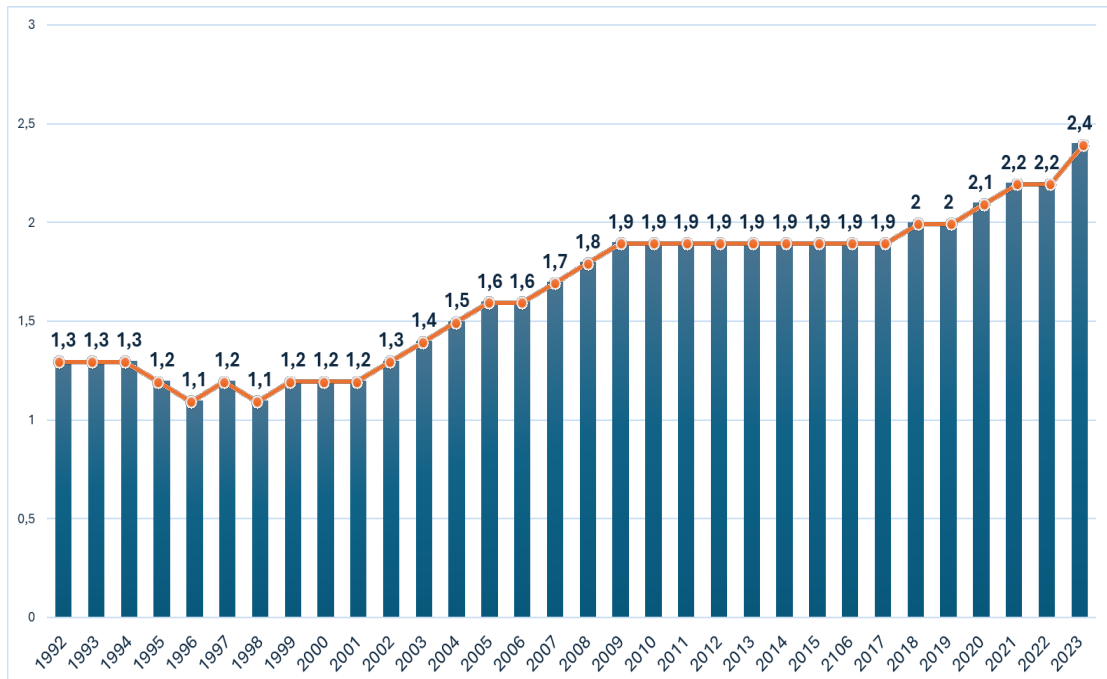
While most of the conflicts being waged around the world are fought using conventional weapons systems (particularly small and medium arms), when the conflict involves armies in the industrialised world, we begin to see semi-autonomous weapons and the first military applications of artificial intelligence, giving us a glimpse of what autonomous weapons systems (known as "killer robots" in the press) may be capable of. It's worth highlighting how the "operational" situations created by wars provide a unique opportunity to experiment with and test these new technologies. One example of this is Israel's use of the *Lavender* and *Gospel* algorithms in Gaza. In addition to satellite systems, these new semi-autonomous technologies (drones) and autonomous technologies (robots) are now commonly used by both belligerents in Ukraine. And moving beyond the current situation to envisage what could potentially occur, the Kremlin has repeatedly invoked the spectre of nuclear warfare in connection with its Special Military Operation. Confirming the many statements that have appeared in the media over the two and a half years of war, on 19 November 2024, the Kremlin officially announced that it had updated its nuclear doctrine, with a rewording that leaves a broad margin of discretion to the President of the Russian Federation.

Obviously, the use of ever higher-performance weapons by the powers involved in conflicts, and by those backing them, requires a flurry of research and development into technologies that grow more advanced by the day. This drives up costs which, in turn, results in two parallel phenomena. On one hand, defence budgets are revised under constant pressure from political and military decision-makers to save on operating costs (typically personnel costs) and instead focus

on investments in “productive” assets like weapons. At the same time, defence budgets inflate exponentially.

As hotbeds of conflict flared back up in the first quarter of the 21st century in many areas around the globe, enormous budgets became necessary to meet the growing needs of warring parties (first and foremost, for weapons and ammunition, but also for provisions, transport, sundry materials and, obviously, wages). Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the trend in global military spending shows a steady increase since 1998, as far back as three years before the attacks on New York and Washington and the US government’s consequent declaration of the “War on Terror”. Inspired by neo-conservative ideologues and implemented by President George W. Bush, this strategy made its entrance in the crisis dating back to 1997, when the US Senate failed to extend the START Treaty, marking the first impasse since the start of East-West dialogue and thwarting the most important result of this dialogue, US and Russian nuclear arms control. The War on Terror – with its military operations aimed at effecting regime change, first against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, which had actually colluded in the attack on the Twin Towers, then against Saddam Hussein, who obviously had not – jump-started an acceleration in defence spending, which would continue uninterrupted in the twenty years that followed (see fig. 2).

**Fig. 2 - Global military spending 1992-2023\***



Source: our processing of 2024 SIPRI data

\* billions of US dollars in constant prices

As shown in the figure, the roots of this concentration of resources in weapons and armed forces goes fairly far back into the past, even decades. An excessive focus on the function and objectives of defence is both the effect and the concurrent cause of the deterioration of international relations. In turn, this deterioration is a process that has taken shape incrementally, as governments have preferred armed national security over diplomatic, multilateral security, underestimating the importance of conflict prevention and systematically pushing to the sidelines the UN, which is rightfully, and should be in actuality, the body designated to manage conflicts.

In particular, after the period 1989 and 1991 when the USSR underwent crisis and dissolution, the West's relations with Russia, heir of the superpower that was the Soviet Union, have oscillated between an initial possibility of partnership and subsequent policies of reciprocal opposition, to the hostilities of recent years, culminating in the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As a result, today, with this war, NATO and the European Union find themselves grappling with a perilous, pre-belligerency situation with Russia, which shares the title of world's largest nuclear power with the US.

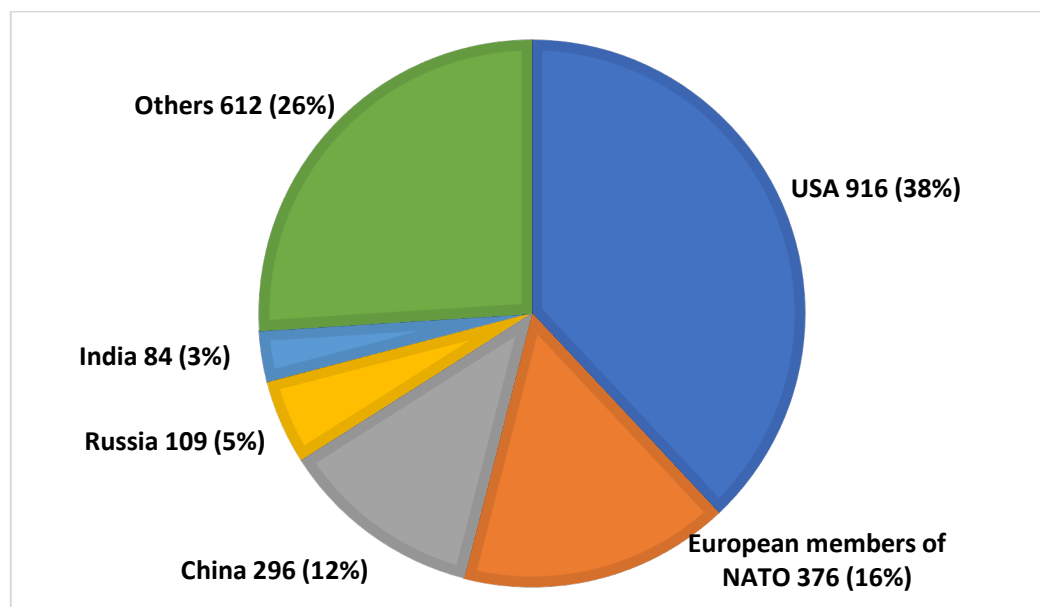
Within the EU (which lacks its own foreign policy and therefore has no defence strategy or shared military force), most politicians and media outlets currently limit themselves to deploring the Union's lack of preparedness in managing relations with Russia that have grown increasingly hostile. The solution that European governments see as the most easily available is a pure and simple alignment with the North Atlantic Alliance's positions.

Indeed, NATO is currently the only place where a defence policy that is not exclusively national is developed and implemented. However, NATO is not currently focused on understanding international trends or discussing possible strategies for addressing them. Instead, pessimistically assuming the worst, its sole focus is on the allocation of costs attributable to each member country to keep up with the current arms race. Years ago, the defence ministers of the NATO countries agreed to increase military spending to 2% of GDP. Even without taking into account the rumours spreading on the eve of a new era marked by Trump's second presidency that there will be demands for 3% of GDP and higher, Italy's position is particularly untenable. The country's current defence spending, even with the €32 billion budgeted for 2025, the third largest defence budget after Germany and France, comes to around 1.6% of GDP. This means that, to reach the 2% target, Italy would need to allocate something like €9 billion more per year to its armed forces (especially weapons). One can reasonably see how reaching this target would destabilise public spending and, if taxes were not raised, inevitably draw funds away from spending on social programmes (like healthcare and education) and the investments needed for the energy transition.

This race to ramp up military spending reveals the significance of the war that Moscow has unleashed, the deep sense of insecurity that it has generated, especially in the EU countries close to Russian borders. Heightening this uncertainty are Trump's threats that, should NATO members fail to meet the inflated terms of burden sharing he has set (5% of GDP in January 2025), he intends to leave Europe defenceless and even have the US withdraw from NATO.

Beyond the international security concerns voiced by public opinion, which are, to a certain extent, spontaneous and, perhaps to a greater extent, played up by politicians, data on the military spending of the main global players (individual countries and alliances) betray the narrative that the EU is weak and insecure because of meagre investments in defence. Data released by the two most respected international research centres, the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) of London and SIPRI of Stockholm (whose estimates converge except for slight differences due to different methodologies) show that the United States is far and away the country with the largest defence budget in the world (accounting for 38% of global military spending in 2023), trailed by NATO's European members (16%), China (12%), Russia (5%) and India (3%). The data reveal that, as a whole, NATO spent \$1,341 billion in 2023, equal to 56% of total global military spending (see fig. 3)

**Fig. 3 - Largest defence budgets in 2023 (billions of \$ and %)**



Source: our processing of 2024 SIPRI data

These datapoints raise the inevitable question of how a military alliance like NATO, whose defence budget dwarfs Russia's (the European portion of NATO's budget alone is triple that of Russia's and, including the United States, NATO's

defence budget is 11 times greater than Moscow's), can possibly feel or be so unprepared. At the same time, the data call into question the efficiency and effectiveness of Western military spending, particularly European military spending.

The escalating international crisis is also reflected in the arms trade. In the five years from 2019 to 2023, the United States (42% of the market) and France (11%) recorded significant growth in arms sales. Vice versa, arms exports from Russia collapsed completely, going from 21% in 2014-2018 to 11% today, given the country's urgent need to rearm its own troops on the Ukrainian front. As for imports, according to SIPRI, other European countries nearly doubled their purchases abroad (+55% in the case of the US), some to send arms to Kiev and/or to replace weapons in use by their own armed forces.

It is difficult to see how increasing military spending (instead of remedying the many overlaps that characterise arms production and procurement by the 27 members of the EU) will improve our collective security. Rather, it is more likely that greater military spending will mean greater insecurity. A rearmament process of this scope will give countries outside NATO incentive to step up their pace in the same direction. The result will be an increasingly frenetic arms race, with the risk of further shows of strength by countries acting in coalitions with others or alone. And this is before taking into account how non-state actors like terrorist groups will be able to take advantage of the geostrategic chaos that ensues.

## ***2. Russian-Ukrainian War: the positions of the Parties and mediators' proposals***

### ***2.1 Background***

It has been 34 months since the Russian invasion, and as we stand at the eve of this third and, hopefully, last year of the Russian-Ukrainian war, any reflection on a possible scenario of peace can only begin with an examination of the positions of the Parties involved. Expressed at different times and in different ways, the positions of both sides, like the mediation proposals that have emerged from a variety of institutional and other bodies, are rooted and experienced a turning point respectively in two crucial moments of the conflict and the attempts to resolve it. The first was the signing of the short-lived Minsk Agreements (Protocols 1 and 2) by the two Parties in 2014-2015, brokered by France and Germany (the “Normandy Format”) and the OSCE. The second was the Istanbul Peace Talks in March-April 2022, which broke down due to the distance between the two negotiating positions and, as reported by international sources, including the respected publication *Foreign Affairs*, the influence of outside parties (see also paragraph 2.6).

The survey of initial positions that we describe in this chapter of the Report is not meant to be an academic historical reconstruction. Our purpose is to illustrate the context in which the arduous search for a political solution has taken place, identifying aspects that could prove useful in the near future. In a similar vein, we have examined the main diplomatic proposals and initiatives – be they institutional, semi-institutional or informal – that have been made over the course of nearly three years of international debate<sup>1</sup>.

### ***2.2 Russia's positions***

On 14 November 2024, the Russian ambassador to the United Nations, Gennady Gatilov announced that the Russian Federation was ready to negotiate an end to the conflict, if the talks were initiated by the President-elect of the

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<sup>1</sup>Our presentation is only intended to describe the official and informal positions and does not imply any preferences or feasibility assessments on the part of the writers of this Report.

United States, Donald Trump, who would officially take office on 20 January 2025. From that moment on, Moscow made a series of statements – including President Putin’s Christmas statement – citing a general willingness on the part of Russia to begin negotiations for peace in Ukraine.

Vladimir Putin’s conditions can be summarised as follows:

- a. Recognition of the occupied regions as Russian territory:** Russia asks for the Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions to be recognised as an integral part of its territory. According to sources close to the Kremlin, including former and current officials who spoke with *Reuters*, Putin might be willing to freeze the conflict along the current front lines. This would pave the way to negotiations on the division of the four eastern regions. Furthermore, Moscow might agree to withdraw from a few limited areas in the Kharkiv and Mykolaiv regions. In all, Russia controlled a little under 20% of Ukrainian territory at 1 January 2025. The occupied territories include all of Crimea, 80% of Donbas and more than 70% of the Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions, for a total of over 110,000 square kilometres. Putin might be able to present a ceasefire that confirms the occupation of these areas as a victory for Russia, allowing him to declare that he has liberated the Russian-speaking minority in the Republic of Ukraine and preserved the land bridge to Crimea (which the Kremlin has argued must be considered definitively part of the Russian Federation in any discussions about its future).
- b. Neutrality of Ukraine and no NATO forces in its territory:** Russia will not accept Ukraine joining NATO nor the presence of NATO forces in Ukrainian territory. However, at the same time, Moscow says it is willing to discuss security guarantees for Kiev. A possible ceasefire could be based on an agreement that Putin has already publicly accepted and that had been nearly approved in April 2022 during the Istanbul Peace Talks, whereby Ukraine would remain neutral in exchange for security guarantees from the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council. Russia insists that this agreement not put Moscow at risk of a confrontation with the West, which should, in turn, acknowledge that preventing a Russian victory on the battlefield is impossible. As is widely known, Putin believes this conflict is simply a continuation of Russia’s historic resistance to NATO expansion and the West’s interference in Russia’s former spheres of influence, like Ukraine and Georgia.



- c. **Limitation of Ukrainian armed forces and arms control:** Russia asks for limits to be set on Ukraine's overall armed forces and to have arms control negotiations begin between Russia and NATO, with specific regard to the verification mechanisms pertaining to NATO's ballistic defence system in Poland and Romania.

### **2.3 Ukraine's positions**

The "Victory Plan", which Volodymyr Zelensky presented first to the Ukrainian Parliament on 16 October 2024, then to the European Parliament and, finally, to NATO, proposes bringing Moscow to the negotiating table on the basis of the following five key points:

- a. **An invitation from NATO to Ukraine:** while recognising that NATO membership is not a short-term possibility for Ukraine, Zelensky noted that an official invitation from the North Atlantic Alliance would send a strong message to Russia. In accordance with Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, no country has ever joined NATO while in conflict, precisely to prevent all the other partner countries from becoming automatically involved in the same conflict. However, some analysts believe that Ukraine's membership, even if it is only a possibility, could serve as a deterrent against further Russian aggression.
- b. **The war in Russian territory:** the deep strikes against Russia using the new missiles supplied by the West for Ukraine's use marked a decisive point in the conflict, turning the war into a tangible hardship for the Russian population. Zelensky believes that this strategy puts pressure on Moscow, forcing Russian citizens to reflect on the effectiveness and the cost of the war and undermining the Kremlin's narrative of Russian "invincibility". On 19 November 2024, one thousand days into the war, Kiev launched missiles deep into Russian territory for the first time. In August 2024, Ukrainian troops had launched an incursion and occupied a segment of Russia's Kursk Oblast, as a diversionary action and to gain a political bargaining chip in view of negotiations with Moscow. The Russian counter-offensive in the area is gradually mounting, with temporary Ukrainian counter-attacks around Kursk since the start of 2025.
- c. **The non-nuclear strategic deterrence package:** Ukraine aims to deploy an advanced defence system developed in collaboration with its Western

partners in order to guarantee its security even after the conflict has ended. Systems like advanced air defence, drones and precision-guided missiles would strengthen Ukraine's ability to deter future aggressions. Local production of these technologies, backed by foreign investment, would not only consolidate national defence but could transform Ukraine into a regional hub of the European defence industry.

- d. Strategic resource agreement:** Ukraine boasts some of Europe's largest reserves of critical minerals, including uranium, titanium and lithium, which are vital for the global energy transition and the tech industry. The combined protection and exploitation of these resources would attract significant investments, bolstering the country's economy in the post-war period. Furthermore, direct control of strategic resources would ensure that they do not end up in the hands of hostile powers, securing a key role for Ukraine in the provision of raw materials to the West.
- e. Ukrainian troops in European defence:** one new aspect, whose strategic utility and political feasibility have yet to be seen, was the proposal to use Ukrainian troops to replace some of the US troops currently deployed in Europe. With its experience in modern warfare, Ukraine could become a pillar of European security. This would strengthen NATO's capabilities in responding to hybrid or conventional threats, especially in Eastern European countries, while the United States could scale back its direct presence, enabling it to focus on other global priorities. The integration of Ukrainian forces into European defence would consolidate Ukraine's role as a crucial ally on the continent.

## ***2.4 Mediations and mediators***

The positions described above illustrate what appears to be an unbridgeable gap between Russia and Ukraine. It is therefore highly unlikely or, rather, impossible, that the two Parties will be able to find common ground on their own. Moreover, the asymmetry of their coalitions complicates the situation further. With the exception of North Korea's recent and as-yet far from decisive contribution on the battlefield, Moscow has been waging this war alone, although it enjoys varying degrees of political affinity with a line-up of countries (a roster that is anything but small, as demonstrated by the votes at the United Nations General Assembly on 2 March 2022, followed by the diplomatic summit hosted by Russia itself, in Kazan, in October 2024). Russia receives another

indirect, yet significant, contribution from the trade relations it has developed with third countries since the West imposed sanctions. Russia's trading with these countries mainly consists of energy exports and imports of industrial goods, particularly military and dual-use products and technologies. After Wagner, the Russian private military company, was dissolved, the role of foreign fighters ("volunteers" or "mercenaries", depending on your point of view) in certain units of one army or the other became fairly marginal, just as the role of the North Korean divisions fighting alongside Russians in Kursk Oblast appears to be marginal and not wholly proven. On the other hand, Ukraine has, until now, been able to rely on the political, financial and strategic commitment of the leader of the West, the United States, and, to varying extents and in various ways, on the other countries that belong to NATO and the European Union.

This suggests that, although they are relatively alone on the battlefield, the two Parties (especially Ukraine) do not stand alone politically. The presence of more or less explicit allies and supporters expands the typically claustrophobic space of war and ushers in the possibility of contributions for a diplomatic solution crafted by outside parties. This is, therefore, the decisive theme of the mediation and the potential mediators.

The only talks that were general in scope and managed to make the first concrete steps forward were those mediated by Turkish President Recep Erdogan. No other attempt since then has got past the floating of the trial balloon. The most recent attempt (December 2024) was the offer put forward by Slovak President Robert Fico (not objectionable to the Kremlin but unlikely to garner EU consensus) to host peace talks in Bratislava.

In addition to a host of serious contingencies, potential mediation in the Russian-Ukrainian war faces one structural challenge as, in most cases, the success of mediation is directly proportionate to the mediator's authority and the influence that the mediator has on both Parties. This tried and true principle of diplomacy may not be so easy to apply to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Because this conflict, politically speaking, pits Russia against NATO and, therefore, against the United States, the parties to be brought to the table are, directly or indirectly, the world's two nuclear superpowers. Xi Jinping is the only potential mediator with high enough international standing that Putin would listen, but nothing suggests that the US would agree to Chinese mediation or that China would accept a task of this kind without asking for something in return (Taiwan comes to mind).

This is not to say that one or more state or other entities will not offer to mediate dialogue between the Parties. However, to achieve a real convergence of objectives, then readily transform them into specific accords, the UN Security Council will probably have to step in. Since it is a forum with global competence,

in which the two largest nuclear superpowers plus China are represented, even a tortured decision like calling a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine would have two advantages. The first is that the ceasefire would be substantially certain to be effectively implemented and the second is that it would be followed by a peace agreement (and Putin has already said he will not sign a simple truce without one).

## ***2.5 The Minsk Agreements (2015)***

Despite presenting considerable weaknesses, specifically in terms of the role of mediation and how it has been practised in the recent past, the Minsk Agreements of 2014-2015 are a useful precedent, at least with regard to identifying the issues that need to be addressed.

In 2015, Minsk-2 was signed with the aim of ending the conflict between Ukraine and the Russian separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. However, since both Parties' violations of the agreements became a constant over time and because the geopolitical and military scenario has changed dramatically since then, all we can do now is pinpoint what is unlikely to be salvaged from the agreements and what, instead, we might still be able to dust off and use.

The points of Minsk-2 that are still feasible mostly relate to humanitarian and operational aspects such as, after the ceasefire has been agreed, the partial withdrawal of heavy weapons, access to humanitarian aid and prisoner exchanges. Although they are limited, these objectives could be pursued through a gradual approach and with the involvement of international actors at regional level, like the OSCE, with a focus on mitigating the violence and providing immediate support to the populations affected by the fighting. There is a natural understanding that the fundamental political disputes, such as border control and the status of the separatist regions will remain highly problematic and require long-term solutions that, at this point in time, appear difficult to bring to fruition. Diplomatic pressure and international cooperation will be crucial to keep communication channels open and encourage progress, even if it is only small steps forward.

### ***2.5.1 The Minsk Agreements: what is unlikely to be salvaged***

- a. Border control by Ukraine:** complete control of the borders by Ukraine is practically impossible in the current context, in which Russian forces hold control over a portion of the territory within the country's official border.

Even the OSCE, which might have played an important role a decade ago, no longer has the capabilities to guarantee this kind of control, especially without a solid, secure political agreement.

**b. Autonomy and special status for the separatist regions:** the granting of autonomy to the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, as established in the Minsk Agreements, seems like an unresolvable dispute. Ukraine was unwilling to grant such broad autonomy while the separatists and Russia saw it as a fundamental objective and, instead of easing the political-military pressure on Kiev, they turned it up. As if that was not enough, after unilateral acts like the 2022 referendum and the official annexation of the regions by Russia, even the monitoring of the local elections lost almost all credibility. This alone would make it difficult, if not impossible, to apply Minsk-2 in the post-war scenario. Indeed, the Minsk Agreements provided for the holding of elections in the separatist regions according to Ukrainian law, with international monitors. But after the Russian annexation, Ukrainian law no longer applies, and local elections are held under the *de facto* control of Russian laws and the separatist authorities.

#### ***2.5.2 The Minsk Agreements: what might be salvaged and with what objectives***

**a. Ceasefire:** despite the difficulties experienced in imposing and enforcing ceasefires in the past, today both Parties could be motivated to regain a modicum of stability. The slaughter of combatants (and even civilians, especially on the Ukrainian side) continues, and, as we have seen, ACLED estimates that over 130,000 Ukrainians have lost their lives in the past three years, while Russia has presumably lost more. The intense attrition of human resources on both sides is a factor that should encourage a ceasefire. International pressure and calls to end the hostilities from several directions could pave the way to new negotiations, especially if the war were to be temporarily “suspended” in order to encourage talks.

**b. Ceasefire monitoring:** the subsequent armistice between the Parties could be entrusted to peacekeepers under the auspices of the UN. If an agreement were reached, the mission could be carried out by the OSCE, after it has been completely overhauled with a new political mandate and rules of engagement, as well as updated decision-making and internal operational bodies. The political makeover of an organisation like the OSCE, which was formed out of the spirit of Helsinki and which owes its failure to bipartisan

distrust of the détente between East and West, would set in motion a virtuous cycle of cooperation in Europe. This would create an alternative to rearmament and the surge in military spending that so many politicians are currently calling for. It would lay the foundation for a European foreign policy, which would in turn lead to the possibility of a shared defence. A partial ceasefire might be the first step towards a possible de-escalation. In turn, it would facilitate other points of the agreement, like humanitarian access and the creation of a buffer zone.

**c. Withdrawal of troops and heavy weapons, creation of a buffer zone:**

- *Oversight by the OSCE.* The presence of an OSCE that is adequately empowered, not only politically but also logistically and organisationally (starting with the use of drones and access to satellites to monitor the withdrawal of heavy weapons) would create the conditions for the real possibility of verifying and monitoring the implementation of this point. Although frequent violations have been committed in the past, the new OSCE could play a crucial role in providing transparency and push for effectiveness in the contingent during the withdrawal of armaments, especially if both Parties are acting under external pressure (for example, due to international sanctions or, better yet, because of their involvement in bilateral negotiations).
- *Gradual withdrawal of arms and troops.* Rather than pulling out completely and immediately, a more limited agreement might provide for the withdrawal of heavy weapons from certain areas, establishing a partial buffer zone in view of the suspension of military operations.
- *Withdrawal of units formed by foreigners and mercenaries.* The presence of foreign fighters, regardless of how they were recruited and their status (from international “volunteers” to foreign units, like the North Korean soldiers often mentioned by Western sources), is obviously an obstacle to establishing peace and should therefore be removed.

**d. Exchange of prisoners and hostages:** of all the measures to be taken, exchanges would seem to be the most feasible with relative ease and immediacy. Indeed, prisoner exchanges and agreed returns of civilians have already occurred when military operations were in full force (a total of 11 exchanges took place in 2024, the last on 30 December and entailing the exchange of 300 people). Other precedents include the successful initiatives of the Holy See through the efforts of Cardinal Matteo Zuppi, president of the

Episcopal Conference of Italy, for the repatriation of Ukrainian children deported to Russia.

- *Pressure for humanitarian releases of prisoners and hostages.* The exchange of prisoners and hostages would be seen as a gesture of goodwill, which would help attenuate the hostile climate created by war and build confidence between the Parties. In the past, prisoners have been exchanged between Kiev and separatists, albeit with some challenges. The international community, supported by neutral moral authorities like the United Nations and its agencies (such as the UNHCR), the Holy See, the Red Cross, etc., could pressure the Parties to release prisoners in the framework of a humanitarian approach.
- *The humanitarian motivation* can be amplified by the advocacy of prisoners' families. The degree of pressure they put on the Ukrainian and Russian authorities and those of the Donbas separatists to have their loved ones released should be intensified and supported internationally. Similarly, the Russian authorities should be pressured to return the deported children and the Ukrainian authorities to protect those who have left Ukraine for Western Europe (some of whom are still minors) who have been or will soon be required to report for mandatory military service and, for this reason, are forced to live in a state of legal and psychological impermanence in EU countries. The freeing of prisoners, the return of children to Ukraine and, in general, the return of displaced people to their homes would be very welcome outcomes. Both governments (as well as the government of Belarus) should grant amnesty to citizens who have claimed conscientious objector status and those who have evaded military service. Even before this, European countries should give them political asylum. The mass media and social networks should focus more on these issues, which are often (incorrectly) considered "secondary", but to the contrary have the power to effect consequential change from the bottom up.

**e. Access and distribution of humanitarian aid:**

- *Need for international assistance.* In many areas of eastern Ukraine, residents are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance because of the devastation caused by the war. With the help of the international community, the UN's humanitarian agencies and NGOs could intensify pressure to obtain/expand access and intervention in the conflict zones.

- *Short-term solutions.* Despite the continuing war, the distribution of humanitarian assistance could be one of the areas in which the Parties manage to arrive at a consensus since humanitarian intervention does not necessarily have any direct political implications. International organisations could act as neutral intermediaries.

**f. Restoration of social and economic ties:**

- *International support for reconciliation and restoration of social and economic stability.* Restoring social and economic ties between the separatist regions and the rest of Ukraine is an objective that could be pursued through economic incentives and reconstruction programmes. Ukraine urgently needs to rebuild its infrastructure and its economy, and the European Union and other international organisations (the World Bank, etc.) could provide support for post-war reconstruction, contingent upon political détente. In exchange for the latter, additional measures could be taken, such as easing the sanctions against the Russian Federation, and even creating forms of economic cooperation in the post-conflict regeneration of the territories involved in the war. Although the Parties' mutual trust must be rebuilt from the ground up, the payment of pensions, the collection of taxes and the reactivation of bank accounts would be facilitated through international mechanisms. This would contribute significantly to restoring economic stability and social well-being in the regions affected by the war.

**g. Creation of a "local" trilateral contact group:**

- *Continuous dialogue.* Although tension remains high, it is essential to create a "local" trilateral contact group (Russia, Ukraine and separatists) to facilitate communication and negotiations at local level. This group would handle practical issues and resolve operational difficulties like prisoner exchanges and humanitarian access, without necessarily addressing the more general political issues.
- *International support and diplomatic pressure.* The international community could insist on intensifying diplomatic contact to work out practical solutions to reduce the hostilities, while maintaining pressure on the more complex political issues.

**h. Compliance with the IV Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons:** amid continued hostilities, international institutions, NGOs, mass media and public opinion at large must demand compliance with the IV Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons. The



incessant strikes, the large majority of which by Russian armed forces, often target civilian settlements or infrastructure crucial for the survival of civilians, starting with the power plants that supply energy for heating, amid harsh winter conditions in particular. Institutional institutions, first and foremost the United Nations, and humanitarian organisations like the Red Cross, must constantly demand that the Russian Federation respect the distinction between combatants and non-combatants and denounce the continuous violations of the IV Geneva Convention relative to the protection of civilian persons.

## **2.6 The Istanbul Peace Talks (2022)**

Less than two months after the Russian invasion, during talks between Ukraine and Russia in Istanbul, an understanding was outlined between the Parties to end the fighting. The German newspaper *Die Welt* published the last draft of the understanding (15 April 2022), clarifying crucial details. Russian forces were to have withdrawn from the occupied areas outside Donbas, whereas a direct meeting was to have been held in which Putin and Zelensky would decide the extent of the withdrawal from Donetsk and Luhansk. The key point of the understanding was Ukraine's permanent neutrality. It established that Ukraine could not join NATO nor host foreign military bases, but it gave the green light for Ukraine's accession to the EU. In exchange for neutrality and partial disarmament, Ukraine would receive security guarantees from the permanent members of the UN Security Council. While British Prime Minister Boris Johnson's opposition played a part in the breakdown of these talks, a decisive blow was dealt by Moscow when it claimed the right to veto Ukraine's future defence activities.

Even if Russia and Ukraine had been able to work out their differences, the agreement negotiated in Istanbul would still have had to be accepted by the United States and its allies, and they would have taken on political risks by negotiating with Kiev and Moscow. However, neither the United States nor Europe seemed willing to commit to risky talks aimed at guaranteeing Ukraine's defence. Moreover, the negotiators' focus on post-war security, while understandable, did not help matters in that "technical" points like the ceasefire and withdrawal of troops were overlooked. While these points might be less important from a general standpoint, once ironed out they can be influential from a symbolic perspective and in terms of the climate in which the more political matters are addressed.

Although these negotiations might now seem like a closed book, let's not forget that Putin and Zelensky were willing to explore significant compromises to end the war. This means that if and when Kiev and Moscow resume talks, they might very well find that some of the ideas floated in Istanbul are still valid.

## ***2.7 Public discourse and international peace proposals***

In these three years of war, the conflict in Ukraine has inspired various initiatives by governments, international organisations, intellectuals and civil society actors. Their proposals reflect a plurality of approaches and sensibilities with the shared intent of finding a sustainable, negotiated solution to a crisis that has had devastating consequences both locally and globally. One such proposal that we mention here because it came from Italy was the peace plan that the then-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Luigi Di Maio, presented to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, in May 2022. It contained four points: a ceasefire, Ukrainian neutrality with security guarantees, a bilateral agreement between Russia and Ukraine regarding Crimea and Donbas and another multilateral peace agreement between the EU and Russia. However, the plan was not made public (although several newspapers reported on its content) and failed to garner wide international or national appeal.

Analysing the content of the different international proposals, we find a few recurring central **themes** across the various texts, despite the many diverse perspectives presented.

- a. **Dialogue, mediation and negotiation solutions:** one recurring theme in nearly all the proposals is promoting dialogue between the parties at war. Several proposals emphasise that lasting peace can only be attained through direct and inclusive negotiations. The Chinese plan insists on the importance of involving the international community to facilitate dialogue with the participation of non-aligned mediators capable of maintaining a balance between the needs of both parties (see chapter 3 on the people-to-people approach).
- b. **Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity:** one fundamental and common point across most of the proposals is the insistence on respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of states. This is one of the main aspects of the Chinese "Peace Plan", which underlines the need to assert international law as the foundation of conflict resolution. Somewhat surprising is the indifference that Western governments, political forces and mass media have

shown for this plan, which Beijing released in February 2023. While not a genuine peace plan, and more a statement of principles that are, in any case, important, the Chinese text reaffirmed several crucial concepts in framing the dialogue with Moscow. In particular, two principles were, and remain, decisive in terms of the possibility of arriving at a political solution for this specific conflict and solutions for similar situations in general. The first principle is the oft-invoked respect for national borders and the inviolability of a state's territory, based on the lines drawn following the Second World War and established in subsequent treaties signed by the belligerents, a principle inspired by a foundational text like the Charter of the United Nations. In particular, the UN's Charter affirms the right to use force solely in response to an external attack (which is precisely the case of Ukraine in the face of the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022). The second principle invoked by Beijing is the repudiation of not only the use, but even the threat of using nuclear force, a principle that Moscow has violated repeatedly, with growing frequency and intensity as the war has progressed (and in January 2025, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken revealed that China had dissuaded Russia from using nuclear weapons).

Similarly, other initiatives, like the Mexican proposal of September 2022, make direct reference to the cardinal principle of the Charter of the United Nations that the use of force to acquire territory is unacceptable. Nevertheless, not all the proposals converge on how this principle should be applied in practice. Some, such as the proposal put forth by the Stop the War Coalition in December 2024, suggest accepting territorial compromise in order to secure lasting peace, which would effectively entail Ukraine giving up immediate control of Donbas and Crimea.

This is one of the most divisive issues because it touches on questions of national identity, self-determination and regional security. A few proposals, like the International Peace Bureau Council's proposal of 2022, floated solutions that include referendums managed by international authorities to determine the status of the contested territories, with monitoring by neutral parties, although there are doubts as to their feasibility.

One interesting reflection explores the role that recognising the cultural and linguistic identities of people in these regions could play in a potential compromise, with enhanced forms of local autonomy following the model of other European regions with clear ethnic divisions.

- c. **Ceasefire and military de-escalation:** the second theme to appear frequently in the various proposals is the call for an immediate ceasefire. This is often described as an indispensable condition to be met before any negotiation

process can begin. In June 2023, the International Summit for Peace in Ukraine, held in Vienna and organised by Europe for Peace, the International Peace Bureau and other associations, highlighted the need to stop hostilities as a first step in establishing a dialogue of peace. The plan presented by the Indonesian Defence Minister, Prabowo Subianto, also puts front and centre the idea of creating a demilitarised zone, 15 kilometres deep and extending along the front lines, to be monitored by UN peacekeeping troops. This approach was commended for its operational practicality, but its implementation would require cooperation between the parties, no easy feat at this time.

Other proposals, like the German “Manifesto for Peace” written by Sahra Wagenknecht and Alice Schwarzer, urge Europe to stop sending weapons (an issue that has generated considerable debate in all EU countries, including Italy). They argue that this would help prevent further escalation. The risk of escalation is heightened by the sending of weapons, particularly those that, like intermediate-range missiles, can strike deep in Russian territory. This issue fits into the growing concerns for global security, making de-escalation not only a regional imperative but a global necessity.

**d. Nuclear safety and security and humanitarian concerns:** various initiatives vehemently call attention to the issue of nuclear safety and security. The Chinese proposal includes specific measures to protect civilian nuclear power plants and prevent attacks against this infrastructure, while the Vienna Manifesto draws attention to the risk of nuclear escalation on the battlefield, demanding a tightening of controls. Without them, the consequences could be catastrophic for the entire continent, and beyond.

Humanitarian concerns are another important aspect and hold a primary position in many of the plans examined. The return of deported children, the priority of Cardinal Zuppi’s mission, is one example of how human rights are finally emerging as a salient point in the diplomatic agenda. Along the same lines, support for humanitarian corridors, the protection of civilians and the management of the global food crisis, which has severely worsened with the blockade on Ukrainian grain exports, was emphasised in several initiatives, including the Chinese and Mexican proposals.

**e. Economic prospects and post-war reconstruction:** various initiatives recommend combining a peace plan with a robust economic and social reconstruction programme financed with international resources or even – as planned by the Trump administration’s recently-named special envoy for Ukraine and Russia, Keith Kellogg – mechanisms like customs tariffs on

Russian exports. Other proposals underscore the importance of an international reconstruction fund to remedy the damage caused by the conflict and lay the foundation for future development.

Post-war reconstruction could also be a chance to transform Ukraine into an energy transition model, using investments to build modern, sustainable, carbon-free energy infrastructure, an aspect that is often underestimated in the current analyses.

- f. A new European security architecture:** finally, a new consensus has begun to emerge and flourish concerning the need to rethink European security in the long term. Certain views, like those held by Stefano Zamagni and the International Peace Bureau Council, favour the creation of a security architecture based on the principles of common security and cooperation, turning away from the logic of the Cold War. At global level, this approach includes the idea of reforming international institutions, for example by eliminating the veto in the UN Security Council. From a regional perspective, we would like to highlight the utility of “resurrecting” a multilateral European forum like the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the OSCE.

The initiatives described highlight a widespread willingness to pursue peace through diplomacy and negotiation. However, the success of these efforts will hinge on the Parties’ ability to overcome their own resistance and to commit to a genuine reconciliation and cooperation process. The principles outlined in the proposals are more than just a starting point; they exemplify the complexity and the urgency of this diplomatic challenge.

## ***2.8 An analysis of the proposals***

Since 24 February 2022, Ukraine has been fighting a defensive war to preserve its security, its independence and its existence as a sovereign state. This right to defend itself is enshrined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. The right to self-defence is a principle that applies irrespective of Ukraine’s history or the global geopolitical context. Nevertheless, the legitimacy of self-defence does not exempt Kiev nor its allies from the obligations of exercising moderation, limiting the violence and resolutely promoting a just, viable and lasting peace.

Support from the West has enabled Ukraine to hold back the invasion, but as the armed conflict continues into 2025, the losses to human life and property have reached devastating proportions. In the background, there remains the

spectre of an escalation that could pit NATO and Russia directly against each other, with the threat of nuclear warfare a sword of Damocles hanging over our heads. The idea that the use of nuclear weapons is improbable does not mean that it can be excluded a priori. As the study released by the Association of Hiroshima and Nagasaki A-bomb Survivors (2024) argues with respect to another hot spot, Northeast Asia, nuclear warfare could *also* be the unintended result of a technical incident, an act carried out for other ends, but misinterpreted by the party on the other side.

No matter who is right (the target) and who is wrong (the aggressor), neither Russia nor Ukraine can realistically expect to accomplish each and every one of their respective strategic goals. Even if the war were to end today, the people of these countries have already paid an exorbitant price, above all in military and civilian lives. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict must not become the epic tragedy of the 21st century. It is also up to European leadership, both the EU and its individual member states, to work towards a ceasefire premised on the establishment of a just peace. This would, in the immediate future, avoid the risk of engulfing the continent in a war with immeasurable consequences. It would also, in the short term, create conditions of stability that keep the conflict from flaring up again. The idea of winning the war by waging more war is unsustainable. We are living in an era of weapons of mass destruction, and the only rational response to this unprecedented circumstance in human history is to definitively transform it into the era of lawfulness and international cooperation.

Since Ukraine's withdrawal from the Istanbul Peace Talks, both Parties have set preliminary conditions for the resumption of negotiations that are impossible to meet. To break the deadlock, they will need to set aside these preconditions and take a more pragmatic approach. With the brutal objectivity of the costs of the war in human lives and the black hole of resources that it has opened up in the societies and states, sooner or later this war will end up forcing the governments to make a rational choice, unless the situation deteriorates first into an extreme conflict putting any superpower or international alliance to the test and, ultimately, endangering the survival of our planet. From this perspective, the voices of allies and even neutral supporters acquire greater depth and resonance.

Ukraine recognises as its allies the European Union and the United States, the latter a decisive ally given its strategic and political primacy. Although it is difficult to make predictions on the eve of 20 January, when President-elect Donald Trump will take office, it is clear to all that the situation will not be what it was under President Biden, or what it could have been had his Vice President, Kamala Harris, been elected. A number of clues suggest Zelensky may have reached the same conclusion. In December 2024, for the first time, he admitted

that it would be difficult for Ukraine to regain possession of the Russian-occupied territories. At the same time, he seems to have shifted the focus from the matter of territories to the even more urgent objective of obtaining adequate security guarantees for his country. While Europe will certainly not deny Ukraine its political and economic support, it is clear to the Ukrainian President that neither the EU nor the UK can step into a role similar to the one that the US has held until now if the war should continue.

Although with some differences, on the opposing side, China's stance is in some ways similar to Europe's. While it is not as committed to providing financial assistance and, especially, military assistance (which, on the other hand, for the EU countries has meant a systematic and onerous supply of advanced weapons systems), China is, beyond its formal impartiality, a strategic Russian partner. Moreover, China's so-called "Peace Plan" contains important implications in terms of its general principles and the call for their consistent application to Russia, its partner, that we would be well advised to reclaim. If it is more than just empty words, the Chinese call for the necessary protection of sovereignty and national borders is an assertion to which Russia must respond. Just as important (although it has not received the consideration it deserves from Western political leaders and the media) is China's other assertion that not only must nuclear weapons never be used, but that they should never even be invoked as a threat, something that Moscow has systematically done.

The point of reflecting on all these proposals lies in whether and to what extent they can inspire a roadmap laid out in clearly-defined, concrete steps.

### *3. A roadmap to peace. The phases of a negotiated solution*

Having considered the multilateral voices in the interpretations, proposals and initiatives aimed at offering a political and strategic way out of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, we set out below the steps in a roadmap rooted in arms control and non-violence. Its framework is based on reducing the use of force and its instruments (weapons and armies) as much as possible.

#### ***Phase I - Ceasefire***

The United Nations Security Council would assume the responsibility of beginning a process to end the war in Ukraine. In accordance with its mandate of guaranteeing peace and international security, the Security Council would establish an operating schedule for the ceasefire agreed by Russia and Ukraine and for the start of peace negotiations.

In this phase, the Security Council would order a total and immediate ceasefire, which would go into force on a specific date ("day X"). This ceasefire would have to be universal, with no exceptions, including all armed units on the battlefield and all weapons systems involved in the conflict. To ensure the effective implementation of these measures, a High Commissioner for Peace and Security in Ukraine would be designated and tasked with supervising the implementation of the schedule and the initiatives agreed within the scope of the roadmap.

At the same time, a peacekeeping mission would be deployed under the aegis of the United Nations. Made up of a multinational contingent, this peacekeeping mission (the "Mission") would have enhanced rules of engagement and be led by Europe but be open to other contributing countries not aligned in the conflict (including BRICS members). Its mandate would be to act as a buffer between the two former belligerents and monitor their compliance with the ceasefire and the established security conditions.

The parties in the conflict, Russia and Ukraine, would undertake to cease all hostilities on day X set by the Security Council. At the same time, all supplies of weapons and munitions to the two parties from other countries would be



temporarily suspended, but this would not rule out the possibility of future talks on the security conditions throughout the region and the Ukrainian Republic's right to defend itself.

## ***Phase II - Negotiations***

The peace negotiations would begin within a certain number of days of day X, under the supervision of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the High Commissioner for Peace and Security in Ukraine. The talks would take into account the official exchanges between the Russian government and NATO prior to the start of the conflict, as well as the understandings reached during the Istanbul Peace Talks in 2022. The negotiations would focus on the commitments that the Parties would have to make and on certain, purely strategic matters:

- *Common commitments:* the Parties would undertake to no longer consider each other enemies, renouncing the use or threat of force, and to respect their mutual security. There would be transparency in military operations, with the deployment of a peacekeeping Mission in a band of land along the Russian-Ukrainian border demarcated for this purpose. This band would include the Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson regions. Observation units of the same Mission would be deployed along the rest of the border between the two states. Any disagreements relating to the fulfilment of these provisions would be resolved peacefully with the support of the UN High Commissioner and/or the guarantor states (see "International guarantees" further on), while Ukraine would retain the right to self-defence.
- *Russia's commitments:* Russia would undertake to withdraw its troops from the areas occupied after 24 February 2022, returning them to their previous positions. In addition, it would create an X-kilometre deep demilitarised zone along the Ukrainian border.
- *Ukraine's commitments:* Ukraine would create a corresponding X-kilometre deep demilitarised zone along the Russian border. Ukraine would also agree not to develop nor to host the nuclear arms or forces of foreign states on a permanent basis. It would agree to set numerical limits on the size of its armed forces and not to purchase intrinsically offensive arms systems. Ukraine would abandon its intention of applying to join the NATO military organisation but it would retain the right to continue and complete the European Union accession process.

- *The matter of Crimea and Sevastopol*: the status of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol would be addressed in bilateral negotiations over the next X years using diplomatic channels, without the use of force.
- *Status of the contested regions*: future provisions for Donetsk, Lugansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson would be decided in the course of the negotiations. If an agreement cannot be reached, a referendum organised by the UN High Commissioner within X years would establish these regions' fate, determining who is eligible to vote.
- *International guarantees*: certain EU member states would participate in a special contact group and, in this way, guarantee the performance of the peace agreements and support Ukraine's accession to the European Union.
- *End of martial law in Ukraine and calling of parliamentary and presidential elections*: within X months of when these agreements go into force, Ukraine would restore its normal political and institutional functions by suspending martial law and calling parliamentary elections (originally scheduled for 2023) and presidential elections (originally scheduled for 2024). At the same time, all the appropriate measures would be taken to reinforce citizens' participation in democratic processes and ensure best practices in the public administration, with specific regard to the moral integrity of officials and political leaders.
- *Economic reconstruction of Ukraine*: an international reconstruction conference would be held in which countries would undertake to actively support Ukraine's economic and infrastructural recovery.

### ***Phase III - A multilateral order for European security***

In the long term, the best way to ensure Ukraine's security and freedom could be within the framework of a European order of peace and stability that gives Russia a role within a shared multilateral context. This new European order would be based on a security architecture that reduces Ukraine's geo-strategic importance in the context of competition between Russia and the United States.

To achieve this vision, a **Conference on Peace and Security in Europe** would be convened based on the historical model of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). It would be capable of reviving and renewing the spirit of the Helsinki Accords and the objectives set out in 1990 with the Charter of Paris. The purpose of this conference would be to set up a shared strategic framework that adequately responds to the complexities of our time.

#### ***Phase IV – Post-conflict rehabilitation in Ukraine: methods and objectives***

Rehabilitation should not be limited to repairing material damage. It is a long, challenging process that entails repairing, alongside material damage, the moral damage caused by war, with the aim of establishing a peace founded on *strategic security* and *human safety*. For the former, the European Union and other international bodies could promote disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR)<sup>1</sup> programmes consisting of training courses, job placements and reintegration into civilian life for ex-combatants. The latter (*human safety*) would entail spreading a culture of lawfulness among the general population, young people in particular, and educating them in the non-violent management of micro-conflicts.

International experience is an invaluable resource in this process. Research conducted in regions of crisis or places where wars have just ended shows the usefulness of this people-to-people approach. It is based on the ability of people – individuals and groups – to cope with complex post-conflict circumstances by relying on daily routines to create a sense of stability and as a way to “return to normal” in their relationships with the outside world, with themselves and with their peers. In addition to survivors of war, who are the protagonists of this process, other actors could be involved, such as, but not limited to:

- Local residents. Family, friend and neighbourhood groups could help encourage a return to normal in self-help groups, advocacy groups and community-based initiatives.
- Public institutions (schools, universities and social services) and the third sector (churches, cultural associations, etc.)
- Outside actors: UN agencies, International Red Cross and NGOs. One NGO in particular, “Operazione Colomba”, an offshoot of an Italian association named after Pope John XXIII, merits mention.
- The contingents of the peacekeeping Mission themselves, through the professional and ethical approach that they bring as peacekeepers, and with the human connections and empathy that certain national contingents practice, as sociological research in this field has shown.

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<sup>1</sup>DDR, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration is the voluntary commitment of members of armed forces and groups to put down their weapons, leave command structures and accept the transition to civilian life. Sustainable reintegration is the main objective of this process, which addresses multiple psychological, social, economic, legal and political needs, not only for ex-combatants but for their families and communities as well.

- Implementation of the European Parliament recommendation of 17 January 2024, “Role of preventive diplomacy in tackling frozen conflicts around the world – missed opportunity or change for the future?”

The fact that Ukraine’s post-conflict rehabilitation will be physically carried out after the hostilities end and peace agreements are signed does not mean that any discussion about it must wait until the first steps forward in the peace process are taken. The methods and objectives of rehabilitation must be planned at once because the post-war phase is a complex challenge that, to be effectively resolved, must be addressed in a timely manner and with an understanding of the intense efforts that it will require.

It bears repeating that rehabilitation cannot be limited to repairing material damage, but must be seen as an extensive, long-term process that also addresses the moral damage caused by the conflict. Rehabilitation includes restoring the rule of law and order, re-establishing political governance, rebuilding the economy and working towards reconciliation. Only by encompassing all these dimensions can rehabilitation build solid, lasting peace.

In a country shattered by war, the presence of non-state armed groups and the spread of light weapons pose a long-term threat to the security of all of society. In this context, the European Union should promote disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes to reduce the risk of post-war violence proliferating.

Despite the major challenges that Ukraine will face in the post-conflict period, the country presents a number of factors in its favour for overcoming them. Ukrainian public authorities are still operating and, with international assistance, will continue to provide essential services to the population, working on long-term projects to restore stability to the political-legal system and the well-being of its people. However, an approach to reconstruction that focuses solely on organisational and economic aspects is incomplete. Such an approach would fail to address the deepest causes of the instability, which lie in the social and psychological wounds caused by a conflict that has lasted ten years, three of which with all the stress and strain of all-out war. This is why the European Union and its international partners must take a holistic view of the reconstruction which is not only aimed at ending the hostilities and restoring public order and conditions favourable to civil coexistence (the preliminary conditions), but is also concerned with human security (as defined by the United Nations) and spreading a culture of lawfulness with training in the non-violent management of macro and micro conflicts.

A crucial step in the post-war phase entails responding to the humanitarian crisis, which has led to tens of thousands of civilian victims, either injured or

dead, and millions of refugees. The survivors embody the most tangible signs of this catastrophe. Their trauma – apart from the individual disorders which will need to be handled clinically – not only puts entire communities' here and now in jeopardy, but also feeds into feelings of frustration and resentment, undermining the very foundations of a possible reconciliation with the former enemy and the emotional stability of individuals, with respect to how they see themselves and others (such as when ex-combatants continue to use violence, even against their families). When, after a conflict like the one Ukraine has suffered, the damage is of massive proportions, social, cultural and psychological trauma must be properly addressed.

Research based on specific empirical evidence of the social aspects of post-conflict rehabilitation shows that while the end to hostilities is a necessary precondition for establishing peace, it is not sufficient in and of itself. Once the belligerents have reached an agreement, a people-to-people approach becomes strategic in handling the aftermath of the war. Special attention must be paid to the daily experiences of victims in the peacebuilding processes. Traditional politics and diplomacy often overlook these experiences, but they are fundamental in the creation of an authentic context of peace. As the European Parliament's recommendation of 17 January 2024 emphasised, a ceasefire does not automatically lead to anything other than an unsatisfactory "frozen" conflict.

The local population can potentially play an important part in this respect. Effective peacebuilding can be carried out informally, by promoting the conduct and attitudes that are instinctive in survivors of war when they are able to return to the routines of their daily lives. Driven by the spirit of self-preservation that individuals and groups find within themselves at the height of emergencies, everyday actions are important. The act of re-establishing and strengthening existential, living, working and other conditions among individuals, families and groups encourages people to mobilise their resources thanks to the distinctly social nature of these domains. Many develop a pro-active view of "reconstruction" that – as has been observed in conflicts between national, linguistic, religious and other groups (e.g., North Ireland, ex-Yugoslavia, South Africa, Sri Lanka, etc.) – can, if adequately supported from the outside, help survivors process their trauma and engage in a virtuous cycle of post-conflict rehabilitation.

If the objective of the institutional actors involved – central and local governments, international and non-profit organisations and the peacekeepers themselves – is to "stitch together" real peace, then the political objective must align with the social, cultural and psychological needs of the population. The empathetic and people-to-people peacekeeping experiences of Italian peacekeepers at micro-social level in many areas of crisis are a particularly

convincing example of this. Approaches like this can be used to build more than just a formal peace. They can cultivate a peace that gradually takes root in society, helping to pave the way towards a shared future.

In Ukraine, despite still being ravaged by war, civil society has produced exemplary cases of psychological, social and economic regeneration that can serve as important precedents for the country's future after the conflict. Some of these initiatives stand out in particular, like pilot group therapy projects to overcome the trauma of war, inter-religious discussion groups, experimental reparative justice initiatives inspired by certain international experiences like the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. On this basis, work is under way to evaluate the feasibility of setting up a European Civil Peace Corps along the lines of interesting initiatives by NGOs of EU countries (notable examples of these initiatives include the Italian "Operazione Colomba" of Comunità Papa Giovanni XXIII, an association named after Pope John XXIII, and work by the Italian Non-Violence Movement in defence of pacifists, conscientious objectors and draft evaders in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus).

The European Parliament, with its recommendation of 17 January 2024 on the "Role of preventive diplomacy in tackling frozen conflicts around the world – missed opportunity or change for the future?", reiterated the need for a supranational body capable of intervening in areas of conflict. Civil Peace Corps groups have proven their ability to prevent violence, promote dialogue and help repair the social fabric. Their success naturally depends to a large extent on the political and organisational support of national and international institutions and cooperation with local communities.

The resulting peacebuilding efforts should not be seen as an alternative to the diplomatic strategies and practices of conflict resolution, but as an essential complement to them, with the common aim of encouraging enduring peace and stability. In this way, the people-to-people approach has proven to be effective in countering mistrust, bias and the dehumanisation of the enemy even in ingrained crises like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In conclusion, the roadmap charts a non-violent approach focused on the means of peacebuilding, combined with a pacifist approach focused on the ends. In this respect, the UN is an imperfect institution (certainly in need of reform), but it is the only one we have. Strengthening the UN means counterbalancing the priority that many governments give the use of force for the resolution of international disputes. Striving for the goal of collective security enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations would mean moving towards an equilibrium between nations where weapons and warfare are not the only means by which they resolve their differences.

### \* *Summary of the Report and updates (March 2025)*

The Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which erupted with the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, is more than just the dramatic outcome of a regional crisis that had been brewing for some time. It is also an event of global consequence that has revealed the fragilities of an international system incapable of achieving a stable balance today, now that the multilateral perspective that had inspired the final phase and definitive end of the Cold War is being rejected. The objective of this Report is to provide a structured analysis of institutional and civil society proposals and initiatives to end the war in Ukraine. The Report also sets out a roadmap to peace, oriented towards the creation of a new European security order founded on principles of multilateral cooperation and diplomatic conflict resolution.

The research was carried out through the meticulous collection, organisation and evaluation of the many proposals made between 2022 and 2024 by institutional actors (States, the UN, the European Union and the OSCE), civil society groups (NGOs, peace movements and religious groups) and individuals. This process of itemising and collating the debate made it possible to arrange the various initiatives within the framework of an international geopolitical context marked by the rise of emerging powers like China and BRICS and latent global multipolarism. The objective was to assemble the vast production of relevant texts into a coherent system in order to identify viable negotiation pathways and ascertain, based on a comparative analysis, each proposal's potential contribution to a sustainable diplomatic solution.

The Report consists of three chapters and this summary. The *first chapter* describes how the conflict began and the context of instability in which it occurred, with particular reference to the civilian population as a preferred target, the nuclear threats that Russia has repeatedly made and that are, in any case, always present, and the arrival of a new generation of arms: semi-autonomous weapons (drones and killer robots) and hypersonic missiles, powerful drivers of the renewed arms race in which Europe finds itself competing.

The *second chapter* illustrates the negotiating context and provides an analysis of the parties' current demands, in order to highlight possible space for negotiation. Ukraine, supported by the West, has consistently claimed its independence and territorial integrity, invoking the right to self-defence

enshrined in Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations. The “Victory Plan” presented by Zelensky in October 2024 provided for Ukraine to join NATO with the possibility of military operations in Russian territory, a conventional deterrence package, an agreement for the exploitation of strategic resources in collaboration with NATO countries and Ukrainian troops involved in European defence, even replacing US forces. On the other side, Russia insists on its definitive sovereignty over the occupied territories and calls for Ukrainian neutrality, categorically rejecting Ukraine’s accession to NATO and demanding severe limitations on its armed forces. These are the polarised positions with which external actors, specifically the United States and the European Union, must contend. China and Turkey have also played a more or less direct role. In particular, the Turkish attempt to broker a deal during the Istanbul Peace Talks in 2022 (as well as the temporary agreement reached by Kiev and Moscow on grain exports) seemed promising until the peace talks were hampered by the differences between the two sides and opposition to a broader understanding on the part of Western powers’ political leaders.

In nearly three years of war (2022-2024), several proposals have been put forward to break the deadlock. China presented a plan (a statement of principles more than anything else) that focused on protecting nuclear power plants and promoting a ceasefire, but China’s influence as a potential mediator was curbed by US reservations, probably out of concern about potential interference with the issue of Taiwan. This meant that, regrettably, even the interesting points in the Chinese plan, such as its reiterated repudiation of not only the use of nuclear weapons but even the threat of using them (a principle that Moscow has repeatedly violated), have been largely ignored by political leaders and the media in the West.

Many proposals name the UN as the most appropriate actor to facilitate a multilateral dialogue, as it has the participation of all the world’s nuclear powers and the authority conferred by its global mandate. This Report highlights the need to overcome biases on both sides in order to initiate pragmatic and inclusive negotiations based on an immediate ceasefire and mutual confidence-building measures. Although they ultimately failed, the Minsk Agreements (2014-2015) and the Istanbul Peace Talks suggest that a gradual and flexible approach, followed by firm and honest implementation, is essential in facilitating a path towards stabilising the conflict and creating a new European security order.

Based on these analyses, the *third chapter* presents a roadmap in four main phases. The first phase would be a ceasefire called by the United Nations Security Council with the possible designation of a High Commissioner for Peace and Security in Ukraine. The Security Council would also order the formation and deployment of a multinational peacekeeping force capable of guaranteeing its impartiality to both sides. At the same time, peace talks would proceed with



input from all parties, devoting due consideration to Ukraine's security. A Conference on Peace and Security in Europe would be held to ensure compliance with the agreements reached. It would be inspired by the spirit of the Helsinki Accords with the aim of introducing a renewed European security framework. In this framework, a central role could be played by a completely updated OSCE, as a multilateral negotiation forum, in which all the European countries and the United States are represented. Finally, by integrating political concerns, which dominate, with social concerns, which are often overlooked, the potential of post-conflict rehabilitation in post-war Ukraine should be explored. In addition to the country's economic reconstruction, disarmament and demobilisation and the reintegration of ex-combatants, social and anthropological-cultural objectives should be taken into account with a people-to-people approach.

This must obviously be premised with a word of caution about the difficulty of making predictions, a difficulty exacerbated by the speed and scale of developments in the new year, most notably the inauguration of the new US President Donald Trump on 20 January 2025. As soon as he was sworn in, Trump pushed for a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, threatening retaliation against both sides, particularly Ukraine, if his proposal was rejected. Despite claiming an interest in beginning peace talks, Moscow has set conditions that could stymie an agreement. This puts Washington's strategy to the test, although the US stands to benefit from having recently recognised Russia as another superpower. The various diplomatic steps to discuss the end of the Ukrainian conflict signal a substantial rapprochement, without ruling out new economic relations between the United States and Russia.

These radical changes present a chequered landscape. The resumption of dialogue has, at the moment, translated into a return to bilateralism between the two nuclear superpowers. The exclusion of Ukraine and Europe from the talks in Riyadh has provoked disappointment and criticism from European allies. The growing divide between the two shores of the Atlantic is even on display at the UN. Three years into the conflict, the UN General Assembly was forced to adopt two separate resolutions. The resolution proposed by the US, called *Path to Peace*, promotes lasting peace but does not mention the Russian invasion nor the crime of aggression; moreover, after the amendments proposed by the European Union, Washington abstained from the final vote. The Ukrainian proposal, which, on the other hand, openly denounces the Russian invasion and calls for investigations into the crimes committed, gained support from several European states, but both the US and Russia voted against it. These choices reflect a significant shift in US policy from all years in the past and shed light on the widening misalignment between Washington and its European allies.

In view of potential diplomatic developments, it is important to bear in mind the possibility of solutions for lasting peace repeatedly emphasised in the

Report. This is an objective that can be pursued on the basis of a new European security order within a multilateral framework, restoring the spirit of Helsinki and the experiences of political cooperation in the early years of the OSCE. To this end, a culture of peace based on the values and methods of non-violence must be promoted. The UN and the EU can play a crucial role, with the active participation of all parties to the conflict, starting with civil society actors within European countries.

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## Annexes

### Survey of proposals and initiatives on the Russian-Ukrainian War (2022-2024)

A. Institutional peace proposals and initiatives (States, international organisations, political leaders, etc.)			
	Parties involved	Conditions	Other
Istanbul Peace Talks (29-30 March 2022)	Russia; Turkey (President Erdogan as mediator); Ukraine.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ukrainian neutrality, without nuclear weapons, with international security guarantees (US, EU, etc.).</li> <li>2. The security guarantees do not apply to Crimea and Donbas.</li> <li>3. Ukraine does not join military alliances and only performs exercises with the consent of the guarantor states.</li> <li>4. In the event of aggression, the guarantor states must assist Ukraine.</li> <li>5. Attacks and responses must be reported to the Security Council.</li> <li>6. Security mechanisms are defined following consultations.</li> <li>7. Provisional treaty until ratification and Ukrainian referendum.</li> <li>8. Consultations for the ceasefire, withdrawal of troops and prisoner exchanges.</li> <li>9. Possible meeting between the Russian and Ukrainian presidents to decide the unresolved political matters.</li> </ol>	Despite initial positive signals, the hostilities continued. The United States and Europe were unwilling to commit to negotiations that carried risks.
Italy's 4-point peace plan (18-20 May 2022)	Luigi Di Maio (Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation); António Guterres (Secretary-General of the United Nations)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ceasefire and demilitarisation of the front lines.</li> <li>2. Ukrainian neutrality with security guarantees from a group of facilitating countries.</li> <li>3. Bilateral agreement between Russia and Ukraine on Crimea and Donbas.</li> <li>4. Multilateral peace agreement between EU and Russia: gradual withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine and lifting of Western sanctions against Moscow.</li> </ol>	According to the press, an Italian peace plan was presented to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.
Proposal of the research group on science and ethics of happiness (Vatican City, 6-7 June 2022)	Research group on science and ethics of happiness (Gruppo di studio scienza ed etica della felicità)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ukraine does not join NATO.</li> <li>2. Security guarantees for Ukraine (UN P5, EU and Turkey).</li> <li>3. Russia has control of Crimea.</li> <li>4. Autonomy for the Luhansk and Donetsk regions.</li> <li>5. Both Russia and Ukraine have trade access to the North Sea ports.</li> <li>6. Gradual lifting of Western sanctions on Russia in exchange for withdrawal of troops.</li> <li>7. Reconstruction fund for Ukrainian regions and access to humanitarian aid.</li> </ol>	

Mexican peace proposal (22 September 2022)	UN; Mexico; International Criminal Court (ICC); Norway; France; India; Holy See; International Atomic Energy Agency; Turkey.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Prohibiting the use of force (in violation of Art. 2 of the UN Charter).</li> <li>2. Respect for the territorial integrity of States.</li> <li>3. Prioritising humanitarian assistance (women, children and the displaced).</li> <li>4. Reducing nuclear risks (Zaporizhzhia power plant).</li> <li>5. Investigating war crimes and crimes against humanity.</li> <li>6. Strengthening diplomatic efforts with a caucus for dialogue and peace.</li> <li>7. Including international leaders (Modi, Pope Francis).</li> </ol>	Mexico's role: impartiality and support for multilateral efforts.
Chinese proposal (24 February 2023)	China; Russia; Ukraine; UN; Turkey; International Atomic Energy Agency.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respecting sovereignty and international rights.</li> <li>2. Abandoning the Cold War mentality.</li> <li>3. Ceasefire.</li> <li>4. Resuming peace talks.</li> <li>5. Resolving the humanitarian crisis.</li> <li>6. Protecting civilians and prisoners of war.</li> <li>7. Securing nuclear power plants.</li> <li>8. Opposing the use of nuclear weapons.</li> <li>9. Guaranteeing grain exports.</li> <li>10. Stopping unilateral sanctions.</li> <li>11. Protecting industry.</li> <li>12. Promoting post-conflict reconstruction.</li> </ol>	Neutrality of humanitarian actions. Fairness and international justice in the handling of relationships between the countries. Long-term stability for global security, promoting a balanced security architecture in Europe.
Prabowo Subianto Indonesian Defence Minister (3 June 2023)	Indonesia; Russia; Ukraine; UN (for the management of the demilitarised zone and the referendum).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ceasefire.</li> <li>2. Creation of a monitored demilitarised zone.</li> <li>3. Deployment of peacekeeping forces.</li> <li>4. Referendum in the contested areas.</li> <li>5. Rejection of sanctions while condemning the invasion.</li> </ol>	Russia accepted this proposal but Ukraine and the EU rejected it. Indonesia emphasised the adverse impacts of the war on Asian economies and compared it to the situation on the Korean peninsula, where peace has been maintained although the conflict has not been resolved.
Sino-Brazilian joint proposal for peace negotiations (23 May 2024)	China; Brazil; Russia; Ukraine.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Political resolution of the Russian-Ukrainian crisis.</li> <li>2. Observance of the three principles of de-escalation.</li> <li>3. Dialogue and negotiation.</li> <li>4. Humanitarian assistance and protection of civilians.</li> <li>5. Opposition to the use of weapons of mass destruction.</li> <li>6. Protection of nuclear facilities.</li> <li>7. International cooperation and protection of critical infrastructure.</li> </ol>	The President of Ukraine rejected the proposal on the grounds that it did not require the withdrawal of Russian forces. Nonetheless, a group of countries (South Africa, Algeria, Bolivia, Kazakhstan, Colombia, Egypt, Indonesia, Mexico, Kenya, Turkey and Zambia) joined the Sino-Brazilian peace initiative.

Switzerland (Bürgenstock) Summit on Peace in Ukraine (15-16 June 2024)	Switzerland; 100 international delegations; three international organisations (UN, OECD and Council of Europe); and two religious representatives (Vatican and Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Commitment to a just and lasting peace based on international law.</li> <li>2. Safe and secure use of nuclear energy.</li> <li>3. Global food security.</li> <li>4. Release of prisoners of war.</li> <li>5. Commitment to dialogue and engagement of all parties.</li> </ol>	The Summit on Peace in Ukraine ended with a joint communiqué adopted by 95 states and international organisations, including: Kenya, Ghana, Japan, South Korea, Turkey, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, United Kingdom, Poland, Ukraine, United States, Canada, Argentina, Australia, New Zealand, the European Council and the European Commission. Russia and China were absent.
Meeting between Viktor Orbán and Pope Francis (4 December 2024)	Viktor Orbán (Hungarian Prime Minister); EU; Russia; Ukraine; Pope Francis.	<p>Hungary's stance (Hungary held the EU Council Presidency from July to December 2024):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ceasefire.</li> <li>2. Act as peace broker and seek dialogue with Moscow and Beijing.</li> <li>3. Oppose the supply of military aid to Ukraine and stop EU initiatives.</li> <li>4. Threaten to veto European sanctions against Russia.</li> </ol>	Orbán's proposal met with bitter criticism from Zelensky. Russia's war against Ukraine cannot be discussed without Ukraine's involvement.
Annalena Baerbock German Foreign Minister (4 December 2024)	Germany; EU; NATO; Russia; Ukraine; United States; North Korea.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sending troops in the event of a peace agreement.</li> <li>2. Providing military and financial support to Ukraine through aid packages.</li> </ol>	Germany's stance could change with the federal elections on 23 February. Friederich Merz (CDU/CSU) has stated that he would push for Ukraine to be able to use weapons in order to pressure Russia.
<b>B. Civil society proposals and initiatives for peace (NGOs, movements, churches, etc.)</b>			
	Parties involved	Conditions	Other
Resolution of the International Peace Bureau Council during the General Assembly in Ghent (19 October 2022)	UN (mediators and supervisors); Pope (mediator); Neutral states (mediators); NATO; India; Turkey; South Africa; Russia; Ukraine; International peace movements; Civil society groups; Countries involved in the sanctions and negotiations; Countries hosting refugees and conscientious objectors.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ceasefire.</li> <li>2. Create demilitarised zones and guarantee the autonomy of Donbas monitored by the UN.</li> <li>3. Send unarmed civil and military observers.</li> <li>4. Agree a gradual withdrawal of Russian troops. Peace logic instead of war logic is the challenge.</li> <li>5. Guarantee Ukrainian neutrality and deny it NATO membership.</li> <li>6. Call international referendums on Crimea and Donbas.</li> <li>7. Adopt the model used for the German state of Saarland for Crimea.</li> <li>8. Establish an international reconstruction programme.</li> <li>9. Gradually dismantle sanctions.</li> <li>10. Strategic nuclear arms control.</li> <li>11. Design a long-term European security architecture.</li> <li>12. Hold a European security and peace conference in 2025.</li> </ol>	Contact between peoples and intercultural exchanges. Sanctuary for people fleeing conscription and compulsory mobilisation into military forces. Recognition of right to conscientious objection. Avoidance of language that demonises the Parties in conflict. Protests by peace and social movements. Cooperation and social dialogue. Protests against militarisation in Europe.

German “Manifesto for Peace” by Sahra Wagenknecht (“Die Linke”) and Alice Schwarzer (“Emma”) (10 February 2023)	Russia; Ukraine; EU member states; United States; NATO; Germany.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ceasefire.</li> <li>2. Negotiations to reach compromise between Russia and Ukraine.</li> <li>3. Stopping arms deliveries.</li> <li>4. Preventing military and nuclear escalation.</li> <li>5. Leading a European alliance for peace.</li> <li>6. Playing a proactive role in political and diplomatic leadership.</li> </ol>	Global risk of escalation towards a world war. Call for diplomacy: need for immediate negotiations and a ceasefire.
Cardinal Zuppi’s Mission (21 May 2023)	Cardinal Matteo Maria Zuppi (envoy to lead the peace mission); Pope Francis; Ukraine; Russia; UN; Other states.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Having deported children returned to Ukraine and making this a fundamental priority.</li> <li>2. Easing tension.</li> <li>3. Laying the foundation for future negotiations through peace talks.</li> </ol>	Preparing for talks by engaging both parties in a climate of mutual trust. Pope Francis is promoting a mission to ease tension in the conflict.
International Summit for Peace of the International Peace Bureau and Europe for Peace (Vienna, 10-11 June 2023)	Coalition of peace movements; International civil society (specifically Belarus, Russia and Ukraine) International community.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Stop all hostilities in Ukraine.</li> <li>2. Negotiate to end the armed conflict.</li> <li>3. Guarantee common security.</li> <li>4. Respect international human rights.</li> <li>5. Self-determination for the communities.</li> <li>6. Support civil society.</li> <li>7. Defend rights.</li> <li>8. Oppose war.</li> <li>9. Protect democracy.</li> </ol>	Condemnation of the Russian invasion, considered illegal. Urgent need for a new kind of diplomacy to prevent further devastation and threats to humanity. Commitment to peace logic, opposition to war illogic.
Stop the War Coalition (5 December 2024)	International public opinion.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ukraine’s acceptance of the loss of territory in the East (Donbas and Crimea).</li> <li>2. Not ceding legal sovereignty over the occupied areas, but recognising the loss of control.</li> <li>3. Implementing a model similar to the Cyprus model (maintaining unstable but lasting peace).</li> <li>4. Monitoring a ceasefire line through the deployment of an UN mission.</li> </ol>	War fatigue: the Parties’ growing desire for peace.
<b>C. Individual proposals and initiatives</b>			
	Parties involved	Conditions	Other
Stefano Zamagni “Avvenire” (21 September 2022)	Russia; Ukraine; UN; NATO; EU; Turkey; International civil society.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ukrainian neutrality.</li> <li>2. Ukrainian sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity.</li> <li>3. De facto Russian control of Crimea for a certain number of years.</li> <li>4. Autonomy for the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.</li> <li>5. Guaranteed access to Black Sea ports for Russia and Ukraine.</li> <li>6. Gradual lifting of Western sanctions on Russia coinciding with the withdrawal of Russian weapons and troops from Ukraine.</li> <li>7. Creation of a multilateral reconstruction and development fund for the destroyed and heavily damaged areas of Ukraine.</li> </ol>	Today, peacebuilding means promoting holistic human development to resolve the structural causes of conflicts (inequality and institutional weaknesses). Reforming international institutions (the UN and IMF) to guarantee cooperation, justice and security. Encouraging disarmament and supporting negotiations for positive peace in Ukraine based on its sovereignty, neutrality and reconstruction.

Italian diplomats (13 October 2022)	Russia; Ukraine; NATO; Italy, France and Germany (with the hope that other EU members will join); UN; Civilian populations.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ceasefire</li> <li>2. Symmetrical withdrawal of troops and sanctions;</li> <li>3. Ukrainian neutrality under UN protection;</li> <li>4. Referendums managed by international authorities in the contested territories.</li> <li>5. Calling a European Security Conference in order to restore the spirit of Helsinki and the peaceful coexistence of European peoples.</li> </ol>	Return to the Minsk agreements as the basis of negotiations. Calling a European Security Conference to restore the spirit of Helsinki. Promoting global negotiations to stabilize the region.
Fabrizio Battistelli "Avvenire" (5 April 2023)	Russia; Ukraine; United States; EU; UN Security Council; China; Turkey; Western countries.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Russia relinquishes the territories in the Donbas; Ukraine relinquishes Crimea.</li> <li>2. Donbas becomes autonomous (following the Italian-Austrian model in Alto Adige/Südtirol).</li> <li>3. Creation of a demilitarised zone between Russia and Ukraine.</li> <li>4. Ukraine joins the EU and forgoes NATO membership and the possession of nuclear weapons.</li> <li>5. An international treaty is signed, guaranteed by the UN P5.</li> <li>6. Lifting of economic sanctions against Russia.</li> <li>7. Reconstruction plan for the areas affected by the war.</li> </ol>	Alternatives to the peace plan: the war of attrition continues with the risk of escalation between NATO and Russia.
Keith Kellogg (9 April 2024)	Fred Fleitz; Russia; Ukraine; NATO; United States.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Imposing peace by force.</li> <li>2. Offering incentives to both Russia and Ukraine.</li> </ol> <p>Russia: postponement of Ukraine's EU membership and easing of sanctions. Ukraine: creation of a demilitarised zone and military support (tied to participation in negotiations).</p>	Keith Kellogg (appointed by Donald Trump as the special envoy for Russia and Ukraine) and Fred Fleitz (former CIA). Military assistance to Ukraine is vague and there are no guarantees for Russia.
Open letter on the Russia-Ukraine conflict from a group of European intellectuals (22 May 2024)	EU; Russia; Ukraine; Pope Francis; EU governments; European Parliament; Turkey; Citizens of Ukraine and Russia (refugees or emigrants); European civil society groups (religious institutions, solidarity groups, social and cultural organisations); Major nuclear powers (Russia, United States, France, United Kingdom).	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ending the war.</li> <li>2. Ceasefire and start of negotiations.</li> <li>3. Confidence-building and tension-easing.</li> <li>4. Facilitating détente.</li> <li>5. Protecting human rights.</li> <li>6. Economic and social reconstruction.</li> <li>7. Promoting a culture of peace and security, breaking away from militarism and violence.</li> </ol>	Engagement of civil society: the support of civil society organisations, religious groups and peace and human rights movements is crucial. The EU could act as an intermediary in the negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. Bottom-up diplomacy: need for grassroots action to create the political conditions for negotiations.

<b>D. Bilateral agreements</b>			
	Parties involved	Conditions	Other
Russia-China Joint Statement of Strategic Partnership (21 March 2023)	Russia; China	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respect for the principles of the UN Charter and international law.</li> <li>2. Opposition to any country seeking military, political or other advantages.</li> <li>3. Respect for the legitimate security concerns of all countries involved.</li> <li>4. Opposition to any unilateral sanctions unauthorised by the UN Security Council.</li> </ol>	Russia has welcomed China's willingness to play a positive role for the political and diplomatic resolution of the crisis and has expressed appreciation for the constructive proposals put forward.
Italy-Ukraine Agreement on Security Cooperation (24 February 2024)	Ukraine; Italy.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Defence and military cooperation.</li> <li>2. Italian support for the development of Ukraine's security and defence forces.</li> <li>3. Cooperation in the security and defence sector reform.</li> <li>4. Cooperation in Ukraine's economic recovery, resilience and reconstruction, sustainable development and reforms.</li> <li>5. Italian support for Ukraine's reform process.</li> <li>6. Recognition of need to impose sanctions on Russia.</li> <li>7. Cooperation in the event of future armed attack.</li> <li>8. Italian support for Ukraine's EU accession process.</li> </ol>	Ten-year agreement signed by Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.
Ukraine-Japan Agreement (13 June 2024)	Ukraine; Japan.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Security and defence assistance and cooperation</li> <li>2. Technical and financial humanitarian, recovery and reconstruction support</li> <li>3. Cooperation in the event of future armed attack.</li> <li>4. Support for Ukraine's reform agenda.</li> <li>5. Compensation for losses, injuries and damage caused by Russian aggression.</li> <li>6. Participation of both Parties in the implementation of Ukraine's Peace Formula.</li> <li>7. Severe sanctions against Russia.</li> </ol>	Ten-year agreement signed by Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

U.S.-Ukraine Bilateral Security Agreement (13 June 2024)	Ukraine; United States.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Cooperation based on the principle of full respect for the independence and sovereignty of each of the Parties.</li> <li>2. Defence and security cooperation.</li> <li>3. Cooperation on economic recovery.</li> <li>4. Support for Ukraine's reforms and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.</li> <li>5. Cooperation to achieve a just and lasting peace.</li> <li>6. Support for Ukraine's Peace Formula.</li> </ol>	<p>The Agreement signed by the U.S. President Joseph Biden and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky remains in force for 10 years.</p> <p>The United States and Ukraine undertake to review the commitments of the Agreement periodically (every 12-18 months).</p>
Russia-India Agreement (8-9 July 2024)	Russia; India.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations.</li> <li>2. Peaceful resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy.</li> <li>3. Guarantee of humanitarian assistance.</li> <li>4. Opposition to any attempt to divide the world into blocs, promoting multilateralism.</li> <li>5. Constructive role in the international community.</li> </ol>	<p>Although India has declared itself neutral, the country has refrained from criticising the Russian invasion of Ukraine and expanded its purchases of low-cost Russian oil.</p>



## Appeal for peace. Ambassadors call for an immediate EU plan to begin negotiations

Thursday 13 October 2022

*Let's return to diplomacy*

*Ukraine's neutrality and the status of the contested territories are crucial points of a mediation that could bring stability to the region*



The war in Ukraine caused by Russian aggression is spiralling into devastating scenarios that could put millions of people's lives at risk and spawn a nuclear winter. In response to the illegal annexation of Donbas and two other Ukrainian regions, approved by the Russian Duma after the recent sham referendum, Kiev signed a decree forbidding any



negotiations with Moscow and officially requesting to join NATO, well aware of the inadmissibility of its request.

President Putin has already announced that if Russia's national security is endangered by the Ukrainian advance supported by NATO, it would consider the use of nuclear weapons a possibility, in accordance with Russian military strategic doctrine. NATO's response to the use of a tactical nuclear warhead would be devastating and expose Russia to the risk of serious retaliation, potentially leading to a symmetrical nuclear confrontation. After months of war and losses to human lives, both parties have dug in their heels. Russian hawks are urging the unhesitant use of force, all the way to the use of tactical nuclear weapons, and on the Western side, multiple actors are pushing for the conflict to continue until Moscow's complete surrender.

*There is a vital need to draft a credible mediation proposal that, with the Minsk Agreements as a starting point, charts a course to a global agreement driven by the principles of security on the Continent.*

*[caption: A Ukrainian army tank on the front line in Donetsk, where for weeks Kiev's forces have been attempting a counteroffensive against Russian occupiers]*

This apocalyptic scenario is horrifying. All men and women of good will must oppose it. Arms must be silenced, making way for diplomacy. Ukraine's neutrality and the status of the contested territories are crucial points in a mediation that can bring stability to the region. As diplomats, long accustomed to objectively analysing international relations, we denounce the atrocious crimes committed against humanity. We express our solidarity with the victims of a war that has already resulted in thousands of dead and injured, millions of refugees and dispersed people and the repression of dissidents and fleeing military conscripts. We urge everyone to remember that the economic costs of this war are being paid by the most vulnerable people in Europe and Africa, where inequality, poverty and the suffering of so many innocents are on the rise.

We therefore feel it is our duty to appeal to the Italian government, asking that it promote at European level a compelling diplomatic initiative for an immediate ceasefire and the start of negotiations between the parties. Italy, France and Germany – with the hope that other members of the Union will join them – can influence, together with European institutions, NATO's strategy by taking a firm stance within the framework of North Atlantic solidarity, as has happened in the past. Such an initiative would also help strengthen and develop a common foreign and security policy, an essential condition for the realisation of a political and federal European Union.

*The symmetrical withdrawal of troops and lifting of sanctions are necessary, alongside referendums managed by international authorities in the contested regions and the convening of a Conference on Security as a way to return to the spirit of the Helsinki Accords and peaceful coexistence.*

There is a vital need to draft a credible mediation proposal that, with the Minsk Agreements as a starting point, charts a course to a global agreement driven by the principles of security in Europe. The proposal must emphasise the tenets at the heart of coexistence and international law, i.e., that the use of force to acquire territory is unacceptable, that people have the right to self-determination and that European linguistic minorities must be protected.

The first objective is a ceasefire and immediate start of negotiations between the parties in order to arrive at: 1) the symmetrical withdrawal of troops and lifting of sanctions; 2) Ukrainian neutrality under the UN's protection; and 3) referendums managed by international authorities in the contested territories. Finally, a Conference on Security in Europe would be a way to return to the spirit of the Helsinki Accords and the peaceful coexistence of European peoples.

**Maria Assunta Accili; Antonio Armellini; Antonio Badini; Giorgio Baroncelli; Anna Blefari; Mario Boffo; Mario Bova; Sergio Busetto; Rocco Cangelosi; Giovanni Caracciolo; Torquato Cardilli; Francesco Caruso; Paolo Casardi; Giuseppe Cassini; Sandro De Bernardini; Enrico De Maio; Luca Del Balzo; Giuseppe Deodato; Roberto Di Leo; Giovanni Dominedò; Giovanni Ferrero; Patrizio Fondi; Paolo Foresti; Giovanni Germano; Elisabetta Kalescian; Luigi Maccotta; Giorgio Malfatti; Carlo Marsili; Roberto Mazzotta; Maurizio Melani; Elio Menzione; Laura Mirakian; Enrico Nardi; Claudio Pacifico; Mario Brando Pensa; Michelangelo Pipan; Cesare Ragaglini; Armando Sanguini; Alberto Schepisi; Riccardo Sessa; Mario Sica; Massimo Spinetti; Stefano Starace Janfolla; Maurizio Teuci; Domenico Vecchioni.**

5 April 2023



## Editorial

In search of a way out of escalation

# STITCHING TOGETHER PEACE IN THREE POINTS

BY FABRIZIO BATTISTELLI

It has been thirteen months since the Russian invasion and the war in Ukraine is, militarily and politically, in deadlock. The political side quietly awaits a military solution, while the military solution awaits the use of a weapon that decides the war and/or an operation that defeats the enemy. Neither solution is on the horizon, without room for a dramatic plot twist. Or at least we'd better hope there aren't any, since the only one possible would be a tactical nuclear warhead striking the theatre of war, with devastating consequences for all.

In the meantime, the troops are being worn down in a war of attrition that is unlikely to result in a clear winner and loser. The Ukrainian and Russian forces might not match up in each and every area, but overall they are equals. Supported by NATO, the Ukrainians are superior in technology, training and intelligence, in addition to their motivation to fight. On the other hand, the Russians, with the outsized resources of a superpower, can count on human and organisational reserves and arms that might not be of the highest quality but are formidable in size and capable of sustaining a long-term conflict. The net result is a standoff that resembles the one that has pitted India against Pakistan for control of Kashmir since 1947-48. The difference here is that this conflict is in Europe and brings the planet's two largest nuclear powers into play.

The Russian army will never reach Kiev. But at the same time, routing the Russians is an impossible task. It would be absurd to expect a resolution on the battlefield. Sooner or later Putin on one side and Zelensky and Biden on the other will have to put the propaganda and weapons away and go the only viable route. That route would be the way of peace, which is to say diplomatic dialogue, also known as politics. As always happens when differences cannot be resolved with force (or when, as in this case, force is intolerably costly without resolving anything), the only way out is through compromise. Compromise might seem unacceptable to the adversaries, but sooner or later they are going to have to accept it.

There are a number of ideas out there, and now is the time to piece them together. Rejected by the US and Ukrainian leaders and ignored by Western media, China's "Peace Plan" is more a declaration of principles than anything else. And not all the points are trivial if you take the time to read the text. From the very first lines, it won't escape you that the Chinese emphasise that "the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of all countries" must be upheld. Or that in addition to the use of nuclear weapons, even "the

threat of using nuclear weapons should be opposed” (clearly a hot topic). Western governments, and especially European ones, would be well advised to take these points and run with them. They are, above all, diametrically opposed to the path Putin has taken.

Beginning with the leaked indiscretions of the protagonists and third countries like Turkey and even China, a compromise that paves the way to peace will be a montage of fragments like:

- a) *Territory*: the adversaries will each be forced to give up elements of their “master plan”. This means that Russia will need to let go of the territories it took in Donbas and subsumed in the pseudo-referendum of September 2022, just as Ukraine will have to give up Crimea (an idea implied in the position taken by the United States’ Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley<sup>3</sup>). This means autonomy for Donbas modelled after the Italian-Austrian agreement for Alto Adige/Südtirol and the delineation of a sufficiently deep demilitarised zone along both sides of the Russian-Ukrainian border.
- b) *International positioning*: Ukraine’s accession to the European Union; giving up the possibility of joining NATO; giving up the possession of nuclear weapons. The country’s security will be guaranteed by a treaty under the auspices of the UN, signed by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.
- c) *Economics*: lifting of economic sanctions on Russia; reconstruction plan for the areas affected by the war.

The only alternative to compromise is war to the bitter end, and that means without any foreseeable limits of time, intensity or risk of escalation, all the way to a direct conflict between NATO and Russia.

**Fabrizio Battistelli**  
*President of Archivio Disarmo*

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<sup>3</sup> Translator’s note: Mark Milley’s name was misspelled as Mirey in the original.

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