



# Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



## POLICY BRIEF

### Ending the Ukraine Conflict

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Delhi Policy Group

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*The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and should not be attributed to the Delhi Policy Group as an Institution.*

## Cover Photographs:

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky met with US President Donald Trump and Vice President JD Vance, in the Oval Office, on February 28, 2025. Source: [X/@WhiteHouse](#)

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia hosted talks between US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, in Riyadh, on February 19, 2025. Source: [X/@KSAmofaEN](#)

European leaders gathered to express support for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the 'Securing Our Future' London Summit, on March 2, 2025. Source: [X/@vonderleyen](#)

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# Ending the Ukraine Conflict

by

Hemant Krishan Singh

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## Ending the Ukraine Conflict

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### Foreword

In denial of certain obvious realities, Ukraine, and its steadfast allies in Europe, have in recent days strenuously resisted or protested incipient moves towards peace, or even the suggestion of it. To some, it would almost appear that Europe wants to relive its past of interminable conflicts for hegemony that had marked the previous century.

Over the past decade, the Western narrative around Ukraine, a relatively fragile state once known for endemic corruption, and for being a hub for illicit trafficking of arms and more, has been transformed. It is now projected as a model democracy, a champion of Western values and freedom, a stalwart defender of Europe from authoritarian Russia, and a nation that has to be armed and financed in its just struggle for as much and as long as it takes. If there is a grand strategy here apart from waging an unwinnable forever war, it is not very evident.

The unspoken reality perhaps is that the global dominance of the “liberal order” led by the “collective West” – and of Europe enjoying the extensive benefits of the US-led Euro-Atlantic alliance – is at stake, as is the future of a manifestly expansionist NATO which apparently needs permanent hostility towards Russia to retain its relevance. The pretence that a dozen or so European leaders meeting in London on March 2, 2025 to debate “security guarantees” for Ukraine represent the “international community”, and that their self-serving interests coincide with those of the “global community”, has been on fulsome display.

The unconditional surrender of Russia, if that has been or is a European goal, is not a realistic possibility, nor indeed is the suppression of Ukrainian sovereignty by Russia a desirable outcome. But certain mindsets that have prevailed among the leadership and opinion makers of Europe have completely shut out the room for envisaging dialogue and diplomacy with Russia as the most viable option to restore peace.

Ukraine, which was (mostly) a victim of unprovoked aggression in 2022, has been turned into a full-fledged European proxy in a war against an old and seemingly irreconcilable foe, Russia. Without peace, Ukraine is headed for an uncertain future. Meanwhile, the “international community” writ large, and the

nations of the Global South in particular, continue to bear the adverse economic and geopolitical consequences of a conflict which is in its fourth year.

## The Backdrop

To revisit how we got here, here are some key assessments which I had publicly enunciated at the Tokyo Global Dialogue on February 21, 2023, a year after the start of this European conflict, but which remain entirely relevant even today.<sup>1</sup>

### Quote:

#### The War in Ukraine

Now, let me turn to the Ukraine War. There is no question that Russia dealt a harsh blow to world order with its premeditated and increasingly brutal military aggression against Ukraine. This will greatly diminish its power, influence and global standing. But this invasion was neither sudden nor unheralded.

As an event, it emanated on the one hand from major Russian miscalculations, including perceptions of US weakness and Western disunity; and on the other, the failure of preventive diplomacy and the breakdown of conventional deterrence in Europe.

More importantly, the invasion did not overturn any established order. Structural issues over the post-Cold War security order in Europe, and ambivalence about Russia's role and standing in Europe, have prevailed since 1991 and have never been settled.

So this is also a crisis that has been waiting to happen. Europe has a historical tendency to generate major wars, and conflicts of ethnicity and religion are not new to it. The not-so-distant precedent for change of territorial status quo by military force already exists in Europe.

Ukraine has every right to defend its territorial integrity and sovereignty. But what started out as a localised conflict between neighbours has escalated into a major war involving the US, NATO and the EU in an all-out confrontation with Russia, using Ukraine as the proxy and sword arm.

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<sup>1</sup> Remarks by Ambassador Hemant Krishan Singh at JIIA's 4<sup>th</sup> Tokyo Global Dialogue, February 21, 2023. <https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/events/conferences/jiias-4th-tokyo-global-dialogue.html>

This has become a civilisational war for domination over the European security order.

The US has rallied its European allies, but is increasingly entrapped by their demands for escalation in pursuit of a decisive military victory, which is unlikely without the direct involvement of NATO. Incrementally, NATO is replacing Ukraine as Russia's main battlefield adversary. This can lead to unmanageable escalation and a strategic deterrence breakdown.

There is good reason for the world to be seriously concerned about that prospect, especially as implausible scenarios of total victory are being contemplated.

Russia is a far weaker major power than the US-NATO combine, but it has considerable autonomous resources and capabilities. It can withstand prolonged conflict. Expectations of its imminent collapse are unrealistic.

Crimea is Russia's strategic jugular, providing warm water access and trade links across the crossroads of Eurasia. Its loss will be deemed as a catastrophe by anyone in power in Moscow.

### **Prospects for the Conflict**

So, what are the prospects for the conflict?

Whatever the outcome, the resolution of Europe's historical antagonisms will become more difficult for decades to come, and instability will persist. The West's manifest intent to crush Russia militarily and economically has already become an existential threat for Moscow.

Whether it is a prolonged war of attrition or a frozen conflict, the US will need to divert more resources to Europe – creating a persistent threat to its security interests on both European and Asian fronts.

And the longer the war lasts, NATO's cumulative power will be progressively drained, with serious consequences for the US and Europe.

The US lacks the capability to constrain both China and Russia at the same time; its power and influence is increasingly dependent on the contributions of its allies. If the US-led alliance system is militarily and economically under stress, there will be adverse repercussions for stability in the Indo-Pacific.

Furthermore, an over-extended Euro-Atlantic alliance and a battered Russia will provide strategic space to China, which has already been

taking advantage of the European preoccupations of the US by flexing its muscles, from the Himalayas to East Asia. Risks to the security of Japan and India will grow.

There is a critical difference between Europe and the Indo-Pacific. In Europe, the US can be an offshore leader leveraging the strength of its NATO allies. In Asia, if there is a conflict, the US will face its adversaries directly, with limited contributions from its regional allies. It will have to lead from the front.

The future of world order, in my view, will be decided in Asia and the Indo-Pacific, not in Europe.

### **Divided Global Response**

I will turn now to the divided global response. The majority of the world's nations, comprising emerging powers and the Global South, are not taking sides between the West and Russia. The question is why.

Well, a unified global response is possible only when the wider international community is being consulted and its perspectives and interests are being taken into account.

The West is caught in a spiral of self-serving actions. Its unilateral coercive measures have disrupted the global economic order, with devastating consequences for developing countries.

Rules-based order, particularly respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, tends to be invoked mainly when the interests of the West are involved.

Among the emerging nations of Asia, a self-absorbed Europe is seen as far removed from issues of stability and strategic balance in Asia. There is deep scepticism about expanding the remit of NATO to Asia, not least after the Afghanistan debacle. And there is growing concern about the West's security and economic policy coordination through NATO and the G7, bypassing the larger comity of nations.

Alienation of the "Rest" is growing as already weak global institutions are side-lined, or seen to serve mainly Western interests.

### **India's Position**

Finally, a word about India's position. India has consistently called for, and will continue to call for, an end to the Ukraine war and resort to dialogue



and diplomacy as the best way forward to peace. It will put its weight behind a ceasefire and negotiated resolution of the conflict.

India's primary concern is with authoritarian expansionism and coercion in Asia. Enhancing capacity to deter aggression, aligning threat mitigation strategies with Quad partners, and jointly contributing to a free and open Indo-Pacific remains India's foremost priority.

### **Preparing for Peace**

The Ukraine conflict is fundamentally a war within the European civilisation. Its origins lie in Europe. So do the solutions. Both sides need to introspect on their respective roles in bringing developments to their current pass.

With the protagonists seeking decisive battlefield gains, it remains far from clear when negotiations on the possible terms of a settlement can begin. Meanwhile, the human and economic costs are rising. It is time for Europe to seriously reflect on the costs of "total" victory, as also its embittered aftermath.

Russia can be diminished but not erased. A fractured world order is becoming increasingly likely. A great deal will depend on the manner in which the Ukraine conflict is brought to an end.

**Unquote**

## **The Present Context**

I have cited the above assessment at length to highlight the fact that not much has changed over the past two years to require a revisit of the salient issues surrounding the conflict in Europe, and its peaceful resolution.

To now return to the present juncture, it is clear that Russia has paid a heavy price in prestige, blood and treasure for its invasion of Ukraine (despite making some territorial gains), but the US-led Western alliance has also expended its strength on massive financial resources and supplies of war materiel to Ukraine, with marginal outcomes.<sup>2</sup> The West's unilateral coercive measures against Russia have undermined a global order already shaken by Russian

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<sup>2</sup> Singh, Hemant Krishan. "The Global Scene: A World in Turmoil". Delhi Policy Group Policy Brief Volume X, Issue 1, January 1, 2025.

[https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads\\_dpg/publication\\_file/the-global-scene-a-world-in-turmoil-5241.pdf](https://www.delhipolicygroup.org/uploads_dpg/publication_file/the-global-scene-a-world-in-turmoil-5241.pdf)



aggression. The conflict has turned into a bloody stalemate, with no end in sight.

If durable peace is to ensue, it will need to be negotiated; outcomes cannot be imposed on the battlefield. Ukraine and Russia will have to engage each other in negotiations and come to an agreement they can each live with. This has in fact been evident from the start of the conflict. But clearly, the path to peace and stability in Europe will not be easy, as great power rivalries and the interests of the Western alliance system remain among the key determinants.

US President Donald Trump has stood alone among Western leaders<sup>3</sup> in calling for an end to a "horrific and brutal conflict", and in taking proactive steps to explore the prospects for peace with the leaders of Russia and Ukraine. He appears determined to persevere, including by pressing a divided Europe and a defiant Ukraine towards the peace table where compromises will surely need to be made.

On March 3, 2025 the US paused all military aid to Kyiv until President Trump determines that Volodymyr Zelenskyy is ready for good faith efforts towards peace negotiations with Russia; the US has also suspended the sharing of military intelligence. The Ukrainian leader has since relented on his very public resistance, and signalled that he is "ready to work under President Trump's strong leadership to get a peace that lasts".

Meanwhile, Europe continues to weigh its response on the issues of war and peace. The desire to prevail decisively over Russia, or to weaken Russia strategically and geopolitically by continuing the Ukraine conflict, remains strong; tensions with Russia are seen to have delivered the benefit of greater NATO cohesion; but the humiliating defeat of Russia has still remained elusive. Europe's many contradictions – including dependence on the US for collective defence, hostility towards Russia, and hesitations about peace – are manifest. What is missing is a balance between support for Ukraine and making room for peace.

By now, it is clear that NATO membership for Ukraine is simply not on the cards for the US, and even European "security guarantees" with "boots on the ground" in Ukraine will be the subject of negotiations, as indeed will Russia's maximalist demands to preserve its core security interests in its strategic periphery.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

This complex scenario suggests that if peace is to materialise, the lead will have to be taken mainly by the leaders of the US and Russia<sup>4</sup>, with Ukraine's involvement. Europe will have to speak the language of peace to play a role.

There is much hand wringing about US President Trump's unconventional and transactional approach towards world affairs, but there have in fact been few surprises. He has quite predictably followed through with his campaign promises, including on Ukraine, and realigned America's foreign policy orientation, replacing ideological posturing and liberal agendas with standalone US primacy, pragmatism and realist "common sense".

If Trump as "peacemaker" can deliver, even partially, on his promise to end ongoing conflicts and prevent the outbreak of others, this will unquestionably have a stabilising impact on global order.

That desirable outcome is still far from certain.

## Conclusion

There is growing recognition today on all sides that the Ukraine conflict must be brought to an end, and that US President Trump will be the main protagonist in this endeavour. European countries have vowed to present their own peace initiative, but their coherence and credibility remains in question. The US role is indispensable for mediating peace between Russia and Ukraine.

A return to high-level strategic communication and normalcy in ties between the US and Russia can bring further stabilising benefits to the world order.

These developments should be welcomed by India, which has repeatedly highlighted the need for Ukraine and Russia to engage directly in a peace process, and has also long mainstreamed the growing concerns of the Global South regarding this European conflict.

India does not need to walk any tightrope between the conflicting interests of the US, Russia, Europe and Ukraine. Its position has been clear from the start: invoking the civilisational laws of humanity to end the war, and calling for the restoration of peace through dialogue and diplomacy.

India's strategic community also needs to be clear eyed regarding misleading narratives about the indivisibility of European and Asian security. This refrain implies the strategic suppression of Asia by the West in pursuit of dominance

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

at both ends of the Eurasian continent.<sup>5</sup> It is not without reason that India has maintained its distance from instruments of collective security.

President Trump has signalled his preference for strong, sovereign nations taking control over their own destiny and working for the interests of their people. In this realist world, there is no place for free riding or dependency. It is time to redouble efforts to build India's national resilience and comprehensive power.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.



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