

IEPI Executive Brief: White Paper on the Russia-Ukraine Conflict

Introduction: The attached “white paper” is the interdisciplinary product of cosmopolitan collaboration by scholars, researchers, and political actors, who now comprise a new network: Independent Experts Peace Initiatives (IEPI). Defending the integrity of Ukraine is impossible without clarifying the interests and beliefs of the Russian invader. With that in mind, we offer a balanced and nuanced assessment of the crisis based on verifiable data. Our focus is not simply on governments, but the impact of their decisions on everyday citizens. This “executive brief” summarizes the white paper—and references its appropriate sections.

Causes: Russian imperialism, distrust of NATO expansion, indifference to minority rights, historical memories, and mutually exclusive interests culminated in the humanitarian cataclysm unleashed by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Sanctions: Current sanctions have been ineffective in weakening the Russian military, devastating the economy, blocking oil and gas exports, or changing the strategic aims of the Russian Federation. They have indiscriminately targeted all citizens, fostered xenophobia, and thus, actually, strengthened the regime. Efficacious sanctions should focus on military and energy sectors of the economy, close financial loopholes, and zero-in on oligarchs.

Scenarios: We envision the following scenarios for the development of the conflict:

- *Russia's military conquest of Ukrainian territory is tacitly acknowledged* and the cessation of hostilities occurs without a formal peace agreement. This would most likely destabilize the region and increase the risk of further escalation. This likely scenario would mirror the partition of Cyprus.
- *Direct confrontation with NATO:* this is a possibility, but the likelihood of this scenario coming to fruition is extremely low.
- *A nuclear attack* is considered unlikely by most of our experts, given that the US has backed down. However, Ukrainian drone attacks and the destruction of part of Russia's nuclear triad by Ukrainian saboteurs in June 2025 have increased the likelihood of a nuclear response from Moscow.
- *Russia expands the conflict:* the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania could be at risk. However, given the serious damage inflicted on Russia's strategic forces recently and the prospect of a consolidated response from NATO, this scenario is unlikely to be considered realistic.
- However, this does not exclude *hybrid attacks*, including cyberattacks, disinformation and growing geopolitical threats.
- *Division of spheres of influence:* division of spheres of influence or implementation of the so-called "New Yalta" or "Global Compromise", which can develop in four different directions with very different consequences.
- *The parties to the conflict*, both Russia and Ukraine, are critical of US peace initiatives. Russia continues to bomb Ukraine and each side blames the other for the continuation of the war. Under these circumstances, events will develop in accordance with the first five scenarios.

Victims: On February 24, 2022, Russia announced the start of the so-called “special military operation” against Ukraine, which turned into the largest and most destructive military conflict in Europe since the end of World War II. Three years later over 1 million people have been killed or wounded, sexual assaults on Ukrainian women have been frequent, thousands of children have been “evacuated” to Russia, and Ukraine’s infrastructure and eco-system have been destroyed. Those rebuilding Ukraine must provide the war’s victims with free counseling and therapy, women’s centers and clinics, free burials, appropriate health care, housing and jobs, and compensation for the families.

Promoting Peace: Experts highlight key issues that participants can consider to promote negotiations and ultimately end hostilities:

- Create a new collective security system that can satisfy the main players - the US, Russia, the EU and China.
- Publicly acknowledge "red lines": Russia perceives NATO expansion as a direct threat to its security.
- Provide incentives for stability: The prospects for de-escalation can only improve with the introduction of economic incentives.
- Include not only Ukraine in the negotiations, but "indirect participants" capable of influencing both sides of the conflict: not only from the West, but also from China, India and various countries of the Global South.
- "Reeze" of the conflict.

Discrete Prospects:

The USA is now vacillating in its commitment to defend Ukraine and, simultaneously, beginning to treat NATO and the European Union less as allies than as rivals. It is becoming increasingly unclear about how it plans to deal with them, prospects of a pending Russian offensive, and the possibility that Ukraine will not agree to a peace without guarantees that will protect its sovereignty. In lieu of American support, Europe must develop its own strategy for Ukraine and the Baltics even as it deals with internal threats from right-wing extremist movements and disagreements over how to pursue the war among its member states. It could try to build its own military arsenal, which will take time, or wait for possible regime change in the United States following the congressional elections of 2026 and the presidential elections of 2028.

Russia must decide whether the conquest of Crimea and its claims on other Ukrainian territories, which would dismember its enemy, are ends unto themselves or first steps in pursuit of more expansive imperialist aims. Divisions in the Western alliance are benefiting Russia, which might draw even closer to China, India, and North Korea (perhaps also the United States) thus altering the global balance of power. Meanwhile, Ukraine must decide whether it can survive as a neutral state (or buffer zone) between Russia and the West, and trust security guarantees from NATO, as it surrenders Crimea and parts of Donbas. Ukraine would thus retain its independence, but compromise its territorial integrity, and still require external assistance to maintain its sovereignty.

Strategic Options: Russia's and Ukraine's future depends on various factors: how lines of demarcation are drawn, American resolve, and the degree of European unity. Excepting the unpredictable consequences of military defeat or domestic implosion, Russia will remain a global power and, sooner or later, resume relations with Europe whereas Ukraine must find financial aid and geo-political support for rebuilding its infrastructure and defending its sovereignty. Both governments will need to "save face" and "sell" the compromises necessary for peace to their citizens.

Debates over strategy will continue with respect to the possible collapse of the Western alliance, the creation of new collective security arrangements, the refashioning of NATO, the dangers posed by the BRICS alliance, and how best to strengthen Europe's defensive capacities in response to the new direction of American foreign policy.

Concluding Thoughts: Flaws in the architecture of the unipolar world of the 1990s have led to the absence of instruments capable of preventing conflicts such as that taking place between Russia and Ukraine. Ending the impasse calls for serious diplomatic efforts by the combatants and their allies, but this seems a long way off. In spite of the dangers, the most available option right now calls for freezing the conflict. Risks for resuming and even escalating the war would remain, but it would buy time for agreeing on the need for new negotiations and perhaps even global compromise down the road

As things currently stand, prospects for ending the Russian-Ukrainian conflict appear slim. None of the existing options for ending the conflict will either terminate existing tensions or restore the status quo ante. The need for a new global security architecture, a new world order, is almost self-evident. However, all principal participants remain captive to outmoded ideological narratives. That is, precisely the reason why a new network capable of providing independent experts peace initiatives is necessary.

Signatories: **Dr. David Abraham** (USA), Professor Emeritus School of Law: University of Miami; **Ms. Haneen Alawawadeh;** (The Hague), UN/Global Human Rights Defense; **Mr. Ruslan Bortnik** (Ukraine), Director of the Ukrainian Institute of Politics; **Dr. Stephen Eric Bronner**, Director of the International Council for Diplomacy and Dialogue; **Dr. Jean Yves Camus** (France). President of the Observatory of Political Radicalism/ Fondation Jean-Jaurès, Researcher in the Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques; **Dr. Lawrence Davidson** (USA), Professor Emeritus of History at West Chester University; **Dr. Attila Demkó** (Hungary), Head of the Centre for Geopolitics at Mathias Corvinus Collegium; **Dr. John Ehrenberg** (USA), Professor Emeritus of Political Science, Long Island University; **Dr. Valery Engel**, President of the European Council for Democracy Development; **Dr. Michael Forman** (USA): Associate Professor of Political Science at University of Washington: Tacoma; **Dr. Sophia Howlett** (USA) President of the School for International Training, Higher Education, Policy, Management; **Dr. Kurt Jacobsen** (USA): Research Associate: Program on International Politics, Economics, and Security; Department of Political Science, University of Chicago; **Dr. James Jennings** (USA), President of Conscience International; **Dr. Christian Kaunert** (Ireland) Professor of International Security at Dublin City University; Director of the Jean Monnet Network on EU Counter-Terrorism; **Dr. Mario Kessler** (Germany), Senior Fellow am Leibniz-Zentrum für historische Forschung, Professor of European History: University of Potsdam; **Mr. Igor Kotler**, (USA) President of the Museum of Human Rights, Freedom, and Tolerance; **Dr. Michael Macdonald** (USA), Frederick L. Schuman Professor of International Relations: Williams College; **Dr. Adam Muller** (Canada), Director of the Peace and Conflict Studies, Program/University of Manitoba; **Mr. Gaston Ocampo** (Portugal):

Secretary General of the Institute for the Promotion of Latin America and the Caribbean; **Dr. Uwe Optenhögel** (Germany): Vice-President of the Foundation for European Progressive Studies (FEPS); **Ms. Marina Peunova** (Switzerland): European Center for Democracy Development; **Dr. Manfred Steger**, Professor and Chair of Sociology, University of Hawa'i-Manoa; **Dr. Sergej Tolstov**, (Ukraine), Head of the Department of Transatlantic Studies, Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine; **Mr. Thierry Valle** (France) Director of CAP pour la Liberté de Conscience.