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Topics:

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- Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine
- The course of the Russian-Ukrainian war

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Ukraine – European Union

- *THEME ANALYSIS: Will dialogue between the EU and Russia help establish a just peace, or does it signify Europe's impotence?*



Photo: Sky News

On 6 January 2026, a meeting of the member states of the Coalition of the Willing (hereinafter referred to as the Coalition) was held in Paris. The Coalition is an association of states that share a consensus on the necessity and importance of establishing a new security order in Europe after the end of Russia's war against Ukraine. This format, proposed by British Prime Minister Keir Starmer in March 2025, provides for the development of a legal basis and plans for the practical implementation of security guarantees for Ukraine. The initiation of such a platform for cooperation was prompted by changes in the foreign policy priorities of the United States towards Europe, culminating in the scandalous meeting between Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, US President Donald Trump and US Vice President JD Vance at the end of February 2025. In such conditions of strategic uncertainty surrounding the issue of security architecture in Europe, the Coalition is currently the main effective mechanism that, in theory, could play a key role in establishing a new European security order, in particular by providing appropriate guarantees for Ukraine in the post-war period.

Thus, following the above-mentioned meeting, the participants formulated and signed a declaration entitled “Robust Security Guarantees for a Solid and Lasting Peace in Ukraine”¹, which, among other things, recorded the Coalition’s readiness to provide a system of politically

¹ European Commission. (2026, January 15). Statement on ... [Press release]. European Commission. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/statement_26_45

and legally binding guarantees for Ukraine. However, based on the thesis of this declaration, one can conclude that *this future security regime will be limited in nature*.

First of all, the core of the new security guarantee system is not the Coalition, but Ukraine itself and its military potential (in particular, the Armed Forces of Ukraine). It is the comprehensive support of the latter, including cooperation in the field of intelligence, that is postulated as the main driver of the European strategy of deterrence against the Russian Federation.

Secondly, all envisaged measures can only be implemented after a ceasefire has been established. Hence, the participating states do not envisage the use of any leverage and/or coercion against Russia to achieve a specific type of conflict resolution.

Thirdly, the military presence of the Coalition's military contingents – the Multinational Forces – currently has no clearly defined status and, accordingly, no list of powers. However, according to the text of the declaration, their main objective will be to monitor compliance with the ceasefire or peace regime. The limited nature of the involvement of these contingents is evidenced by the British government's comment on the possibility of the presence of British armed forces on the territory of Ukraine only if there are no threats to their lives. Hence, the participation of these contingents in direct combat operations is not envisaged. In addition, as of January 2026, only two of the 33 Coalition members – France and the UK² – have signalled their readiness to send their contingents as part of the Multinational Force. As for the rest of the players, they have either not yet provided a specific answer or have limited themselves to providing infrastructure, logistical and security support. However, despite the fact that these actors are currently key players in the Coalition, there are significant doubts that their governments will be able to ratify the relevant agreements on sending their own contingents to Ukraine. The reason for this is the right-wing and left-wing forces that are gaining increasing influence in the political arena of these countries and are sceptical about the idea of multinational forces. These include, in particular, the leader of the French National Rally party, Jordan Bardella, and the leader of the British Reform UK party, Nigel Farage. Therefore, for Emmanuel Macron and Keir Starmer, the issue of deploying national armed forces on Ukrainian territory could become politically sensitive. This state of affairs, at least for now, largely negates the potential of multinational forces as one of the pillars of future security guarantees.

Fourth, the mechanism for implementing security guarantees in the event of a renewed Russian attack on Ukraine, as well as the role of the United States in this process, are vaguely defined (as Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has also pointed out³). Although negotiations on the final format of security cooperation and the provision of guarantees are ongoing, it can already be said that the current scope for ambiguous interpretation of the Coalition's commitments by its members undermines the reliability of such a security regime and thus weakens the effectiveness of deterring the Russian Federation from further acts of aggression.

² Polskie Radio. (2026, January 8). *Париж без ілюзій: декларації «Коаліції охочих» не стали гарантіями безпеки для України*. Українська Служба Polskiego Radia. <https://www.polskieradio.pl/398/7857/Artykul/3631283>

³ Maślanka, Ł., & Sienicki, K. (2026, January 8). The Paris Declaration: A tool to influence US policy. OSW Centre for Eastern Studies. <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2026-01-08/paris-declaration-a-tool-to-influence-us-policy>

Finally, the document entitled “Robust Security Guarantees for a Solid and Lasting Peace in Ukraine” is essentially a declaration that, from the point of view of international law, does not contain any legally binding provisions. Instead, it is a statement of *intent and readiness* of the Coalition member states to be involved in this initiative. The framework nature of this declaration is also indicated by the fact that the text of the document states that the Coalition's guarantee mechanism will operate in addition to the security agreements already concluded by Ukraine with its Western partners from 2023 to the present⁴.

Hence, as of January 2026, *the deterrence strategy and security guarantee model proposed by the Coalition are not sufficient, from the point of view of international conflict theory, to establish an effective international security regime that is resilient to crisis situations*. In its current form, the Coalition's initiative is more of a diplomatic signal to the Russian Federation about Europe's readiness to play a role in the security paradigm against the backdrop of the United States' ambiguous foreign policy activities on the European vector.

The issue of dialogue between Russia and the EU as a tool for establishing a just peace for Ukraine should be studied as a separate aspect. Given the positions of these two actors on the scenarios and methods of resolving the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, the main obstacle to Russia's constructive involvement in the negotiation process (from the point of view of Europe and Ukraine's other Western partners) is fundamental differences in strategic cultures.

In particular, in the context of security guarantees for Ukraine, it is advisable to choose the strategy of deterrence – in its Russian and Western interpretations – as a comparative benchmark. Thus, taking into account the Coalition's approach described above, there is every reason to classify its model of security guarantees as a type of *deterrence by denial strategy*. Its essence is to artificially increase the risks and losses for the aggressor in the event of a renewed escalation of the conflict. Thus, the scenario of resuming hostilities is a priori disadvantageous for the actor perturbing the status quo, directly threatening its national interests. In the context of the Coalition, the effect of this type of deterrence should be achieved through guarantees of comprehensive and rapid assistance to Ukraine in the event of a violation of the ceasefire or peace. From this point of view, the prospect of multilateral and in-depth support in the military, security, infrastructure, logistics and financial spheres should be perceived by the Kremlin as an unfavourable factor by default when making decisions on renewed aggression. However, the Russian model of deterrence (Russian: сдерживание) is characterised by its “hybrid” structure. It includes components such as intimidation and coercion through the use of nuclear, conventional and cyber capabilities. The eclectic nature of this strategic approach provides Russia with a wide scope for manoeuvre and, at the same time, is perceived by other actors as posing potential threats to national security. For example, in the Russian version of deterrence through denial, the limited use of force is entirely possible, whereas this is not the case in the equivalent Western model. Hence, it is the component of aggression that accounts for the significant difference in the strategic cultures of the Russian Federation and the West.

In addition, with Russia potentially joining the cooperation to achieve a just peace, the Coalition should take into account the specifics of Russian diplomacy. In his book “From Cold War to Hot Peace: an American Ambassador in Putin's Russia”⁵ Michael McFaul draws attention to a specific technique used by the Kremlin, which consists of linking the achievement of certain

⁴ Міністерство оборони України. *З ким Україна має безпекові угоди і що вони передбачають: пояснення Міноборони*. <https://mod.gov.ua/news/z-kim-ukrayina-maye-bezpekovi-ugodi-i-shho-voni-peredbachayut-poyasneniya-minoboroni>

⁵ М.МакФол. (2020). *Від Холодної Війни До Гарячого Миру: американський посол у путінській Росії*. Yakaboo Publishing

results in one area to coercion in order to obtain concessions from the other party in another area. With this in mind, we should not rule out the possibility that the establishment of a security dialogue between Russia and the Coalition could result in the resolution of such 'sensitive' issues in Russia's favour, such as the easing of EU sanctions or the frozen assets of the Russian elite. In this context, it should also be noted that the Coalition is in a relatively weaker position compared to Russia, as the participating states do not consider any instruments of influence and/or coercion on the Kremlin in their approach to encourage direct negotiations to end the war. As the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Kaja Kallas⁶ rightly points out, at this stage, in the absence of a ceasefire, the potential of the security regime presented by the Coalition is limited. At the same time, the Kremlin's reaction to the declaration "Robust Security Guarantees for a Solid and Lasting Peace in Ukraine" is categorically negative and aggressive. In particular, commenting on the mechanism of the presence of French and British armed contingents, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova stressed that any foreign military presence on the territory of Ukraine, including infrastructure and logistics hubs, will be regarded by Russia as 'foreign intervention' and a direct threat to national security. With this, the Multinational Forces and related critical facilities will be a 'legitimate target' for the Russian Armed Forces⁷.

Therefore, given the above-mentioned points, differences in strategic cultures and foreign policy priorities between the Russian Federation and the Coalition member states make it impossible to establish a constructive cooperation platform within the framework of developing and implementing a new security regime in Europe, one of the key objectives of which is to provide effective security guarantees for Ukraine. Thus, the appeal of the Coalition leaders to the prospects of building a dialogue with Russia at this stage will not have any operational or strategic benefits for Ukraine in particular, or for the West in general. One of the reasons for the asymmetry in the West-Russia dyad is the former's lack of political will to take a more decisive, aggressive stance, since it is precisely the demonstration of strength and determination that is an effective means of persuasion from the point of view of Russian strategic culture.

As for Ukraine, the main task at this stage is to convince the governments of the Coalition member states to take on the maximum amount of commitments in providing security guarantees. In the context of provocations from the Russian Federation, as well as threatening and volatile rhetoric from the White House, Ukrainian diplomacy could use the differences within the Euro-Atlantic community to its advantage. In particular, an important part of this campaign should be working with the public in European and Western partner countries, which would make it possible to counter opposition political forces that use the Ukraine issue for lobbying and PR purposes. In addition, the agenda of Ukrainian public diplomacy should include such tools as tough, even condemnatory and critical rhetoric regarding Europe's passivity in the face of security threats that affect not only Ukraine but the entire region. A good example of this is Volodymyr Zelenskyy's comment during his speech at the Davos Forum. In other words, Europeans and the West must realise that strong and reliable guarantees for Ukraine, together with effective and decisive accompanying measures (including those symmetrical to Russia's), are the top priority in both the short and long term. Otherwise, the Russian Federation will

⁶ Kallas, K. (2026, January 14). Russia is to blame for the inaction of the "coalition of the willing". *EADaily*. <https://eadaily.com/en/news/2026/01/14/russia-is-to-blame-for-the-inaction-of-the-coalition-of-the-willing-kallas>

⁷ The Russian Foreign Ministry stated that the deployment of foreign troops in Ukraine would be considered as legitimate targets. UNN. <https://unn.ua/en/news/the-russian-foreign-ministry-stated-that-the-deployment-of-foreign-troops-in-ukraine-would-be-considered-as-legitimate-targets>

finally break Europe's security architecture and, in doing so, call into question its subjectivity in the international political arena.

Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine

- *THEME ANALYSIS: The implementation of the Agreement on the end of the war in Ukraine has ended without even getting off the ground*



Photo: DW

Despite the ambitious statements of the 47th President of the United States and given the pace and scope of progress achieved, Trump's peace plan to resolve the Russian-Ukrainian war is still in the formulation stage. Since the publication of the 28 points for ending the conflict, the American peace initiative has undergone structural changes as a result of several rounds of negotiations with the Ukrainian and Russian sides. However, one of the key factors preventing the achievement of lasting peace for Ukraine is the eclectic nature of the US approach to conflict management.

First of all, it is about the duality of tracks. Since the media published a list of 28 points that were to form the basis of the future peace agreement, American delegations began to hold parallel talks with representatives of Ukraine (most often – the contact group headed by Ukrainian Defence Minister Rustem Umerov and Chief of the General Staff Andriy Gnatov) and Russia (most often – Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation Kirill Dmitriev). Among them, the key meetings were held in Geneva (23 November 2025), Abu Dhabi (25 November 2025), Miami (30 November, 20 December 2025), Berlin (14 December 2025), Mar-a-Lago (28 December 2025), and Moscow (2 December 2025, 22 January 2026). In addition, Trump's special envoy to the Middle East, Steve Witkoff, and the US president's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, held backroom talks with Kirill Dmitriev in Paris on 7 January (after the Paris summit of the Coalition of the Willing) and on the sidelines of the Davos Forum on 20 January 2026. It is noteworthy that the results of the American delegation's meetings with one side became the central topic of discussion with the other. Thus, in early December, Ukrainian

President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that Trump's initial 28-point peace plan⁸ had been revised and reduced to 20 points⁹. In particular, the following points were removed: 1) the thesis on the return of the Russian Federation to the global economic system (G-8); 2) the obligation to constitutionally enshrine Ukraine's rejection of Atlantic integration; 3) the thesis on the inadmissibility of deploying NATO contingents on the territory of Ukraine; 4) the thesis on the deployment of European fighter jets in Poland; 5) the clause on frozen Russian assets; 6) the mention of the establishment of a Russian-American working group on security issues; 7) the statement on cooperation between the Russian Federation and the United States on non-proliferation treaties, in particular START-I. In addition, several points were modified, namely: 1) the number of Armed Forces personnel was increased from 600,000 to 800,000; and 2) elections (primarily presidential) are to be held as soon as conditions are favourable, rather than 100 days after the signing of the future peace treaty. It should be noted that the Russian side, on behalf of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, following the meeting in Abu Dhabi on 25 November 2025, emphasised that the new version of the document significantly differs from the vision agreed upon by the Russian and American leaders during the summit in Alaska, and, accordingly, is not acceptable to the Kremlin. However, if we trace the dynamics of Russian-American meetings in various formats from late November 2025 to late January 2026, representatives of both countries took turns declaring either the constructiveness or the effectiveness of these meetings (despite the lack of consensus). In other words, it seems that active diplomatic efforts were underway to develop a mutually acceptable version of the agreement, against the backdrop of constant statements by senior American officials about the Russian leadership's desire and readiness to make peace. However, if we analyse the signals and messages from the Kremlin, in particular from Putin and Lavrov, we can conclude, at the very least, that Russia is not ready to end military operations on the terms of the 20-point plan. At most, we are talking about parallel negotiations at the level of two dyads: 'US-Russia' and 'US-Ukraine.' In this regard, several scenarios are entirely possible.

The first one - there are several agendas for the negotiations: Russian-American and Ukrainian-American. An argument in favour of this assumption is the fact that issues related to NATO are to be considered in a separate document. In other words, the points that were removed following the meetings in Geneva and Miami at the end of November 2025 might have been included in another negotiating framework. This scenario seems likely also because the dialogue between Russia and the United States continued even after Lavrov's remarks about the differences in the agreed provisions of the document. Hence, under these conditions, the Trump administration is now faced with the task of reconciling these two parallel negotiation tracks in order to achieve a just and lasting peace. However, at this stage, this state of affairs provides too much room for manoeuvre for the parties involved. This applies in particular to the Kremlin, whose hybrid tactics are aimed at intimidating Ukraine and its Western partners and thus gaining a better negotiating position. For example, the day after Zelensky announced that, following a meeting with the American delegation in Mar-a-Lago (28 December 2025), security guarantees for Ukraine and 90% of a peace agreement had been fully agreed, Russia published video

⁸ Mankovska, V. (2025, November 25). 28-point peace plan for Ukraine-Russia war, Europe's amendments, and Geneva negotiations. Gwara Media. <https://gwaramedia.com/en/28-points-peace-plan-for-ukraine-trumps-proposal-europes-amendments-and-results-of-negotiations-in-geneva/>

⁹ Rubryka. (2025, 24 December). *Zelenskyy unveils details of 20-point peace plan for the first time*. Rubryka. <https://rubryka.com/en/2025/12/24/zelenskyj-vpershe-rozkriv-zmist-20-punktiv-myrnogo-planu/>

evidence of a Ukrainian drone attack on Putin's residence in Valdai. Although the authenticity of this video footage is questioned by the Trump administration, the Kremlin used this artificially created pretext to launch an Oreshnik ballistic missile across Ukraine. It is noteworthy that this strike was preceded by the signing of the Paris Declaration at the meeting of the Coalition of the Willing (6 January 2026). Hence, in the absence of a clear position from the US, including effective instruments of coercion, Putin's regime will continue to resort to aggressive actions to shift the balance of power in its favour.

The second one - the peace plan promoted by the United States is still in the early stages of negotiations, despite the White House's loud statements. Put differently, the 28 points, and later the 20-point version of the agreement, are only a framework document. According to the theory of international conflicts, this phase of conflict management is characterised by the parties involved setting maximum (and, as a rule, inflated) wishes and expectations. Subsequently, based on the results of negotiations and/or further hostilities, the actors lower their 'threshold' of demands and interests, which makes consensus possible. Given the progress achieved as of the end of January 2026, the dialogue between the Russian Federation and Ukraine (mediated by the United States) needs further harmonisation in order to develop a common, mutually acceptable platform for reaching a peaceful agreement. The last round of negotiations involving both Ukrainian and Russian delegations took place on 23-24 January 2026 in Abu Dhabi. However, no significant progress was made in the negotiation process (in particular on the territorial issue), while representatives of the countries involved stated that further discussions would continue in the same format on 1 February 2026. Nevertheless, it should not be ruled out that such ambivalence is a deliberate approach by Washington aimed at satisfying US national interests. For example, the course towards European autonomy includes the removal of critical points of tension in the region. To this end, the American side is considering cooperation with the autocratic regimes of Alexander Lukashenko and Vladimir Putin. This agenda involves solving two problematic issues at once: 1) settlement on the European continent; and 2) deterrence of China (for which both Belarus and Russia are strategic partners). Therefore, it is entirely realistic to assume that ***the peace plan for Ukraine is just one of the tools for reconfiguring the balance of power between the US and its opponents in other regions.***

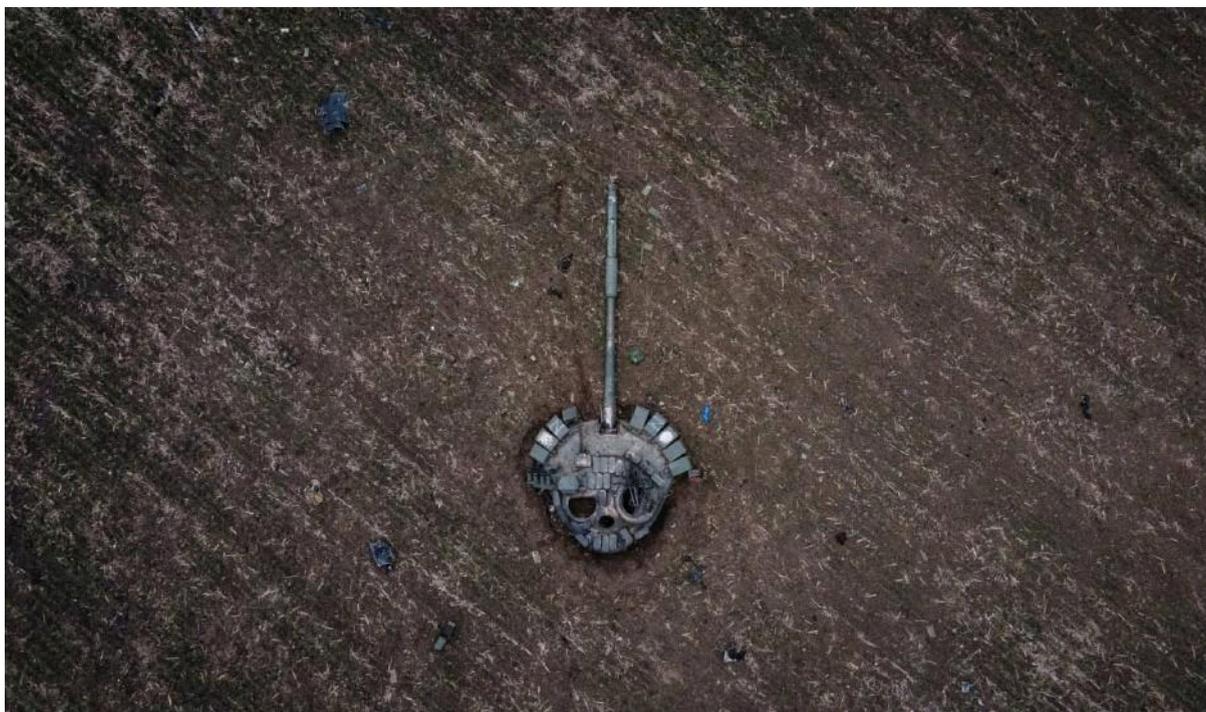
In the context of the US position and intentions, the main security and strategic goals and guidelines of the state should be taken into account. On 23 January 2026, the US Department of War published *the National Defence Strategy*¹⁰, two months after the publication of *the National Security Strategy*¹¹. According to the key points of these two doctrinal documents, the issue of peace in Ukraine is interpreted by the United States as part of a new European approach. Thus, the US does not intend to leave Europe, but the format and scope of its presence will be more restrained and determined in accordance with the 'America first' ideology. Given the Trump administration's shift in focus to the Western Hemisphere (Latin and North America and the Caribbean), the United States considers it inappropriate to allocate excessive resources to maintaining security parity in Europe. Hence, this strategy contains parameters that, from a European perspective, seem mutually exclusive, namely: a) a policy of 'burden sharing' with the aim of increasing the autonomy and defence capabilities of the US's European partners;

¹⁰ Department of Defense. (2026, January 23). *2026 National Defense Strategy*. <https://media.defense.gov/2026/Jan/23/2003864773/-1/-1/0/2026-NATIONAL-DEFENSE-STRATEGY.PDF>

¹¹ The White House. (2025_November). *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

b) restoring stability in Europe, including through achieving strategic stability with the Russian Federation. In other words, based on the texts of the two US national strategies, one of the tools for achieving strategic values in Europe is ***the artificial unification of the European and Eurasian (read Russian) agendas***. If this is indeed the case, then achieving lasting peace for Ukraine, including security guarantees, is **unlikely** – at least at this stage. This is explained by the mutual exclusivity of the Ukrainian and Russian positions, where consensus on territorial issues in particular is impossible without significant concessions from one of the parties. The only thing left for Washington to do is to use more effective instruments of pressure on one or both sides of the conflict. But since Ukraine's position on the vast majority of issues coincides with that of Europe, in order to ensure stability in Europe, the Trump administration should apply pressure specifically on Russia. However, no such political/forceful actions have been observed so far.

Thus, as of the end of January 2026, President Trump's peace initiative remains in the initial stage of the negotiation process. Further developments, taking into account the above scenarios and the position of the United States, depend primarily on Washington's political will: either the “Peace Plan” will continue to serve as a framework document laying the foundation for negotiations with the Ukrainian and Russian delegations; or, as a result of decisive measures, Russia will be forcibly included in the negotiation agenda, the terms of which will be mutually acceptable. Otherwise, **Putin's regime will continue to use the negotiation tracks as a ‘smokescreen’ to implement its hybrid strategy of intimidation and, accordingly, change the balance of power in its favour.**



Source:
Army FM

■ Changes at the frontline

Trend: *Ukraine was forced to build its defense on drones to compensate for the lack of manpower and equipment.*

Russian troops are using foggy weather to advance across the entire front, particularly in the Pokrovsk, Velykomykhailivsk, and Huliaipole directions.

The enemy is suffering the greatest losses in the Pokrovsk direction. There, Russian troops are forced to use even their most combat-ready units in so-called banzai attacks, effectively as ‘assault meat.’ In this direction, the Russian army has lost about 1,000 armoured vehicles and more than 500 tanks in two years of fighting. Personnel losses in the Pokrovsk direction are among the most serious for the Russian occupation army. According to Western intelligence services, in October alone, Russian troops lost about 25,000 personnel in this direction¹².

In the North Slobzhansky and Kursk directions, the enemy carries out up to 100 shellings per day.

In the South Slobzhansky direction, Ukrainian troops stopped enemy attacks in the areas of Vovchansk, Staritsa, Prilipka, Fyholivka, and in the direction of Izbityk and Kutkivka.

¹² РФ стягнула елітні війська для захоплення Покровська: ЗСУ контролюють понад 50 відсотків міста.
<https://expres.online/podrobitsi/uf-styagnula-elitni-viyska-dlya-zakhoplennya-pokrovska-zsu-kontrolyuyut-ponad-50-vidsotkiv-mista>

In the Kupiansk direction, Ukrainian defenders stopped enemy assaults in the areas of Stepova Novoselivka, Pershotravneve, and towards Petropavlivka.

In the Lyman direction, the enemy is trying to break through our defences near the settlements of Novoselivka, Kolodyazne, and Torske.

In the Sloviansk direction, the Defence Forces repelled the enemy's offensive near Dronivka, Siversk and Sviato-Pokrovsk.

In the Kostyantynivka direction, the enemy is carrying out systematic attacks in the areas of Pleshchiiivka, Oleksandro-Shulytne, Rusyn Yar, Yablunivka and towards Sofiiivka.

In the Oleksandrivka direction, the enemy is storming Ukrainian positions in the areas of the settlements of Zelenyi Hai, Oleksandrograd, Sosnivka, Vorone, Oleksiivka, Vyshneve, Solodke, and Yegorivka.

In the Huliaipilya direction, the Defence Forces repelled Russian attacks throughout January in the areas of Zeleny, Huliaipole, Varvarivka, Dorozhnyanka and towards Sviatopetrivka.

In the Orikhiv direction, the enemy continued its attempts to break through the defences of our defenders in the areas of Plavni, Mala Tokmachka, Shcherbaky, and Stepove.

■ *Military aid*

Results of military aid in 2025. On the one hand, 2025 was a record year for Ukraine in terms of Western military aid – despite ‘war fatigue’ and new political restrictions, allies pledged approximately \$45 billion in support. On the other hand, a change in sentiment in key capitals led to a slowdown in some of this aid: in particular, the US effectively suspended new packages, forcing European partners to look for ways to compensate for the shortfall. Despite these challenges, the West plans to continue supporting Ukraine in 2026 through new financial mechanisms, record commitments from European governments, and creative approaches from individual countries.

What exactly can we expect from Western military aid this year? Ukraine's needs are growing: the government has estimated the defence request for 2026 at \$120 billion and has asked its allies to provide at least 0.25% of their GDP to support Kyiv, as promised at the NATO summit in The Hague on 24–25 June 2025. For example, the Baltic countries have already reached this level. European states have taken on more financial commitments to compensate for the reduction in US contributions.

The USA. The US administration virtually froze military aid to Ukraine in 2025 for previously approved deliveries, and Washington did not approve new packages, using the pause as leverage to pressure Kyiv into negotiations. Only at the end of the year did Congress include a symbolic \$400 million in the defence budget for weapons for Ukraine in 2026–2027, although in the spring of 2024, there was talk of almost \$14 billion for a similar programme. Only at the end of the year did Congress include a symbolic \$400 million in the defence budget for weapons for Ukraine in 2026–2027, although in the spring of 2024, there was talk of almost \$14 billion for a similar programme.

The US administration continues to refrain from using existing aid mechanisms, preferring to sell weapons through European intermediaries.

It is expected that in 2026, most US weapons will continue to be supplied indirectly – through funds contributed by other countries for the purchase of weapons from the US.

EU. European allies significantly increased their aid in 2025 to compensate for the American pause. At the 32nd meeting of the Contact Group in December, plans for support in 2026 were announced¹³: Germany announced a package of €11.5 billion, the largest contribution among all countries (with an emphasis on air defence, drones and ammunition). Other states also presented large-scale packages (for example, Norway – about \$7 billion, the Netherlands – hundreds of millions of euros for high-tech equipment).

In addition to national programmes, the EU has agreed on unprecedented long-term financing mechanisms. EU leaders have approved a new €90 billion package for 2026–2027, which will be provided to Ukraine in the form of concessional loans guaranteed by the joint budget. The intention to use frozen Russian assets for this purpose has currently stalled. European leaders stress that they cannot allow Ukraine to collapse financially: without this package, Ukraine would risk running out of funds by mid-2026.

Therefore, other sources are being discussed in Brussels in parallel, in particular, a €140 billion reparations fund guaranteed by Russian assets.

For better coordination of aid, the Coalition of the Willing led by Britain and France was created in 2025, which took over part of the leadership in planning support for Ukraine. The PURL fund, a mechanism for jointly financing the purchase of American weapons, has also become critically important. In 2026, PURL's needs are estimated at approximately \$15 billion; several countries have already announced contributions, which will allow the supply of missiles for air defence to continue.

Great Britain. In 2025, London placed special emphasis on strengthening Ukraine's air defence. The British government announced its largest single-year package to date – £600 million to be allocated to air defence systems for Ukraine. This package is financed from various sources, including Russian assets confiscated in the UK. They emphasise that support will only increase if the war drags on: Defence Minister John Healey¹⁴ said that if the aggression continues, the allies will only strengthen their unity and assistance to Ukraine.

Canada. Canada significantly increased its military aid to Ukraine in 2025. Since 2022, Ottawa has transferred more than 6 billion Canadian dollars worth of weapons. In August 2025, during a visit to Kyiv, the new Prime Minister Mark Carney announced a support package worth 2 billion US dollars¹⁵. Canada also agreed to jointly produce drones and other military equipment. Ottawa joined the PURL fund, allocating nearly \$900 million through it to purchase critical weapons from the United States (primarily air defence systems).

Ukraine's expectations for 2026. Ukraine insists that in order to turn the tide of war, it needs modern long-range weapons and stronger air defence systems right now. Its allies say they will provide 'as much support as necessary,' but the main limiting factor remains the financial resources of the West. Therefore, the search for new sources has become relevant, for example, perhaps the frozen assets of the Russian Federation will be used after all. For now, Ukraine is relying on already agreed aid packages and increased arms production by its allies. The first months of 2026 will show whether these efforts will be sufficient.¹⁶

¹³ Euromaidan Press. (2025, December 17). *Allies pledge record \$45bn for Ukraine in 2025 as 17 countries commit to 2026 military aid.* <https://euromaidanpress.com/2025/12/17/ramstein-2025-ukraine-45-billion-military-aid-commitments/>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ NATO Association of Canada. (2025). *Canada's military assistance to Ukraine in 2025: Key trends.* <https://natoassociation.ca/canadas-military-assistance-to-ukraine-in-2025-key-trends/>

¹⁶ Військова допомога Заходу: чого чекати у 2026 році. <https://frontliner.ua/viiskova-dopomoha-zakhodu-2026/>

■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

Trend: *Russia is shifting to a strategy of non-nuclear strategic intimidation as a means of coercing Ukraine into capitulation*



Photo: UNITED24

The use of the Oreshnik medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) during a massive air attack on Ukraine on the night of 7 to 8 January 2026 was ***more of a political and strategic signal than a step towards gaining operational advantage in the military campaign***. This incident should be considered from two perspectives: doctrinal-theoretical and systemic.

Firstly, as Dmitriy Adamski notes in his article “*Quo Vadis, Russian Deterrence? Strategic Culture and Coercion Innovations*”¹⁷, the Kremlin’s political leadership, in particular the defence ministry, is currently focused on improving the national deterrence strategy. In this context, it is worth noting that the Russian deterrence model has specific characteristics, including hybridity, eclecticism, and excessive belligerence/aggressiveness. This configuration has both advantages and disadvantages for the Russian leadership. On the one hand, there is ***a lack of clarity regarding the principles and conditions for implementing the deterrence strategy***, especially the possibility of combining non-nuclear and nuclear complexes. This creates too much room for interpretation and, with it, strategic uncertainty, within which opponents (in this case, Western countries and their partners/allies) are reluctant to take risks and

¹⁷ Adamski, D. (2025). Quo vadis, Russian deterrence? Strategic culture and coercion innovations. *International Security*, 49(3), 50–83.

<https://direct.mit.edu/isec/article/49/3/50/128035/Quo-Vadis-Russian-Deterrence-Strategic-Culture-and>

prefer to ‘pass’ in order to de-escalate the situation. On the other hand, *prolonged ‘sabre-rattling’ with nuclear weapons tends to undermine the authority of the actor and also undermines the credibility of the risk/threat envisaged by the deterrence strategy*. It is with regard to the latter parameter that Russian academic theorists and political elites are pursuing the goal of modifying the Russian model of this strategy, including through a shift to intimidation tactics (Russian: *ustrashenie*). This approach involves, among other things, ensuring a smooth transition between the instruments used to implement the relevant strategy (for example, from the use of cyberattacks to the use of limited nuclear strikes). At the same time, the most important thing is to maintain a high level of the enemy's perception of potential danger and, with it, a willingness to make concessions in favour of the Kremlin. In the context of the Oreshnik exercise, this is one of the signs of a transitional stage in the formation of *a renewed strategy of deterrence of the Russian Federation*, in which the use of conventional and nuclear components *are complementary parameters rather than separate options*. The scale of damage to infrastructure and industrial facilities in Ukraine's Lviv region on 9 January 2026 (there is no specific information about the target¹⁸) supports the thesis that the use of this type of weapon was purely demonstrative. Thus, based on the information presented in the media, the consequences of the Oreshnik strike were insignificant, at least in terms of the combat characteristics of this MRBM. In addition, as pointed out by Defense Express analysts¹⁹, the warheads of the missiles, as in the case of the first use of Oreshnik on the territory of Ukraine in November 2024, were equipped with large-scale mock-ups, as indicated by the absence of further detonation.

Secondly, the significance of the launch of Oreshnik should also be viewed through the prism of the balance of power – both in the region and in the system of international relations as a whole. In particular, *not only the launch itself was important from the point of view of international security, but also the timing*. The strike on the Lviv region by this MRBM took place a few days after the meeting of the Coalition of the Willing in Paris on 6 January 2026. The Kremlin's reaction to the Trilateral Declaration signed by Volodymyr Zelensky, Emmanuel Macron and Keir Starmer on the readiness of France and the United Kingdom to send their own military contingents to Ukraine after the ceasefire is indicative here. The official position of the Russian Foreign Ministry on this news was to recognise the foreign presence (including logistical and infrastructure facilities) on the territory of Ukraine as a legitimate target for the Russian Armed Forces. Hence, the escalation of the strategy of intimidating the West through the reuse of intercontinental ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads was due, among other things, to *developments surrounding the development of Western security guarantees for Ukraine*. The geography of the strike, namely the territory bordering Poland, a NATO member state and a member of the Coalition of the Willing, also supports this thesis. In this regard, it is worth noting that there have already been precedents of Russian drones and missiles hitting the territory of Ukraine's neighbouring states (in particular, the drone attack on Poland in early September 2025). It is noteworthy that, despite the resonance in the global media and at the level of statements by European and Western officials, none of them received a decisive and, most

¹⁸ Focus.ua. (2026, January 9). *Путін хотів налякати Україну: куди саме влучила ракета "Орешник,"* — Reuters. <https://focus.ua/uk/voennye-novosti/739880-ataka-oreshnikom-kudi-same-vdarilya-rf-ta-yaka-bula-meta-rosi-ji>

¹⁹ Espresso TV. *Oborona ta bezpeka: raketa bilya kordoniv ES ta NATO: Use shcho vidomo pro udar "Oreshnykom" po Lvovu: poyasnyuemo.* <https://espresso.tv/oborona-ta-bezpeka-raketa-bilya-kordoniv-es-ta-nato-use-shcho-vidomo-pro-udar-oreshnykom-po-lvovu-poyasnyuemo>

importantly, equivalent response. At the same time, with regard to the Coalition of the Willing, a significant number of participating states have not yet taken a final position on their participation in providing security guarantees to Ukraine, including through the deployment of their own contingents. Thus, the Oreshnik strike – as an instrument of intimidation strategy – was also designed to ***undermine the security mechanisms of the Coalition of the Willing at an early stage***. Given that Ukraine's security partners are democratic states, the dependence of the political elites of Europe and the West on electoral cycles and, accordingly, the balance of party/political forces and public sentiment is significant. Accordingly, the result of such provocations by the Russian Federation may be: a) the transfer of the issue of Ukraine's security guarantees to the category of a 'vulnerable' issue, around which there will be confrontation between different political forces (especially on the eve of parliamentary or presidential elections); and b) a negative perception of this issue by the citizens of Ukraine's partner states, and thus an increase in the 'price' of security guarantees provided by their governments. At the same time, with regard to the United States and the process of peaceful settlement of the Russian-Ukrainian war, the strategy of intimidation is aimed precisely at prolonging the negotiation process. The logic behind this line of thinking can be explained as follows: a) stalling for time, combined with constant attacks on energy infrastructure, aimed at further exhausting Ukraine and weakening its negotiating position (which, in turn, will enable greater concessions in favour of the Kremlin); b) the tactic of delaying and disrupting negotiations against the backdrop of a shift in the balance of power within the transatlantic community (the Greenland case) and US foreign policy priorities (the case of initiating the creation of a Peace Council and inviting Russia to join it). In other words, Russia's main motivation is ***to obtain maximum benefits and, at the same time, minimize losses in the process of military settlement***.

Consequently, an assessment of Russia's transition from a strategy of containment to intimidation suggests that one of the key objectives of this trend is to resolve the Ukrainian issue in its favour. This, in turn, requires maximum concessions from Ukraine in particular and the West in general. This result is expected to be achieved by creating an artificial environment of strategic uncertainty and moving to a more aggressive and hybrid intimidation campaign – and the launch of the Oreshnik MRBM is one such tool. Currently, the Kremlin's priority is to disrupt the mechanisms for providing security guarantees for Ukraine and to drag out the negotiation process in order to strengthen its own position. ***Given the lack of significant progress on peace and security initiatives for Ukraine as of January 2026, the effectiveness of Russia's intimidation strategy requires further observation.***