

# INTERNATIONAL WEEKLY

№15 01.10.2024-31.10.2024

## Topics:

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

# CONTENT

## ■ UKRAINE - EUROPEAN UNION

*Theme Analysis:* The West's Choice: Better a bad peace with Russia than its defeat in the war with Ukraine\_\_\_\_\_3

## ■ FOREIGN AND DEFENSE POLICY OF UKRAINE

*Theme Analysis:* V. Zelensky's victory plan: The West is prone to declarations, but not ready to implement them\_\_\_\_\_7

## ■ THE COURSE OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR

Changes at the front\_\_\_\_\_10  
Military assistance\_\_\_\_\_12  
Russia: External and internal challenges\_\_\_\_\_13

## Ukraine – European Union

- *THEME ANALYSIS: The West's Choice: Better a bad peace with Russia than its defeat in the war with Ukraine*



*Photo: Geert Vanden  
Wyngaert*

Russia still occupies a fifth of Ukraine's territories. And to avoid misunderstandings, neither Kyiv nor its partners propose to recognise Russia's sovereignty over them, including the part it has illegally seized since 2014, as this could encourage further Russian aggression and finally destroy the international legal order, which has already been undermined by the Russian-Ukrainian war.

There is a tacit agreement that these territories should be returned through diplomacy in the future. For Ukrainians, however, the issue remains sensitive, especially when it comes to compromising with Moscow. Although **ceding land for NATO** membership may seem like the 'only option', as some Western diplomats, leaders, think tanks and foreign media have said, it is **a public taboo for Ukrainians**. Therefore, the nature and timing of the security guarantees that Ukraine needs to achieve stability continues to be openly discussed.

For example, during his visit to Washington, V. Zelensky reiterated the need for Ukraine's accelerated accession to NATO. However, the United States, following the agreed position of the Alliance, insists that 'Ukraine's future in NATO' and its accession will be possible 'when the allies agree and all conditions are met'. The United States fears that the mutual defence guarantees provided under Article 5 of the NATO treaty could draw it into a conflict before the war is over.

Some allies, however, believe that this issue can be resolved. Jens Stoltenberg, who stepped down as NATO secretary general this month, compared the situation to the security guarantees the United States provides to Japan: they do not apply to the Kuril Islands, which have been controlled by Russia since 1945, even though Japan considers them its territory. He also recalled Germany, which joined NATO in 1955 while remaining divided into western and eastern parts. Only West Germany was under the NATO umbrella. 'If there is a will, a

solution can be found,' he said, 'but it is important to determine where Article 5 applies, and Ukraine should control the entire territory up to that border. The idea of using the West German model for Ukraine's accession to NATO has been discussed for more than a year and a half. Among its supporters are former US Assistant Secretary of State Dan Fried, former US Ambassador to NATO Kurt Volker, former NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and Financial Times writer Ivan Krustev.<sup>1</sup>

**The idea is also gaining momentum in political circles.** Czech President Petr Pavel has said that *the full regaining of control over the entire territory is not a prerequisite for NATO membership, allowing Ukraine to join with the temporary borders it currently controls*. This could guarantee Ukraine's sovereignty and allow it to follow Western priorities, although it would be hated by Moscow and could lead to an escalation of the conflict.

Mary Sarotte, an American historian, noted that it is possible to apply **an individual approach** to the conditions of membership. For example, Norway once promised not to deploy a NATO base on its territory, and West Germany overcame the division without using force to unite with East Germany. According to her, Ukraine could define a defensive border, refuse to deploy NATO military bases and nuclear weapons on its territory in the absence of an external threat, and refrain from using force beyond this border, except in self-defence. This would allow Ukraine to show Moscow that its membership in NATO is a fait accompli.<sup>2</sup>

However, sceptics, such as Thomas Kleine-Brockhoff of the German Council on Foreign Relations, warn that Ukraine is different from West Germany, as its borders are fought over every day, and Putin may **interpret the limits of NATO's Article 5 in his own way**.

***The willingness of the United States and its European allies to make a military commitment to defend Ukraine also remains a major challenge.*** France supports the idea of Ukraine joining NATO as soon as possible, while German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is concerned about the possibility of Germany being drawn into a new conflict with Russia.<sup>3</sup>

The Biden administration has so far remained adamant about speeding up Kyiv's accession. However, the question remains open, especially if we consider other options, such as a potential Kamala Harris presidency or a change in policy by Donald Trump. Mary Sarotte concludes that ***applying the West German model to Ukraine would be a better option for Ukraine and the Alliance than postponing membership in anticipation of Putin's abandonment of his ambitions.***

Sarotte believes that ***the cost of a potential deal would be a long-term division of Ukraine, but the benefit would be the security of most of the country within NATO.*** According to her estimates, this agreement would force Russia to accept the new conditions by shifting the negotiations: instead of ceding territory, they would discuss restrictions on military infrastructure.

However, even this option has its critics in the West, particularly in the United States and Germany, which continue to oppose Ukraine's accession to NATO until the war is over. According to the Spanish newspaper El País, **the pressure on Ukraine to negotiate with Russia is growing, as Ukraine needs much more military assistance than it is receiving to deter Russian offensives in Donbas.**

El País also notes that the decline in support for Zelensky during his last visit to the US is a signal of a change in the tone of the partners in favour of a diplomatic solution. Time is not in Ukraine's favour here, as Donald Trump's return to the White House could change US policy towards Ukraine.

---

<sup>1</sup> Гарантії безпеки в обмін на контроль Росії над окупованими територіями України - FT про варіант мирної угоди. 05.10.2024. <https://www.holosameryky.com/a/harantiyi-bezpeky-v-obmin-na-terytoriyu-financial-times/7811592.html>

<sup>2</sup> Ukraine, Nato membership and the West Germany mode.05.10.2024. <https://www.ft.com/content/b70972d6-3e7f-4a87-8bc5-ac0699f6e7fc>

<sup>3</sup> НАТО в обмін на територію? Які виклики доведеться здолати у разі запрошення України до Альянсу.29.10.2024. <https://www.eurointegration.com.ua/articles/2024/10/29/7197259/>

**President Zelensky's office, for its part, categorically rejects claims that an agreement with Russia has been discussed, under which Ukraine would receive security guarantees in exchange for Russia's de facto control over the occupied territories.** An unnamed source in the President's Office told Channel 24 that no one in the West has officially offered Ukraine such guarantees, and some partners are even afraid to provide long-range weapons.

**The proposed model of 'NATO membership in exchange for territory' implies that Ukraine would receive an official invitation to join the Alliance, but Article 5 security guarantees would cover only government-controlled territories.** This would mean a temporary refraining from military operations in the occupied territories, with a focus on NATO integration, which would protect the rest of the country from further aggression. This concept has revived debate both in Ukraine and internationally, as it combines the country's strategic goals with the desire for security. **Ukrainian society views this issue through the prism of territorial integrity, national identity, and long-term security.** Regardless of the circumstances, Ukraine's position **should be formed on the basis of actual circumstances, the readiness of partners and the international political situation,** which may change.

From a historical and procedural point of view, if Ukraine decides to pursue such integration, the process of joining NATO will involve a complex procedure that will take time and coordinated action by all Allies. The experience of other countries shows the need for clear internal and external measures to implement Article 5 only in certain territories. Risks include the possible perception of this step as a concession, which could encourage further Russian aggression. At the same time, the benefits include international security guarantees that would reduce the likelihood of a large-scale invasion of the remaining territory of Ukraine.

Procedurally, NATO must take into account the specifics of such a limited membership. This includes legal adjustments and new approaches to strategic planning. The procedure for inviting Ukraine to join NATO, despite the support of most allies, carries significant diplomatic risks. One of the main challenges is the need for unanimous agreement among all members of the Alliance. Twenty-four countries have declared their support for Ukraine's integration, although these declarations are currently purely symbolic and not binding. At the same time, Germany's scepticism under Olaf Scholz, Slovakia's open confrontation with the new government of Robert Fico, and Hungary's hostile stance under Viktor Orban are creating obstacles to consensus.

Instability in the United States also adds to the uncertainty. The success of the invitation largely depends on Washington's final position. The Biden administration is interested in expanding the Alliance, but this initiative may not receive further support if Donald Trump wins, increasing uncertainty about long-term plans. For successful integration, it is important to secure the support of NATO's four key players - the United States, France, Germany and the United Kingdom. With their joint political will, opposing countries, including Orban and Fico, can be influenced, in particular through political or economic pressure.

The security conditions and territorial coverage of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty are another important issue. The question of which territories of Ukraine will be covered by NATO guarantees is critical, especially in the case of incomplete territorial integrity at the time of accession. If the guarantees cover only government-controlled territories, questions arise: which territory will be considered protected - the one controlled at the time of the invitation or the one that will be at the time of signing the accession agreement? What if further occupation occurs between the invitation and ratification?

Finding a model that satisfies all 33 NATO member states (including Ukraine) will be an important diplomatic challenge. Even if a consensus is reached, the final version must be approved by all national parliaments, which could prolong the accession process and make it harder to achieve.

And of course, **such a discourse ignores the main source of problems - Russia.** Assuming real territorial concessions, how would this affect Moscow's strategic culture?

Looking back at almost a century of Russian policy, which has never suffered international consequences or been punished for its crimes, the answer is obvious. In addition to the unwanted freezing of the conflict and the ballast of occupation, Ukraine will have an equally bloodthirsty neighbour, who now has the time and opportunity to restore and build its own power.

**When the West enthusiastically welcomes such initiatives in an attempt to save Russia's face, it forgets that the occupied Ukrainian territories are far from Russia's ultimate goal.** Nor is the whole of Ukraine the Kremlin's ultimate prey. This approach is just naïve optimism, provoked by an unwillingness to change the status quo and a more proactive policy that demands change. **At the same time, it is a repetition of the mistakes that the West has made towards Russia since the end of the Cold War, which have never brought it the desired long-term results.**



## Foreign and Defense Policy of Ukraine

- *THEME ANALYSIS: V. Zelensky's victory plan: The West is prone to declarations, but not ready to implement them*



Source: Reuters

President Volodymyr Zelensky presented Ukraine's Strategic Action Plan, first mentioned in August and already previously discussed with Western partners, to the Verkhovna Rada. The speech was aimed at explaining to the Ukrainian people the country's next steps in the war, providing a clear understanding of the future strategy and international support. Prior to his speech to the Rada, Zelensky undertook a diplomatic tour, presenting the plan to US President Joe Biden and discussing it with the leaders of Germany, France, the UK and Italy. Most of the plan's points, including those related to military support and the number of weapons, will remain classified even after its public announcement.<sup>4</sup>

The plan covers five main areas, including military and economic assistance, as well as diplomatic efforts to end the war. Despite some criticism from the president's opponents, who claim that the plan was presented to Western partners first, Zelensky will continue his diplomatic efforts, planning to present the initiative at the EU summit, where he will brief European leaders on the details and Ukraine's efforts to achieve peace. President Volodymyr Zelensky began his speech to the Verkhovna Rada by stressing the importance of victory: ***'Victory gives you the opportunity to live on your own land, under your own law and choose your own future.'*** He emphasised that he sees Ukraine's future within the European Union and NATO, calling them key elements of the post-war plan. V. Zelensky also stressed that 'the Victory Plan is about strengthening our position, and it depends on our partners, not on Russia, because Putin is not looking for an honest peace\*. For partners, supporting Ukraine is a means of preserving a fair world order, the President added.

The structure of the Victory Plan, as revealed by Zelensky, consists of five points and three secret annexes:

<sup>4</sup> Зеленський представив українцям свій план перемоги. У ньому 5 пунктів і секретні додатки. 16.10.2024. <https://www.bbc.com/ukrainian/articles/ce3w08447eno?xtor=AL-73-%5Bpartner%5D-%5Bukr%5D-%5Bheadline%5D-%5Bukrainian%5D-%5Bbizdev%5D-%5Bisapi%5D>

1. **Geopolitical** - to invite Ukraine to join NATO before the war is over to emphasise that Russia has suffered a geopolitical defeat. This will become a symbol of the irreversibility of the country's European integration course.

2. and 3. **Military** - these points cover aspects of strengthening defence capabilities during the war.

4. **Economic** - aimed at stabilising and supporting the economy in times of war.

5. **Security** - will be implemented after the war, when the country will start rebuilding and ensuring long-term security.

The President emphasised that the first four points need to be implemented in wartime, while the last, fifth, aims to ensure a secure future after the victory.

Svyatoslav Khomenko of the BBC notes that Ukrainian society has not received positive news from the frontline for a long time, and the Russian offensive only increases anxiety. In this context, he said, Zelensky is giving people hope by assuring them that Ukraine has a real plan for victory, even with a deadline of no later than next year. This does not look like preparations for a 'soft surrender'. Although he did not mention the '1991 borders' or full 'territorial integrity', Zelensky did reaffirm his commitment to his own 'Formula for Peace', which includes victory within internationally recognised borders.

He also pointed out that the fourth point of the plan describes the economic benefits of supporting Ukraine, such as control over the country's strategic resources for the benefit of the 'collective West'. Khomenko points to a secret appendix to this point, which probably contains specific conditions for Western partners to use these resources. The fifth point refers to the post-war period, when a powerful Ukrainian army could become a security donor for Europe, in particular by replacing US troops in the region, an argument for US Republicans determined to reduce the US military presence abroad.

Zelensky reiterated several already known demands, such as an invitation to join NATO, permission to attack Russian territory, participation of Western air defences in the defence of Ukraine, and investment in Ukraine's military-industrial complex. But Khomenko particularly emphasises the third point - a '**non-nuclear deterrence package**', which could mean an invitation to deploy US military bases on Ukrainian territory to provide physical security guarantees. This step is very similar to the model already used by Poland and other countries to improve their security. Khomenko concludes by asking whether Western countries will react to these proposals, given the approaching US elections, which makes any radical decisions on their part difficult.

Zelensky's plan has indeed found interest among Western partners, but **concrete solutions remain uncertain**. The president noted the 'practical and attentive' approach of the allies to the details of the plan, which is important for Ukraine, which expects active action, especially in providing long-range weapons and advancing the process of joining NATO. Andrii Yermak stressed that Kyiv expects concrete steps in response to the initiatives presented.

However, the US response was rather restrained. 'Ukraine has not yet made this plan publicly available, so I will not do it now. It's up to them to do that. But we have received this plan, read it, and saw a number of useful steps in it. We'll be talking to them about it,' said State Department spokesman Matthew Miller during a briefing on 2 October. He also noted that the victory plan includes not only Ukraine's actions, but also actions to be taken by other countries.

The Western media also commented on the 'victory plan' presented by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky in Kyiv. *The Washington Post* notes that growing cynicism and fatigue among Ukraine's partners may make it harder to achieve the quick victory that some had hoped for. Zelensky, however, argues that if the plan is implemented, the war could be over by the end of next year. The newspaper quotes Czech President Petr Pavel as saying that Ukrainians should 'be realistic', as he believes that part of Ukrainian territory is likely to remain under Russian control. The publication also warns that in the event of possible negotiations with Russia, Ukrainians' attitudes towards the West could change, despite the



significant financial investments made by the US and Europe in support of Ukraine.

It remains to be seen whether the allies will support the plan, although General Charles Brown, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, believes that the plan largely mirrors Ukraine's previous requests for increased military support. *Newsweek* emphasises that no country has officially endorsed or assessed the feasibility of the plan, and suggests that Zelensky is seeking to shore up the strategy before the inauguration of the new US president. The newspaper also notes that **none of the US presidential candidates has yet guaranteed a clear perspective for Kyiv.**

*The BBC* adds that Zelensky presented the plan as a potential investment opportunity for Western partners, drawing attention to Ukraine's natural resources and economic potential. He stressed that Ukraine's mineral reserves, energy and food potential are important for the development of both the country itself and Europe's security autonomy. The publication suggests that ***in order to win, Ukraine and its Western partners must recognise the serious difficulties and reconsider their goals.*** The war is now a war of attrition, and Russia, although suffering significant losses, continues to advance, especially in the East. As a result, war fatigue is growing in Ukraine, and the army is having difficulty mobilising new fighters and sustaining current efforts on the battlefield.

The authors propose that Ukraine should focus not only on regaining all of its territories, but also on creating a stable democracy and deterring Russia. The West should help develop national military production, provide modern weapons and, importantly, provide realistic prospects for NATO membership. NATO membership could stabilise the situation, similar to what happened to Germany in 1955, despite the possible occupation of part of Ukraine's territory.<sup>5</sup>

**Ultimately, such a strategy would require more concrete support from the West than just promises to avoid the threat of radicalisation or destabilisation in the event of a Ukrainian defeat. In general, the West has been concerned with declarations rather than guarantees.** However, the plan itself is more of a declarative nature, designed to put the focus back on supporting Ukraine at a time when the West has significantly reduced its attention to it. **On the eve of the US elections and political instability, this is a desperate attempt to provide Kyiv with an unwavering security guarantee.**

---

<sup>5</sup> Чому план Зеленського може бути "далеким від негайної перемоги". Огляд західних реакцій. 16.10.2024. <https://www.holosameryky.com/a/reakciji-na-plan-peremohy/7824258.html>



Source: Army FM

### ■ *Changes at the front*

**Trend:** *The Ukrainian defence has lost its resilience. Russian troops are steadily advancing through Ukrainian defensive positions in the southeastern part of the frontline and deeper into the territory of Ukraine.*

Russian troops recently advanced on the main Ukrainian salient in Kursk region amid fighting in the area on 30 October. Geo-location footage released on 29 October indicated that Russian forces had recently advanced in the central part of Novoivanivka (southeast of Koreneve).

*In the Kharkiv direction*, Russian troops continued limited offensive operations in the vicinity of Lyptsi and in the vicinity of Vovchansk, but did not make any progress.

*In the Kupiansk direction*, Russian troops advanced east of Kupiansk and west of Kreminna amid ongoing offensive operations along the Kupiansk-Svatovo-Kreminna line. In addition, by the end of October, Russian troops had advanced south of Stepova Novoselivka (east of Kupiansk) and north of Terni (west of Kreminna).

Russian troops continued their offensive operations:

- north of Kupiansk in the area of Holubivka;
- north-east of Kupiansk in the area of Synkivka and Pervomaiske;

- south-east of Kupyansk in the area of Kolisnykivka, Bohuslivka, Kruhlyakivka, Lozova, Stepova Novoselivka, Pishchane, Zahryzove, Vyshneve, Berestove, Zelenyi Hai, Cherneshchyna, Novoosynove;
- to the west of Svatove in the area of Stelmakhivka;
- south-west of Svatove in the area of Druzhelyubivka and Hrektivka;
- north-west of Kreminna near Katerynivka, Novomykhailivka and Nevske;
- west of Kreminna in the area of Terne, Zarichne, Yampolivka, Torske;
- south of Kreminna near Serebryanka south of Kreminna near Serebryanka

*In the Liman direction*, the enemy conducted constant attacks near Hrektivka, Novomykhailivka, Ternove and Torske.

*In the Kramatorsk direction*, Ukrainian troops repelled an attempt by the invaders to advance near Bondarne.

*In the Pokrovske direction*, Russian troops advanced southeast of Chasovyi Yar amid offensive operations. Occupant units advanced along the T0504 Bakhmut-Kostiantynivka road southeast of Chasovyi Yar and continue to attack across the Siverskyi Donets Canal in small infantry groups of two to three men, but they cannot gain a foothold in positions across the canal due to attacks by Ukrainian artillery and drones. Russian troops also continued offensive operations in the Toretsk sector, seizing part of the city of Toretsk, where heavy fighting continues in the city centre.

Russian troops advanced southeast of Promin (east of Pokrovsk) and captured Selidove, a stronghold of Ukrainian defence.

*In the Kurakhove direction*, Russian troops advanced towards Kurakhove and captured Hirnyk and advanced towards eastern Kurakhove.

**Conclusions:** In October, the Russians seized more Ukrainian territory than they had seized in a month since March 2022. This is 414 square kilometres, according to the Institute for the Study of War. Thus, as The New York Times notes, the Russians are gradually achieving what they have been aiming for for months, namely, the exhaustion of Ukrainian troops and the identification of the weakest links in Ukrainian defence. ‘While earlier meat assaults generally had barely noticeable results, the effect of Ukrainian troop fatigue and lack of personnel is gradually accumulating. Now, the Russians are constantly checking Ukrainian defences along almost the entire frontline - and filling in the gaps where they are weakest,’ the journalists write.

The publication notes that the rapid advance of the Russian Federation on the frontline has become a striking change compared to last year's situation. Back then, the battlefield remained static, and the ambitious offensives of Ukraine and Russia ‘mostly failed.’ ‘Part of the Ukrainian Armed Forces is currently in Kursk region and cannot arbitrarily go to Donetsk region to help. While the Russians still have the resources for both operations in the Pokrovsk area and to deter a Ukrainian breakthrough in Kursk, albeit at the cost of attracting a contingent from North Korea,’ the journalists note.

In response, the Ukrainian side is trying to mobilise another 160,000 people to bring the manning of the army's combat units to 85%, while leaving the outdated and inefficient organisation of positional defence unchanged.

## ■ *Military assistance*

**The United States** has provided a \$2.4 billion package of assistance through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI), which includes:

- Ammunition and support for Ukrainian air defence systems
- Air-to-ground munitions
- Unmanned aerial vehicles and components to support Ukrainian-made UAVs
- Equipment to combat UAVs
- Unmanned surface vessels
- Secure communications equipment
- Equipment and materiel to support Ukrainian ammunition production
- Spare parts, maintenance and support, as well as other auxiliary equipment.

The Pentagon adds that this is the twenty-first USAI package from the Biden administration worth \$7.9 billion, under which the Armed Forces will receive an additional Patriot air defence system, other air defence equipment, interceptors, drones, long-range missiles and air-to-ground munitions, as well as money to strengthen Ukraine's defence industrial base. In addition, the US will expand programmes to train Ukrainian pilots to fly F-16s.

On 17 October, the **German government** reported on the transfer of another batch of military aid to Ukraine.

According to the updated list, Ukraine received from Germany:

- 8 Leopard 1A5 tanks (shared with Denmark) and 20 Marder infantry fighting vehicles,
- 6 Panzerhaubitze 2000 howitzers,
- one BEAVER bridge-laying tank,
- two WISENT 1 armoured personnel carriers and four mine and ambush protection vehicles.
- additional ammunition for Leopard 1, Leopard 2, Marder, 24,000 artillery shells,
- Sea Sparrow missiles, missiles for the IRIS-T SLM air defence system, and 30 Vector reconnaissance drones.

In addition, Berlin donated 100 H-PEMBS portable mine clearance systems, 90 mine detectors, one mine plough, two mobile antenna-mast systems, 57 laser rangefinders, 3,000 RGW 90 anti-tank grenade launchers, and 25,000 rounds of 40 mm ammunition.

Other equipment transferred includes 75,000 tourniquets to stop bleeding, 460 MK 556 assault rifles, 90 HLR 338 sniper rifles with ammunition, 30 CR 308 rifles, and 3,000 SFP9 pistols.

In addition, Germany announced that it would supply Ukraine with AIM-9L/I-1 Sidewinder missiles, two TRML-4D air surveillance radars, 4,000 attack drones, 360 SONGBIRD reconnaissance drones, another 42,000 rounds of 40 mm ammunition, and winter clothing.

In early October, the German Ministry of Defence disclosed that Germany had recently handed over new IRIS-T medium- and short-range air defence systems to Ukraine.

It also became known that Germany, together with three other NATO countries, is preparing a large package of military assistance for Ukraine worth 1.4 billion euros, which is planned to be provided by the end of 2024.

At the same time, Germany plans to stop supplying heavy military equipment to the Ukrainian Armed Forces. According to information, about 300 Leopard 2 tanks, as well as armoured personnel carriers, infantry fighting vehicles and howitzers, the number of which is not disclosed, remain in warehouses in Germany. Therefore, Ukraine will receive only the amount of equipment that was previously announced, including 18 Leopard 2 tanks. No new deliveries are planned for today.

**The United Kingdom** announced a \$2.93 billion loan to Ukraine from frozen Russian assets, part of a broader international assistance package from the G7 countries totalling \$50 billion. These funds will be provided to Ukraine to cover its military, budgetary and reconstruction needs in the fight against Russian aggression. In particular:

- air defence

- artillery
- and other technical support.

In addition to financial assistance, the UK has already provided Ukraine with about 400 pieces of military equipment. In addition, British Defence Secretary John Healey announced a new delivery of 650 lightweight multi-role missile systems to strengthen Ukraine's air defence. This is additional financial support to the existing military assistance worth £3 billion a year.

**France** will also provide Ukraine with 12 Caesar air defence systems from frozen Russian assets.

#### ■ *Russia: External and internal challenges*

#### **Trend: *The West is pathologically afraid of crossing the Kremlin's 'red lines'***

According to Western media, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky ended his visit to the United States without achieving any results that could affect the course of the war. He failed to obtain permission to conduct long-range strikes on Russian territory using Western weapons and to make progress in Ukraine's accession to NATO. Zelensky's victory plan has not impressed the American leadership, and the West is unwilling to raise the stakes. **In the third year of the war, even Ukraine's staunchest allies have begun to talk about the need for negotiations with the Kremlin.**

In recent weeks, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has announced his intention to call Vladimir Putin for the first time in two years, and former NATO general and Czech President Petr Pavel has offered territorial concessions. However, Russia and Ukraine are currently far from peace talks. Both sides continue to escalate the conflict. Ukrainian troops have been operating in Russia for two months now. **Zelensky stressed the need to force Russia to peace, which is only possible if Putin starts losing on the battlefield.** The Kremlin has responded by threatening Ukraine and its allies with nuclear weapons and has prepared a new state budget that includes record spending on the military and weapons production.

Observing the mood of their president, people around Putin do not believe that the war will end soon. The Russian elite believes that peace talks remain a distant prospect, and the Ukrainian invasion of the Kursk region is perceived as a serious blow to Putin's ego.

At the end of the summer, it seemed that the conflict could end within six months or a year. Interlocutors point to **three key points**. **First**, there is a softening of rhetoric on the part of the Ukrainian leadership. For example, in July, V. Zelensky announced the possibility of holding a referendum on the terms of ending the war with Russia. 'He no longer said 'we will not give up a single inch' and similar things,' one of our sources said. **Second**, there was a large-scale exchange of prisoners between Russia, the US and the EU. The Kremlin's main goal was the return of FSB special forces officer Vadim Krasikov, but the very possibility of such negotiations became a 'useful precedent'. 'We quarreled and bargained, but we reached an agreement and implemented it. This increases trust,' says a person familiar with the negotiation process. **Thirdly**, Russian and Ukrainian military leaders have almost reached an agreement on de-escalation of the conflict, including mutual restrictions on strikes on energy facilities. The agreement was supposed to be sealed on 22-23 August in Qatar at the first meeting between the Russian and Ukrainian militaries since the beginning of the war.

However, the meeting was disrupted by Kyiv's operation in the Kursk region, as reported by *The Washington Post*, citing Ukrainian sources. Both sides publicly denied any negotiations. Zelensky later said in an interview that the Kursk operation 'showed the Russians the truth: Putin was in no hurry to defend his own land.' Putin's reaction to the Ukrainian operation in the Kursk region was quite angry. Although the Kremlin tried to downplay the event, **'for Putin, it [the invasion of Russian territory] was humiliating,'** said an insider close to the president. Putin commented in detail on the operation only on the



sixth day, going on a tirade about the ‘leaders of the Kyiv regime’ who were allegedly trying to destabilise the situation in Russia: ‘What can we talk about with them [the Ukrainian authorities]? <...> The enemy will get a decent answer.’ ‘The Kremlin has come to a conclusion: **to destroy the state of Ukraine**. Now we are talking about an unprincipled struggle, both sides are thinking about how to make things worse for each other,’ the source continues. According to him, Putin will not trade Kursk region in exchange for Donetsk or Luhansk, so **there are no prospects for peace talks at the moment**.

Supporters of peace talks are now in the minority in the Kremlin. Before the invasion of the Kursk region, there was a strong desire to start a peace process among the elite, but now there is none, a senior official admits. ‘It is difficult to even mention peace, these voices will be suppressed,’ he adds. According to another official, who regularly communicates with Putin, the possibility of peace talks will completely disappear if Western weapons start striking deep into Russia. ‘It would be a big escalation, and it is quite possible,’ he said. ‘Things have gone too far. I don't believe in any peace process. **Until Ukraine collapses, nothing will end**,’ says the head of a large state-owned enterprise who regularly meets with Putin, reflecting his boss's mood.<sup>6</sup>

When Ukraine asked the US for permission to strike deep into Russian territory with Western missiles, Putin responded by threatening to strengthen Russia's nuclear doctrine so that even a massive drone attack could be responded to with nuclear weapons. Western politicians have publicly reacted to these threats with restraint. One source who sees Putin regularly is confident that he would only risk using nuclear weapons in the event of a major conflict with the West, and that he is currently constrained by his relations with his BRICS allies. A friend of Putin's believes that he will ‘keep a close eye on the nuclear button’ if his threats are not taken seriously.

**The Kremlin is ready for a long war.** According to one source, the Kursk operation may prove to be a tactical success for Kyiv, but its development will be difficult. **‘Ukraine's forces are being depleted. The Kremlin can wage such a war for decades, while Ukraine is degrading faster,’** he said.

Spending on the army will remain a priority for the Kremlin in the coming years. The draft state budget for 2025-2027 envisages record spending on military support and arms production. Next year alone, this will amount to 13.5 trillion rubles (about \$142 billion), which is about 6.2% of GDP, which is significantly higher than, for example, in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany. Since the beginning of the war, Kremlin spending on the army has increased by more than 3.5 times and, together with spending on security forces, will account for about 40% of the total budget.

**One of the reasons for the West's lack of support for Ukraine is the fear of a possible complete collapse of Russia and chaos on its territory after a military defeat.** However, these fears are unfounded, according to an article on the website of the Atlantic Council, a US think tank.<sup>7</sup> The author of the article emphasises that in the past, the West also feared the collapse of its geopolitical rival, the USSR. For example, US President George W. Bush visited Kyiv shortly before Ukraine's independence and delivered his famous ‘Chicken Kiev speech’ in an attempt to persuade Ukrainians not to separate from Moscow. Western leaders at the time were primarily concerned about the fate of the Soviet Union's vast military machine and nuclear arsenal. Allowing this arsenal to be shared among the newly independent states seemed reckless to them. So, instead of hastening the fall of the Soviet empire, they tried to prevent or at least control the process. Similar concerns, according to the author, are

---

<sup>6</sup> «У Кремлі зробили висновок: знищуватимемо державу Україна»«В Кремле сделали вывод: будем уничтожать государство Украина». 03.10.2024. <https://zapiska.substack.com/p/russiaukrainenopeace>

<sup>7</sup> Доки Захід рятує Росію від поразки, Путін вже порівнює себе з Петром Першим, - аналітики. 25.05.2024. <https://www.unian.ua/world/viyna-v-ukrajini-zahid-hoche-vryatuvati-rosiyu-vid-porazki-v-ukrajini-12643398.html>



still hindering support for Ukraine today.

The author of this think tank *assumes that Russia's defeat in Ukraine will lead to the fall of the Putin regime and the beginning of reforms rather than to the chaotic collapse of the state*. This was also the case after other major Russian defeats in history: defeat in the Crimean War led to the abolition of serfdom, and defeat in the 1905 war with Japan gave rise to Russian parliamentarism. 'If the current invasion ends in defeat, we can expect Russia to remain intact. A retreat from Ukraine, while a serious blow to Russian national pride, is unlikely to pose an existential threat to Russia itself,' the author concludes.

The Atlantic Council calls on Western leaders to stop frightening themselves with 'nightmare scenarios' of Russia's future collapse and focus on the more serious threats that could arise from the Kremlin's victory in Ukraine. The authors of the publication note that if Putin achieves victory in Ukraine, he is likely to continue his aggressive actions. The Kremlin dictator is already boasting about his 'conquests' in Ukraine and comparing himself to Peter the Great, the all-conquering Russian tsar of the 18th century. At the beginning of the war, Putin tried to present the invasion as a defensive move, blaming NATO expansion and imaginary 'Ukrainian Nazis'. However, as his situation on the frontline improved, he began to speak openly about the return of 'historically Russian lands'.

Analysing the possible consequences, the Atlantic Council emphasises that under the 'pretext of returning historically Russian lands', the Kremlin could resort to aggression against other neighbouring countries, from Finland to Kazakhstan. In addition, analysts reject the argument that Russia will be too exhausted after its victory in Ukraine to risk new aggression. They believe that the **Kremlin, on the contrary, could use its success in Ukraine to further expand, posing a significant security threat in the region and beyond**. The Atlantic Council warns that a Russian victory in Ukraine could significantly change the geopolitical climate, leading to increased international support for the Kremlin and demoralising the West. If Russia succeeds in Ukraine, countries of the Global South may abandon neutrality and establish closer ties with Moscow, further complicating the situation for the West.

This approach reflects the West's desire to maintain a certain balance in the region, which could make it more difficult to provide Ukraine with the support it needs to achieve a complete victory in the war. But this scenario is simply impossible. And until the West admits this, it will continue to play against itself. Moscow has always spent money on the army and boasted about its status, but the reality is quite different. And as for the nuclear threat, we should not forget that Russia's greatest deterrent is not the BRICS, but Beijing, which is unlikely to ever allow Russia to take such measures. **But as long as the West allows itself to be manipulated and blackmailed, Kremlin will be happy to do so.**