



# Ukrainian War Persists: Strikes and Drones Exchange, Negotiations Pending, Tides Turn

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**Abstract** — This brief examines the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War, with particular focus on the escalating exchange of drone and missile strikes between Russia and Ukraine, the fragile state of ceasefire negotiations brokered in part by the United States, and the shifting momentum on the battlefield as of mid-2026. The persistence of the conflict despite repeated short-term truces underscores the deep mistrust between the two parties and the complexity of achieving a lasting peace settlement. The brief analyzes current military dynamics, the role of drone warfare in shaping frontline outcomes, diplomatic efforts by the Trump administration and European powers, and the political stakes heading into potential long-term negotiations.

**Keywords**— Russo-Ukraine War, drone warfare, ceasefire negotiations, Russia, Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Vladimir Putin, NATO, frontline, peace talks, Trump administration, energy infrastructure, territorial sovereignty

## I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, the war has entered a protracted phase, defined by mass drone exchanges, contested frontline positions, and

halting diplomatic progress. In early 2026, Ukraine reversed a trend of Russian territorial gains through large scale drone operations that disrupted supply lines and command networks. Meanwhile, a series of short-term ceasefires offered brief pauses, but no lasting relief, with both sides accusing one another of violations. U.S. President Donald Trump brokered a three-day ceasefire for May 9-11, 2026, and declared it would mark the “beginning of the end” of the war, though sustained negotiations remain elusive. The conflict continues to claim civilian lives, damage critical infrastructure, and generate one of the largest refugee crises in European history. This brief situates these developments within the broader historical arc of the war and addresses the policy landscape as negotiations remain pending.

## II. OVERVIEW

The Russo-Ukrainian conflict began in 2014 following Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatist forces in eastern Ukraine. What followed was a grinding war of attrition

fought along the eastern front, with both sides deploying increasingly sophisticated drone and missile technology to strike military and civilian targets deep behind enemy lines. As of mid-2026, Ukraine has reversed Russian territorial momentum through a scaled-up drone campaign, while a series of fragile short-term ceasefires brokered in part by the United States have offered brief pauses but no pathway to lasting peace. The outcome of ongoing negotiations will set precedents for how the international community responds to territorial aggression for decades to come.

#### *A. Pointed Summary*

- Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, triggering the largest war in Europe since World War II and a refugee crisis affecting millions of people across the continent.
- Drone warfare has become the defining feature of the conflict in 2026, with Ukraine retaking seventy-eight square miles over five days in February 2026 through precision mass drone strikes, reversing a trend of Russian territorial gains that have alarmed analysts throughout 2025.
- Russia has continued large-scale aerial assaults on Ukrainian civilians and infrastructure, launching over 270 drones in a single overnight attack in late March 2026, killing five people and damaging port facilities and energy sites
- U.S. President Donald Trump brokered a three-day ceasefire from May 9-11, 2026, which both sides confirmed but subsequently violated, leaving the path to a durable settlement deeply uncertain.

#### *B. Relevance*

The Russo-Ukrainian War carries profound implications for global security, international law, and American foreign policy that extend far beyond the borders of Eastern Europe. At the most immediate level, the war has produced one of the gravest humanitarian emergencies in recent history. By the early years of the conflict, Russian forces had been responsible for mass civilian casualties and the torture of captured Ukrainian soldiers, while roughly 8 million Ukrainians were internally displaced and over 8.2 million had fled the country by mid-2023, constituting Europe's largest refugee crisis since World War II.

From a policy standpoint, the conflict has forced a fundamental reassessment of European defense architecture and the future of NATO. A possible approach already in motion is the phased ceasefire framework centered around the "Coalition of the Willing," an alliance of over thirty Western countries that held its first meeting in Paris in January 2026 to outline security guarantees for Ukraine, including a U.S.-led ceasefire monitoring program and the possibility of deploying multinational troops under French and British command, contingent on an official ceasefire declaration. At the same time, Ukraine's drone innovation has forced Russia to divert resources to protect its supply lines and infrastructure, demonstrating how asymmetric technological gains can reshape the battlefield and force a much larger power onto the defensive.

For American policymakers specifically, the war sits at the intersection of competing interests: support for a democratic ally under attack, pressure to avoid direct confrontation with a nuclear-armed adversary, and growing domestic debate over the scope of continued U.S. engagement. Public opinion data indicates that around six in ten Americans support continuous

military aid to Kyiv, while 76 percent oppose Russia's desired occupation of eastern Ukrainian territories not yet seized, suggesting a public that remains broadly engaged even as political attention in Washington has shifted toward other conflicts. The outcome of negotiations — or their continued failure — will set precedents for how the international community responds to territorial aggression for decades to come.

### III. HISTORY

Ukraine declared independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, granting citizenship in the new civic nation to everyone residing within its borders at that time and thereafter.<sup>1</sup> In the time that followed, Ukraine, along with its independence, sought to align itself with Western institutions and alliances, including the European Union and NATO, a goal that Russia strongly opposed. Ties with the EU caused tensions to rise with Russia, when President Yanukovich, in late 2013, with pressure and influence from Moscow, abandoned a formal economic agreement between the EU and Ukraine. This decision by the former Ukrainian president ignited protests across the country known as Euromaidan.<sup>2</sup> The protests and outrage by the citizens of Ukraine ultimately led Yanukovich to flee Kyiv in 2014.<sup>3</sup> Shortly after, Russia responded by annexing

Crimea and arming separatists in Ukraine's Donbas region. Russia's seizure of Crimea was the first time since World War II that another European state had annexed another European state's territory.<sup>4</sup> The conflict in Donbas between 2014 and 2021 killed over 14 thousand people, and displaced around 1.5 million.<sup>3</sup> On February 24th, 2022, Russia launched a full-scale invasion against Ukraine, triggering the largest war in Europe since World War II.<sup>3</sup> As of 2026, the conflict has lasted longer than World War I.<sup>4</sup> Hein Goemans, professor of political science at the University of Rochester, argues that Putin's invasion is driven by two deep-rooted, historically motivated goals. The first goal is to reestablish the Russian Empire. The second is preventing democratization or "Color Revolutions" around Russia, such as what occurred with the protests in Ukraine of 2014.

#### A. Current Stances

The U.S. position and response efforts to the Russo-Ukraine conflict have shifted across administrations. Throughout the full-scale invasion, the Biden administration steadily positioned the U.S. as a determined ally of Ukraine. On November 28, 2024, Russia launched an aerial attack on Ukraine. Reports indicated that this attack used around 200 missiles and drones to target Ukrainian infrastructure and strategic energy infrastructure.<sup>7</sup> Former President Joe Biden then issued a statement the morning after, where he expressed the importance of supporting the Ukrainian people in defense of Russian aggression.<sup>5</sup> In this same statement,

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<sup>1</sup> Ukrainian Research Institute Harvard University, "Background," Russo-Ukrainian War, 2022, <https://war.huri.harvard.edu/background/>.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Masters, "Ukraine: Conflict at the Crossroads of Europe and Russia | Council on Foreign Relations," Cfr.org, February 5, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/ukraine-conflict-crossroads-europe-and-russia>.

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Baunov, Balázs Jarábik, and Alexander Golubov, "A Year after Maidan: Why Did Viktor Yanukovich Flee after Signing the Agreement with the Opposition?," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 25, 2015, <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2015/02/a-year-after-maidan-why-did-viktor-yanukovich-flee-after-signing-the-agreement-with-the-opposition>.

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<sup>4</sup> Stefan Korshak, "Russia's Invasion of Ukraine Is Now Longer than WWI – Five Things to Know," Kyiv Post, June 13, 2026, <https://www.kyivpost.com/post/77991>.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Mission Russia, "Statement from President Joe Biden on Russia's Attack on Ukraine," U.S. Embassy & Consulates in Russia, November 29, 2024, <https://ru.usembassy.gov/statement-from-president-joe-biden-on-russias-attack-on-ukraine/>.

Biden made clear his commitment to supporting Ukraine by stating, “My message to the Ukrainian people is clear: the United States stands with you.” Biden then ended the address by reiterating that the United States stands with Ukraine in its fight for freedom. Support from the Biden administration was not just verbal, but also material. On January 9th, 2025, the Biden administration announced security assistance to Ukraine in the form of a Presidential Drawdown Authority (PDA) package. This package consisted of AIM-7, RIM-7, and AIM-9M missiles for air defense, air-to-ground munitions, support equipment for F-16s, and other various materials.<sup>6</sup> This package was also the 74th set of equipment sent to Ukraine by the Biden Administration since August 2021.<sup>8</sup> President Trump’s stance on Ukraine has remained relatively skeptical. Trump has historically blamed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky for starting the war with Russia. Trump has blamed not only Zelensky, but also Biden and Russian president Vladimir Putin, stating that “Biden could have stopped it... and Putin should have never started it. Everybody is to blame”.<sup>7</sup> These comments occurred after Russia struck Sumy, the deadliest attack on Ukrainian civilians at the time.<sup>9</sup> Most recently, Trump’s engagement and attention to Ukraine have waned due to the war with Iran. The G7 summit in France, which was meant to produce talks with a new focus on Ukraine, was quickly shot down by Trump. Trump stated that the U.S. is “thousands of miles away” and has “nothing to

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<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of War, “Biden Administration Announces Additional Security Assistance for Ukraine,” U.S. Department of War, January 9, 2025, <https://www.war.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4025039/biden-administration-announces-additional-security-assistance-for-ukraine/>.

<sup>7</sup> Yang Tian, “Trump Blames Zelensky for Starting War Day after Massive Russian Attack,” *BBC*, April 15, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cg5q0mev07lo>.

do with it,” referring to the war.<sup>8</sup> Despite saying this, President Trump stated that he had met with President Zelensky at the summit, describing the meeting as “very good” and reiterating his stance that Russia ought to make a deal. However, when Trump was asked whether or not he would devote special attention to Ukraine, he explained that he would not.<sup>10</sup> When it comes to American Public sentiment on Ukraine, around six in 10 Americans support continuous military aid to Kyiv and 76% reject Russia’s desired colonization of Eastern Ukrainian territories, territories that have not yet been seized.<sup>9</sup>

### *B. Tried Policy*

Historically, the U.S. has intervened in the Russo-Ukrainian war in two main ways, one of which is through providing foreign aid. Since the start of the Ukraine invasion in 2022, the U.S. has sent over \$100 billion to Ukraine in the form of humanitarian and military aid.<sup>10</sup> The second way in which the U.S. has responded to the conflict is through economic sanctions. Since the invasion, the U.S. has deployed sanctions to isolate Russia from the global economic system, the most prevalent economic sanction being implemented in 2022, when the U.S. froze \$5 billion of Russian bank assets. Energy sanctions were also implemented, where in March of 2022, the U.S. banned crude oil and natural gas imports from

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<sup>8</sup> Erica Green and Zolan Kanno-Youngs, “U.S. Has ‘Nothing to Do’ with Ukraine War, Trump Says at G7 Summit,” *NY Times*, June 16, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/06/16/world/europe/trump-ukraine-war-g7.html>.

<sup>9</sup> Lama El Baz, Dina Smeltz, and Craig Kafura, “Americans Oppose Ceding the Donbas to Russia amid Push for Peace Deal,” *Globalaffairs.org*, 2026, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-oppose-ceding-donbas-russia-amid-push-peace-deal>.

<sup>10</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, “A Brief History of U.S. Foreign Aid,” *CFR Education* from the Council on Foreign Relations, April 28, 2023, <https://education.cfr.org/learn/reading/brief-history-us-foreign-aid>.

Russia. The sanctions aimed to reduce profit in Russian energy sectors, as well as dull Russian military capability.<sup>11</sup> Sanctions, however, are not unique to the Russo-Ukrainian war. In fact, the U.S. deploys and uses sanctions more than any other country in the world.<sup>12</sup> The U.S. has used sanctions against countries like Iran, North Korea, Syria, and Venezuela.<sup>14</sup> Economic sanctions are embedded in U.S. conflict response, the prevention of military campaigns, and the combating of human rights violations. The goal of sanctions is to punish and express dissatisfaction against the actions or behavior of another country that engages in these measures.<sup>13</sup>

#### IV. POLICY PROBLEM

##### A. Stakeholders

The primary stakeholders are Ukrainian and Russian civilians, who continue to face casualties, displacement, and infrastructure damage as drone and missile strikes persist.<sup>14</sup> The governments of Ukraine and Russia remain directly involved through military operations and negotiations, while international actors such as NATO, the European Union, and the United States continue

providing support to Ukraine through military aid, financial assistance, and diplomatic efforts.<sup>15</sup>

##### B. Risks of Indifference

If the conflict is not addressed, civilian casualties and displacement are likely to continue. The UN refugee agency reports that the war has caused one of the world's largest displacement crises, with millions of Ukrainians remaining displaced inside and outside the country.<sup>16</sup> Continued fighting also threatens homes, infrastructure, and access to essential services, increasing humanitarian needs across the region. Finally, prolonged conflict could make future peace negotiations more difficult and contribute to long-term instability in Europe.<sup>17</sup>

##### C. Nonpartisan Reasoning

Congressional Democrats have broadly backed continued military support for Ukraine, while Republican leadership has largely opposed new aid – though eighteen House Republicans broke with leadership in June 2026 to pass a \$1.3 billion security assistance bill, exposing growing fractures within the GOP.<sup>18</sup> Despite the divide, 67

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<sup>11</sup>Ivana Saric, Noah Berman, and Anshu Siripurapu, “Three Years of War in Ukraine: Are Sanctions against Russia Making a Difference? | Council on Foreign Relations,” Cfr.org, October 23, 2025, <https://www.cfr.org/articles/three-years-war-ukraine-are-sanctions-against-russia-making-difference>.

<sup>12</sup>Caroline Gray, “What Are Sanctions and How Do They Work? A History of US Economic Sanctions,” Institute for Global Affairs, May 23, 2023, <https://instituteforglobalaffairs.org/2023/05/what-are-sanctions-and-how-do-they-work-a-history-of-us-economic-sanctions/>.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey Schott, “US Economic Sanctions: Good Intentions, Bad Execution,” PIIE, March 2, 2016, <https://www.piie.com/commentary/speeches-papers/us-economic-sanctions-good-intentions-bad-execution>.

<sup>14</sup>UNHCR, “Ukraine Emergency,” UNHCR, June 2023, <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/ukraine-emergency>.

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<sup>15</sup> European Commission, “EU Solidarity with Ukraine,” European Commission, February 26, 2022, [https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-solidarity-ukraine\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/topics/eu-solidarity-ukraine_en).

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, “Ukraine Emergency,” UNHCR, June 2023, <https://www.unhcr.org/emergencies/ukraine-emergency>.

<sup>17</sup> IOM UN Migration, “Ukraine Crisis Response Plan 2026 | Global Crisis Response Platform,” Iom.int, 2026, <https://crisisresponse.iom.int/response/ukraine-crisis-response-plan-2026?>

<sup>18</sup> Miranda Jeyaretnam, “18 House Republicans Defy Party Leadership to Help Pass Pro-Ukraine Bill,” TIME (Time), June 5, 2026, <https://time.com/article/2026/06/05/house-republicans-bipartisan-ukraine-support-act-aid-russia-trump>.

percent of Americans oppose ceding Ukrainian territory to Russia.<sup>19</sup>

## V. POLICY OPTIONS

Several approaches are currently being proposed to find ways of reaching a sustainable settlement to the ongoing Ukraine crisis amidst front-line hostilities and a lack of progress in negotiations.

A possible approach already in play is the phased ceasefire framework centered around the “Coalition of the Willing,” an alliance of over thirty Western Countries that held their first meeting in Paris in January 2026 to outline security guarantees for Ukraine. According to the declaration of the Coalition of the Willing, the plan involves the establishment of a U.S. led ceasefire monitoring program and the possibility of deploying multinational troops under French and British command. However, the guarantees will be activated following the official declaration of a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine.<sup>20</sup> British PM Keir Starmer promised that both the UK and France would set up military centers in Ukraine and create secure storage centers for weapons, but Russia consistently rejected any deal involving the presence of NATO-linked forces in Ukraine, making the framework highly unlikely.

<sup>21</sup> Also, a crucial issue relates to territorial disputes,

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<sup>19</sup> Lama El Baz, Dina Smeltz, and Craig Kafura, “Americans Oppose Ceding the Donbas to Russia amid Push for Peace Deal,” *Globalaffairs.org*, 2026, <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/americans-oppose-ceding-donbas-russia-amid-push-peace-deal>.

<sup>20</sup> Nils Adler, “Ukraine’s Security Guarantees: What Are They and Why Might They Fall Short?,” *Al Jazeera*, January 26, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/26/ukraines-security-guarantees-what-are-they-and-why-might-they-fall-short>.

<sup>21</sup> Loïc Simonet, “The War in Ukraine: The Moment of Truth in 2026?,” *Austrian Institute for International Affairs*, January 2026,

as Russia refuses to give up its occupied areas in Ukraine, and Ukraine does not recognize Russian territorial claims, which remains a significant concern for both parties and needs urgent resolution.<sup>22</sup> Another possible option lies in continued economic sanctions and negotiation over the U.S.-Ukraine critical mineral deal made in April 2025, though critics warn that without renewed military aid and credible enforcement, economic diplomacy alone lacks the leverage to move the Kremlin toward true compromise.<sup>23</sup>

## VI. CONCLUSIONS

With violations of previous ceasefires and no structured enforcement method, the U.S. government should attach further security assistance to the implementation of a monitored ceasefire arrangement as opposed to just expressions of intentions, since the April 2026 Easter ceasefire agreement broke down almost immediately, with Ukraine's General Staff reporting more than 2,000 Russian violations within hours.<sup>24</sup> Congress should also refrain from cutting down the Prioritized Ukraine Requirements List where NATO allies have already provided over \$4.1 billion despite signals from U.S. officials that future funding should rely

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<https://www.oijp.ac.at/en/publications/the-war-in-ukraine-the-moment-of-truth-in-2026/>.

<sup>22</sup> Claire Mills, “Response to the US-Russia 28-Point Peace Plan for Ukraine,” *House of Commons Library*, November 30, 2025, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10411/>.

<sup>23</sup> Gracelin Baskaran and Meredith Schwartz, “What to Know about the Signed U.S.-Ukraine Minerals Deal,” *Csis.org*, May 1, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/what-know-about-signed-us-ukraine-minerals-deal>.

<sup>24</sup> Lucy Davalou and Lucy Davalou, “Russia and Ukraine Accuse Each Other of Violating Easter Ceasefire,” *euronews* (*euronews.com*), April 12, 2026, <https://www.euronews.com/2026/04/12/ukraine-and-russia-accuse-each-other-of-breaching-36-hour-orthodox-easter-ceasefire>.

on Europe.<sup>25</sup> Negotiators should not accept any agreement which does not provide for verifiable Ukraine defense systems following Kyiv's refusal to give up the fortified Donetsk "fortress belt."<sup>26</sup>

Continued violations may be expected despite resumed negotiations due to the collapse of the ceasefires in April and May this year after only a couple days due to mutual allegations.<sup>27</sup> The refusal of Russia to consider peacekeeping forces affiliated with NATO undermines the security of proposals put forward by the Coalition of the Willing.<sup>28</sup> Domestically, House Democrats' discharge petition requesting a vote on additional Ukraine aid demonstrates thinning congressional patience on both sides, which is a dynamic that is likely to intensify as funding debates continue ahead of the 2026 midterms.<sup>29</sup>

#### VII. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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<sup>25</sup> U.S. Congress, "Russia's War against Ukraine: Diplomatic Talks and U.S. Policy," Congress.gov, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IN12534>.

<sup>26</sup> U.S. Congress, "Russia's War against Ukraine: Diplomatic Talks and U.S. Policy," Congress.gov, 2025, <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IN12534>.

<sup>27</sup> AFP, "Ukraine, Russia Exchange Accusations over Easter Truce Violations," The Moscow Times, April 12, 2026, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2026/04/12/ukraine-russia-exchange-accusations-over-easter-truce-violations-a92477>.

<sup>28</sup> Nils Adler, "Ukraine's Security Guarantees: What Are They and Why Might They Fall Short?," Al Jazeera, January 26, 2026, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/1/26/ukraines-security-guarantees-what-are-they-and-why-might-they-fall-short>.

<sup>29</sup> Patrick Martin, "Democrats Force House Vote on Increased Military Aid to Ukraine," World Socialist Web Site, May 15, 2026, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2026/05/15/qfmm-m15.html>.

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