

Ukraine: 'We want genuine peace negotiations, not another "ceasefire" until the next invasion'

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The liberation of the southern port city of Kherson in mid-November represented an important victory in Ukraine's just war of resistance against Russian President Vladimir Putin's brutal invasion.

The recapture of the only major city seized by Russian forces since February 24 followed the liberation of large swathes of eastern Kharkiv Oblast since September and represents the most significant gain yet of the Ukrainian counter offensive, which began in August.

Kherson locals celebrated and cheered Ukrainian fighters as they entered the city and raised the nation's flag over Freedom Square on November 11. The images were a stark contrast to the courageous unarmed protests by locals against the arrival of Russia's occupying forces nine months ago, protests that were subsequently suppressed.

While fighting continues in the Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk oblasts, and Russia tries to hold off further Ukrainian advances in Kharkiv and Kherson, Putin has sought to demoralise the Ukrainian people through a mass campaign of aerial destruction that has damaged the majority of Ukraine's energy infrastructure amid the cold winter.

US open to negotiations

In this context, an increasing number of voices from the United States and Russia have emerged calling for negotiations.

On the US side, the growing cost of the war — in terms of financial aid and depleted military stockpiles — along with pressure from European leaders facing domestic turmoil over rising energy prices, [has motivated desires](#) for negotiations.

The most notable of these voices has been US Army General Mark Milley, the highest-ranking US military officer. In a [speech](#) to The Economic Club of New York on November 9, Milley said: "There has to be a mutual recognition that military victory, in the true sense of the word, is maybe not achievable through military means, so therefore you need to turn to other means."

Milley said a window of opportunity for ending the conflict could come when the front lines stabilised in winter: "When there's an opportunity to negotiate when peace can be achieved, seize it."

The comments came just days after US President Joe Biden's top national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, made an unannounced visit to Kyiv. Meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky,

he raised “the need for a diplomatic resolution to the war”, according to a November 10 *NBC News* [report](#).

Russia seeks ceasefire

Milley’s comments also came as news filtered out of “confidential conversations” between the US and Russia.

The *Wall Street Journal* [reported](#) on November 7 that Sullivan has been in ongoing talks with Putin’s foreign policy adviser Yuri Ushakov and Russia’s Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev to guard “against the risk of escalation”.

Moreover, according to [AP News](#), CIA Director Bill Burns and Russia’s SVR spy agency chief Sergei Naryshkin met on November 14 in the “highest-ranking face-to-face engagement between US and Russian officials” since the start of the war.

The meeting was hosted in Turkey, whose president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, after an approach by the US, “signalled a willingness to help broker a deal” *NBC News* reported.

Back in mid-October, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said his country was “willing to engage with the United States or with Turkey on ways to end the war”. Absent was any mention of willingness to engage with Ukraine.

A week after Sullivan’s visit to Kyiv, Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said Russia was “still open to negotiations, we have never refused them, we are ready to conduct them — taking, of course, into account the realities being established at the moment”.

By “realities being established”, Zakharova was referring to Russia’s declared annexation of the Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia oblasts following sham referendums organised by its invading forces in September.

At the same time, Russia has faced huge losses in terms of troop numbers and military hardware, and is confronted with rising demoralisation among soldiers on the frontline and growing opposition to the war at home.

Zelensky’s peace proposal

Responding to Sullivan’s calls for a “diplomatic resolution to the war”, Zelensky emphasised, according to *NBC News*, “that Ukraine had pushed for diplomacy with Russia in the initial months of the war and only took talks with [Putin] off the table following documented atrocities and alleged war crimes that the official said had made talks with Moscow in the near term unpalatable to the Ukrainian public”.

But Zelensky has also warned that, behind talks of negotiations, “Russia is now looking for a short truce, a respite to regain strength”. [Addressing](#) the Halifax International Security Forum on November 18, Zelensky added: “Someone may call [a ceasefire] the war’s end. But such a respite will only worsen the situation.”

“Immoral compromises will only lead to new blood,” he continued, noting an “honest peace” can only be achieved by “the complete demolition of Russian aggression”.

[Addressing](#) the G20 summit on November 15, Zelensky laid out Ukraine’s proposal for peace: “To liberate our entire land from [Russia], we will still have to fight for a while longer ... However, if

victory will be ours in any case — and we are sure of that — then shouldn't we try to implement our formula for peace to save thousands of lives and protect the world from further destabilisations?"

Zelensky's formula is based on a ten-point plan that addresses: radiation and nuclear safety; food security; energy security; release of all prisoners and deported persons; implementation of the United Nations Charter and restoration of Ukraine's territorial integrity and the world order; withdrawal of Russian troops and cessation of hostilities; restoration of justice; countering ecocide; preventing escalation; and confirmation of the end of the war.

Zelensky said negotiations had "to be public, not behind the scenes" and that "this aggressive Russian war [had] to end justly and on the basis of the UN Charter and international law".

"If Russia opposes our peace formula, you will see that it only wants war."

Ukrainian socialists

In an [article](#) published on the website of Ukrainian socialist group Social Movement, Denys Bondar and Zakhar Popovych outlined their organisation's view on prospects for peace negotiations.

"All wars, of course, end in negotiations. Ukraine has always clearly emphasised that it has no intention to march on Moscow and force a full and unconditional surrender."

But they note that "there is a consensus in Ukrainian society that to achieve peace it is necessary to expel the Russian army from the country (by destroying it, if possible) and to 'demilitarise' the Russian Federation, at least until it can no longer shell peaceful Ukrainian cities and blackmail us by depriving us of electricity, water and heating..."

Furthermore, they add, those opposing "some territorial concessions for the sake of peace" has risen to 87% of the population, with the "overwhelming majority of respondents in all regions of Ukraine" and "representatives of all major ethnic and linguistic groups" included in this group, according to a recent Kyiv Institute of Sociology poll.

"Those people in the US, Europe, and the world who truly want peace talks to begin must, at a minimum, demand an immediate end to the destruction of Ukraine's critical infrastructure by Russian missiles and the restoration of normal electricity and heat to the population..."

"Instead of wasting time talking about what the world needs to convince Zelensky of, it would be better to first convince the governments of the world to stop buying Russian oil and gas and provide Ukraine with missile defence systems and at least a couple thousand industrial transformers to restore normal electricity, water and heat supply..."

"It cannot be ruled out that if the Russians publicly offered to discuss a peace plan that would include the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine and the prospects of restoring the territorial integrity of the country, Ukrainians might agree to some negotiations.

"But no proposals that include the withdrawal of Russian troops are currently being voiced. *De facto*, the Russians 'offer negotiations' only on the cessation of the Ukrainian counteroffensive until they can accumulate forces..."

Summarising the stance of the majority of Ukrainians, they write: "There is no certainty that Russian authorities even understand that Zelensky cannot simply sign whatever he wants, and that even Biden cannot force Zelensky to sign an agreement that will not be approved by the majority of Ukrainians..."

“Ukrainians want peace, not another ‘ceasefire’ that will last until the next invasion. Campaigning for peace is actually being conducted even in mainstream Ukrainian media, but trust in peace negotiations and lasting peace are impossible without public discussion of its terms.

“Editor-in-chief of Ukrainian *Pravda*, Sevgil Musaeva, a Ukrainian of Crimean Tatar origin — despite what the postponement of the Crimea issue means for her personally — does not reject negotiations, but calls for a public formulation of fair peace terms, because if ‘Ukrainian society does not feel justice, any agreements are doomed from the beginning’

“We, Ukrainian socialists, must now watch carefully to ensure no one forgets that peace negotiations must be public and only public, and only on terms acceptable to Ukrainians. Only in this way can we count on a just and lasting peace.”

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