

Türkiye: The Impact of Türkiye's Peace-oriented Approach to the Russia–Ukraine War on the War and the Region

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Abstract: This article aims to analyze the reasons behind the war initiated by Russia against Ukraine as part of its efforts to re-establish control over its former spheres of influence after 2000 and Türkiye's initiatives in response to these developments. One of the reasons the war rapidly evolved into a Europe–Russia conflict is Russia's strong objection to Ukraine's desire to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Russia's stance is a cause of concern for Europe. This study discusses the historical, social, political, and economic dimensions of the Ukraine War and explains the multifaceted nature of its impact. Mediation efforts and diplomatic initiatives are crucial for resolving the ongoing war. As a NATO member capable of maintaining communication with both parties, Türkiye has intensified its efforts to end the war. Despite ongoing mediation efforts and a peaceful approach to the issue, the problem remains unresolved. This study seeks to answer what needs to be done to achieve lasting and sustainable peace in the Russia-Ukraine War and whether Türkiye's efforts will be sufficient to reach a resolution.

Keywords: Russia, Ukraine, Türkiye, Europe, Istanbul Agreement, peace talks.

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Introduction

During the Soviet era, eastern Ukraine was designated as an industrial region, leading to the settlement of large numbers of Russians in the area and altering its demographic structure. Although Ukraine declared its independence on August 24, 1991, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the country was governed by administrations politically aligned with Russia until 2014, and its foreign policy was shaped accordingly (Acer, 2022). On February 21, 2014, Viktor Yanukovich, the last pro-Russian Ukrainian president, was removed from power (Halhalli, 2022; Candan & Halhalli, 2022). After Yanukovich fled to Russia, Ukraine began to shift toward the Western bloc and rebuilt its foreign policy accordingly. This shift in Ukraine's foreign policy led to increased tensions with Russia (Sönmez et al., 2015).

Russia aims to protect its security by eliminating the West's military presence in Ukraine (Mearsheimer, 2014). In contrast, the West seeks to position Ukraine as a forward outpost against any potential Russian threat. Due to its strategic location, Ukraine has become a competitive arena since the day it gained independence. The Western bloc's "containment policy" toward Russia and Russia's "near abroad doctrine" have occasionally led to confrontations between the two sides.

The invasion of Crimea on February 27, 2014, effectively marked the beginning of the Ukraine War. Following Russia's annexation of Crimea, anti-Ukrainian separatist sentiment grew stronger and sparked protests in the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in eastern Ukraine, where the Russian population is concentrated. Russia escalated tensions in this region, known as Donbas, and assisted the protesters. In May 2014, these provinces also held referendums to declare independence from Ukraine and join Russia. The protests manifested as demands to secede from Ukraine and join Russia, and independent republics, the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, were declared. Hot conflicts began between Ukraine and the separatists, escalating the situation into an international crisis. In order to stop the conflicts and declare a ceasefire, representatives of Russia, Ukraine, and the Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic came together and signed the Minsk Protocol. Although this protocol aimed to establish a ceasefire, it was unsuccessful in stopping the conflict (Candan & Halhalli, 2022).

Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who came to power on April 21, 2019, made serious efforts toward Ukraine's accession to NATO. In response, Russia claimed that Ukraine's choice paved the way for an attack on itself, that it was under threat, and demanded that Ukraine end this rapprochement (Güler, 2022). When Ukraine rejected this demand, Russia first recognized the Luhansk and Donetsk People's Republics as independent states on February 21, 2022. The following day, it announced the termination of the Minsk Protocol, which contained ceasefire provisions (Acer, 2022). In a televised speech on February 24, 2022, Vladimir Putin clearly indicated that he viewed the West's support for Ukraine as a threat to Russia (Fisher, 2022). Between 2014 and 2022, Ukraine struggled against separatist movements supported by Russia and was shaken by the Russian invasion that began on February 24, 2022 (Güneş, 2022).

Due to attacks on civilians and cities in Ukraine, these conflicts have taken on an existential nature. Concerns inherited from the Cold War era created a security dilemma, leading Russia to conclude that the West—by supporting Ukraine—intended to weaken Russia, seize its assets, exclude it from international institutions, and pursue regime change (Benjamin & Davies, 2022). Expecting an easy victory, Russia instead encountered unexpected Ukrainian resistance and suffered losses. Moreover, it was subjected to severe military, political, and economic sanctions imposed by the Western alliance led by the United States (US) and Europe, resulting in Russia's isolation from the international system of states. Although the US and European powers were not actively involved in the war, they provided Ukraine with significant military and economic assistance, helping it resist the occupation. Russia's suspension of natural gas sales to European countries triggered a serious energy crisis in Europe (Bağış, 2022). Russia failed to achieve the expected results from the war it initiated and was subjected to heavy economic sanctions in response.

However, despite the massive military assistance provided to Ukraine by Western powers, the war and occupation did not end until the end. Europe, which largely relied on NATO and US protection during the Cold War, has reached the point of depletion of its military stockpiles. Currently, European powers aim to prevent the ongoing war on the European continent from spreading to other countries within the continent, resolve the crisis caused by energy sanctions, and end the war after inflicting maximum damage on Russia (Özdemir, 2022). Ukrainian President Zelenskyy stated that Ukrainians would not cede their land to invaders. While their warfighting capabilities compete on the ground, Türkiye, pursuing a policy of balance, has maintained its relations with both Russia and Ukraine since the beginning of the war and has striven to resolve the dispute through mediation between them.

This study examines the historical perspective of Russia-Ukraine relations and addresses the factors that escalated the dispute, leading to conflict. It explains the stance of Europe and the US on the issue and focuses on Türkiye's approach and the negotiations conducted within the scope of its mediation efforts.

Historical Background

The founding of the Russian Empire is generally considered to have begun with the establishment of the first Russian principality in Kiev in 882 (Sethe, 1968). Therefore, Kiev is regarded as the center of the formation of Russian civilization and is perceived as the heart of Slavic civilization (Kondratenko, 2016). The historical tensions between Ukraine and Russia date back centuries. Because the lands east of the Dnieper River, which flows through the heart of the country, were generally dominated by Russians, while those to the west were dominated by various Western nations, the population in the eastern part of the country tends to feel closer to Russia, while those in the west feel closer to the Western nations. Based on this, Russia argues that the Dnieper River should serve as the border between Russia and Ukraine.

The root causes of these problems lie in a complex mix of cultural, economic and political factors. From the late 18th century until the 1917 Russian Revolution, Ukraine was part of the Russian Empire and was subjected to significant political and cultural pressures (Kappeler, 2014). During the Soviet period, policies of Russification in Ukraine mandated Russian as the language of education, the press, and the bureaucracy, while Sovietization policies marginalized non-Russian populations. Historical, cultural, and political factors have led to disagreements between the two countries and increased the risk of conflict. Western Ukraine, which adopted Ukrainian as its language and belonged to Central European culture, confronted Eastern Ukraine, which spoke Russian and considered itself ethnically Russian. While the population in western Ukraine tended to support pro-Western policies, those in eastern Ukraine saw themselves as closer to Russia (Penkala et al., 2020).

After Ukraine declared independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it was expected to develop bilateral relations with Russia as independent and equal states, influenced by their shared history and past ties. However, because Russia viewed Ukraine as part of its sphere of influence, Ukraine was perceived as part of Russia (Masters, 2023). Despite declaring independence, Ukraine did not achieve a fully stable political structure, resulting in a dilemma regarding its foreign policy orientation. Accordingly, Ukraine oscillated between opposing “pro-Western” and “pro-Russian” foreign policy perspectives (Sakwa, 2022). To balance Russia, it sought to strengthen its relations with the US and NATO. Indeed, President Clinton’s foreign policy goals, which included controlling the east-west and north-south energy and trade in Eurasia, placed Ukraine in a crucial position for the US (Torbakov, 2001; European Commission, 2021).

While Russia acknowledges that things will not be the same as in the Soviet Union, it continues to pursue its ambition of rebuilding its influence (Nixey, 2012). Ukraine, with its newly acquired sovereignty, was forced to navigate a delicate balance between establishing its own identity and maintaining relations with Russia (Cui et al., 2023). Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Ukraine became the world’s third-largest nuclear power. Russia’s claim that the nuclear weapons in regional countries should be returned to it was also supported by Western countries. As a strong gesture of goodwill to improve relations with the West, particularly the US, Ukraine agreed to relinquish its nuclear warheads (Bilener, 2007). The Budapest Memorandum was signed on December 5, 1994 (Lawless, 2025). Under this agreement, Ukraine renounced the world’s third-largest nuclear arsenal, inherited from the former Soviet Union, and transferred all its nuclear warheads to Russia (Büyükkıncı, 2004). The signatories of the memorandum pledged to respect Ukraine’s territorial integrity and the inviolability of its borders and refrain from the use or threat of military force (Budjeryn & Bunn, 2020). Ukraine’s surrender of its nuclear weapons and their derivatives, relying on law and the principle of *pacta sunt servanda* to secure its sovereignty, and its subsequent withdrawal from its territory due to its defenselessness, rather than its own sovereignty, are questionable issues. Russia broke its promise not to attack or interfere with Ukraine after it received nuclear weapons.

The era of Vladimir Putin marks a period in which Russia entered a phase of recovery, significantly regained its strength, and began asserting itself on the international stage (Halidov, 2014). Russia, on the rise with Putin, began taking steps to realize its ambitions of becoming a great power, justifying itself to regain its former glory (Askeroğlu, 2020). Consequently, it viewed the growing Western influence in Ukraine as a factor that weakened its claim to global leadership. However, the West cannot be said to have remained silent in the face of Russia's moves, as NATO, just as it did during the Cold War, began implementing containment and encirclement policies against Russia.

Factors Escalating the Conflict

With its “near abroad doctrine,” announced in 1993, Russia declared a vital area of interest in its regional security and economic policies, particularly encompassing the states that gained independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, adopting an Eurasianist approach (Sönmez, 2010). The Ukraine crisis, which began in 2013, triggered a clash between pro-Russian separatists and the Kiev government, leading to Russia's annexation of Crimea. The seizure of Crimea by Russia is one of the most significant causes of tensions between the two countries. Russia claims that the Ukrainian government committed genocide against people of Russian origin, thus entitling Crimea and the Donbas region to “self-determination” (Halhalli, 2022). The acceleration of pro-Russian separatist movements in the region and the ongoing conflict, fueled by humanitarian crises, further complicated Russian-Ukrainian relations and drew international attention (Marandici & Leşanu, 2021). Ukraine, however, maintains that the asserted right to self-determination applies only to peoples under colonial rule, that this right does not grant the right to secede, and that otherwise, the principle of “state integrity” would be violated (Acer, 2022). Although Moscow claims to have the right to protect Russians on Ukrainian territory, it cannot change the fact that Ukraine is an independent and sovereign state recognized by the UN.

On February 21, 2022, Russia recognized the so-called administrations of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (Korovkin & Makarin, 2023), which Russian-backed separatists established in April 2014. Following this recognition, Russian military troops entered both the regions. Russia's military intervention escalated into a protracted and multifaceted war that resulted in thousands of deaths, civilian displacement, and widespread humanitarian crises (da Silva et al., 2023). Russia's occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the subsequent large-scale military attacks it launched against Ukraine in February 2022 were not spontaneous developments. It is important to note that the tensions between Moscow and Kiev began with the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the subsequent declaration of independence by the Ukrainian Parliament on August 24, 1991. With Ukraine gaining independence, tensions and rivalries between the West and Russia continued within Ukraine. In the internal political struggle between the

pro-Russian and pro-Western political tendencies that emerged, Ukraine's shift towards pro-Western policies led to the possibility of NATO membership being on the agenda.

Putin argues that Ukraine does not exist as a separate country and that Ukrainian identity is artificial and a product of external forces (Bothmann, 2022), while arguing that Ukraine comprises historical and cultural parts that rightfully belong to Russia (Sönmez et al., 2015). Ukraine is viewed as a buffer zone that provides strategic depth and defense against enemy attacks for Russia (Alcaro, 2015). Ukraine's geopolitical position is one of the key reasons behind the war. Ukraine allowed competing external powers to pursue their own interest-driven agendas, pushing the country to the brink of a violent civil war. Russia, the European Union, and the United States all actively participated in this internal competition (Liu & Shu, 2023). Therefore, the Russia-Ukraine conflict threatens the security of these two countries and significantly impacts the Black Sea Basin countries regionally.

The major move in the escalating crisis was the Trump administration's decision to sell defensive weapons to Kiev in 2017. This process raised the question of "defense against what?" from Russia's perspective (The Economist, 2022). Neither side was willing to discuss these issues. Russia's insistence on its pressure policies and Ukraine's determination to improve its relations with the West escalated the dispute. Russia's deployment of approximately 180,000 troops to the Ukrainian border in April 2021, particularly in Crimea and the Donbas region, for military exercises, and NATO's increased deployment of troops and weapons to the region due to the Ukraine crisis led to escalating tensions (BBC News Türkçe, 2021). Russia perceives NATO's military deployments and expansionist policies as threats and containment policies (Harris et al., 2022).

The United States' policy of supporting Ukraine continued under the Biden administration, further strengthening ties between the two countries. This strengthened relationship was formalized in November 2021 through the signing of the significant "US-Ukraine Strategic Partnership Charter" by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba (Gray, 2023). In December 2021, the Russian government laid out its "red lines" when it made demands of Western countries, including a legally binding guarantee that NATO would not expand further eastward (Statista, 2025). On February 21, 2022, Putin announced Russia's recognition of the independence of Donetsk and Luhansk in the Donbas region (BBC, 2022) and immediately sent troops into the area. This move can be interpreted as the first signal from Russia indicating the initiation of war. Acting out of concerns over Ukraine's efforts to join NATO and the alliance's eastward expansion, Russia launched an attack on Ukrainian territory on February 24, 2022. This was a continuation of the 2014 invasion of Crimea. Russia invoked the right of peoples to self-determination to legitimize its attacks within the framework of international law.

Russia regarded Ukraine's potential NATO membership as a security threat, claiming that it was pursuing a justified war. Putin issued a stern warning to Ukraine and NATO countries, stating that "If Ukraine joins NATO, a war will break out between Russia and

NATO” (Bag, 2022). The effective use of soft power diplomacy by European states and the expansion of Ukraine’s multifaceted cooperation with the West have led to a redefinition of power balances. The growing security dilemma stemming from Ukraine’s close ties with Western countries led Russia to invest more in its military power and adopt aggressive strategies. One of the most important reasons underlying Russia’s aggressive initiatives is the West’s effective use of its growing control mechanisms over the region (Cafruny et al., 2023). In a political arena where the United States, NATO, and the European Union seek to expand their spheres of influence, Ukraine’s alignment with these Western power centers formed the foundation of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The Ukrainian people have rejected Russia’s patronage. The encouragement of Ukraine’s efforts to turn westward by the EU, NATO, and the US led Russia to adopt a more aggressive policy toward Ukraine.

In his February 2022 speech, Putin set forth several conditions for ending the war. These included Ukraine abandoning its desire to join NATO, recognizing the annexation of Crimea, recognizing the independence of the Donetsk and Luhansk People’s Republics, demilitarizing Ukraine, and granting Russian the status of a second official language. However, the emergence of new problems throughout the conflict made a solution increasingly difficult. In particular, Russia’s war crimes against civilians, its displacement of civilians, and its involvement in large-scale material damage, along with Ukraine’s interventions in Donbass and attacks on Russian territory, are increasingly pushing both sides away from a solution (Miall, 2023).

The Stance of Europe and the US

The Russia-Ukraine conflict is not merely a regional issue but also one with global dimensions. The importance of international borders, the principle of state sovereignty, and the post-Cold War European security order are being tested by this conflict (Galeotti, 2018). Although the Russia-Ukraine war is fundamentally a geopolitical and regional conflict, it has profound economic, military, and political implications for the wider region. Although there are differences among European countries regarding the severity of their responses to Russia’s invasion, there is a general consensus that Ukraine is right. The European Union views the attack on Ukraine not only as an invasion of a sovereign state and a challenge to international law and the existing order, but also as a direct security concern and a threat to democracy. Russia, unable to develop weapons technology after the Cold War, realized too late that it would be forced to fight the US, the EU, and especially the UK, due to its weakness in intelligence. Russia transformed media, food, and energy resources into tools of pressure against European countries. It also used its deterrent weapons and nuclear arsenal as instruments of threat, attempting to influence European countries’ stance in the war.

On February 21, 2022, the US issued Executive Order 14065, prohibiting certain transactions with Russia and blocking the assets of certain individuals (The White House,

2022). Immediately following the invasion, US President Joe Biden stated that Russia was responsible for the ensuing destruction and pledged to take action with its allies against the Moscow government (Euronews, 2022). Most of the Biden government's sanctions were aimed at undermining Russia's ability to finance its military capabilities (Macias, 2021). Indeed, the US imposed the most sanctions, issuing 3,152 (Castellum.AI, 2023).

It is evident that Ukraine cannot fight Russia without the US's economic and military support (Oruç, 2025). Trump approached the issue during his second term with the promise of ending the war in a single day. Ukrainian President Zelensky, invited to the White House for the so-called peace agreement, refuses to sign the agreement transferring rare earths and precious metals to the US, leaving the White House feeling humiliated. Thus, it became clear that the promises to end the war in Ukraine were nothing more than rhetoric.

Since the onset of the Russia–Ukraine war, the German government has taken a clear stance, strongly condemning the attacks on Ukraine. In response to Russia's attacks, Germany and its European Union partners adopted a comprehensive sanctions package. The government pledged full support to Ukraine and approved direct arms deliveries to the country. Chancellor Olaf Scholz held Russian President Vladimir Putin directly responsible for the attack, calling it “Putin's war” (Deutschland.de, 2022).

France quickly moved away from its traditional pro-Russia stance and signed a security pact with Ukraine in February 2024 (Taskin, 2022). Macron stated that France would continue to support Ukraine with military, financial, and humanitarian aid until victory was achieved under terms acceptable to Kiev (Rahman, 2022).

Similar to Germany, the United Kingdom supported Ukraine from the outset of the war and strongly condemned Russia's actions. Furthermore, the UK sought to capitalize on Russia's failure to achieve a resolution of the conflict. Then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that “the poor performance of Russian equipment will force countries to reassess their defense contracts and provide the UK with the opportunity to sell weapons and equipment to countries relying on Soviet-era arsenals” (Topchi et al., 2022). His successor, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, declared on November 15, 2022, that Russia had become a pariah state, isolated from the international community, and emphasized the necessity of ending this barbaric war (Elgot, 2022). The UK stated that the purpose of its sanctions against Russia was to halt its actions. While the UK does not admit it, it is believed to have played a direct role in the unconventional warfare technique employed in the destruction of the Crimean (Kerch) bridge, which Ukraine could not have achieved by itself (Adams, 2022).

In March 2021, the EU decided to finance arms shipments to Ukraine through the European Peace Fund, which it defined as off-budget (TRT Haber, 2022). EU countries unanimously agreed to a joint shipment of lethal weapons to Ukraine (Bertoncini, 2023). Europe, aiming to weaken Russia, refrained from providing Ukraine with weapons that would guarantee a decisive victory. However, in response to ongoing developments, the EU

and Ukraine signed the “EU–Ukraine Partnership Agreement,” which aimed to support Ukraine (Pfeil, 2015). Additionally, in November 2022, the EU launched a mission to train 15,000 Ukrainian soldiers.

Although the EU and the US imposed sanctions against Russia in every domain, they also declared that they would not intervene directly in the war, effectively leaving the timeline for ending the conflict open. As Soviet-made weapons held by former Warsaw Pact members, now NATO allies, were transferred to Ukraine, a new market and testing ground emerged for the Western defense industry. However, the Western-sourced weapons systems provided to Ukraine failed to produce the expected results because of a lack of necessary training. For example, Ukraine was unable to achieve the desired efficiency with its Leopard tanks and F-16 fighter jets. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) made several decisions to prevent further deterioration of the situation between Russia and Ukraine, but these decisions did not go beyond the framework of the Minsk Protocol.

The EU Council declared that Ukraine’s sovereignty was violated, that Russia must immediately withdraw its troops from Ukrainian territory, and that the referendum decision constituted a breach of the Ukrainian Constitution (European Council, Council of the European Union, 2025). The sanctions imposed by the EU against Russia became one of the key measures aimed at pressuring Russia to alter its behavior and respect Ukraine’s sovereignty (Caprile & Delivorias, 2023). The measures taken against Russia under the new sanctions by the 28 EU member states included individual and economic sanctions, economic restrictions on the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, media restrictions, and various diplomatic measures (European Union, 2025). The EU further announced that no arms would be sold to Russia, certain technologies used in the oil and gas sectors would be restricted, and several Russian banks would be excluded from the EU’s financial system. It also stated that the number of individuals in President Putin’s inner circle who were subject to travel bans and asset freezes would increase (Şeker & Hacıferoğlu, 2025). The sanctions significantly impacted the Russian economy, particularly in the energy and finance sectors. While the primary goal of the sanctions imposed on Russia was to end the war by causing Russia’s economic collapse, they were not very effective in changing Russia’s policies. European states primarily approached the situation through trade and economic relations. In this context, their dependence on Russia, particularly for natural gas, ensured the continued existence of Russian regional authority.

The Impact of Türkiye’s Approach on War and the Region

Since the early 2000s, Türkiye has been deepening its relations with many countries, particularly those in its immediate region, within the framework of stability diplomacy and in line with the principle of equal sovereignty. Türkiye aims to end ongoing conflicts, address disputes through solution-oriented mechanisms, and ensure the preservation of regional peace.

In the international system, the responsibility for “maintaining international peace and security” is assigned to the UN Security Council under Article 1 of the UN Charter (United Nations, 1945). However, because Russia is a permanent member of the Security Council, the council cannot make decisions that will stop Russia in Ukraine. During a period when the UN is unable to effectively fulfill its role, Türkiye’s peace-oriented initiatives gain particular significance. In this regard, Türkiye aims to develop a solution plan acceptable to all parties in terms of its mediation activities.

For Türkiye, the Russia–Ukraine War has emerged as one of the most significant challenges among recent crises, as it seeks to maintain its special relationship with Russia while preserving its alignment with the Western bloc. While Türkiye has not ignored its NATO membership, it appears unwilling to abandon its interests in the region. Türkiye is a mid-sized power seeking to strengthen its independent role, enhance its prestige, and expand its role regionally and globally by establishing a balance between Ukraine and Russia (Pearson, 2022). From the outset of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, Türkiye adopted a stance against the war and supported Ukraine’s territorial integrity. However, it has also been prudent to avoid direct conflict with Russia (Cook, 2022). Türkiye expressed its respect for Ukraine’s territorial integrity and officially declared its non-recognition of the annexation. During this period, it pursued a balancing strategy that aligned with its regional security concerns and global interactions, and conducted its relations with Ukraine and Russia accordingly. Furthermore, the US, EU, Canada, and Australia did not participate in the sanctions imposed on Russia, maintaining political, economic, and military relations with both countries. While the US and Western actors exacerbated the crisis with anti-Russian rhetoric, Türkiye adopted a more moderate stance and sought to establish a constructive dialogue with both sides, aimed at ending the crisis and violence.

Türkiye’s balancing policy, carefully maintained without distancing itself from either side as it seeks to contribute to resolving the Russia–Ukraine conflict, has enhanced its significance in the international arena. Türkiye’s foreign policy vision is described on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ website as “while protecting our country’s interests in the turbulent regional and international environment we find ourselves in, our foreign policy aims to make conditions conducive to sustainable peace and development, contributing to the establishment of a zone of peace, prosperity, and stability in our region” (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). Furthermore, according to President Erdoğan’s assessment, “Türkiye, which plays an active role in regional and global crises with its approach that serves solutions, peace, and stability, is also making intense efforts in diplomacy to establish peace between Russia and Ukraine” (Akan, 2022).

Türkiye can draw on its cultural ties with the Crimean Tatars in Ukraine and its shared history with Russia, using these elements as instruments of soft power to promote mediation, dialogue, and mutual understanding (Isaacs & Polese, 2016). Possessing historical, cultural, and strategic links with both Russia and Ukraine, Türkiye is not a party to the conflict. Accordingly, it has pursued a neutral stance rather than an interest-driven policy and

maintained its impartiality. By balancing the needs and concerns of both parties, Türkiye aims to contribute to the emergence of a fair and sustainable resolution to this conflict.

To prevent the crisis from escalating further, Türkiye, positioning itself as a neutral arbiter with strong relations with both Russia and Ukraine, called on the parties to engage in mediation in November 2021. Before this initiative could yield concrete results, the issue of transit rights in the Black Sea came to the forefront. Türkiye assumed a crucial role in the geopolitical and geoeconomic future of the Black Sea during the Russia-Ukraine War (Demir, 2019). Geopolitically, the Black Sea serves as a vital maritime route connecting Türkiye with Russia, Ukraine, and other coastal states. With the escalation of the war, the importance of the Bosphorus and the Montreux Convention (1936) became apparent. The Montreux Convention, which restricts the presence of navies of states without coasts in the Black Sea, grants Türkiye significant control over access to the Black Sea via its straits (Kaplan, 2016). Bound by this convention, Türkiye maintains a delicate balance between its NATO commitments and obligations under the agreement. In this regard, Türkiye closed the straits to warships in February 2022, in accordance with Article 19 of the Montreux Convention (Resmî Gazete, 1936), thereby helping to prevent the further expansion of the war.

Peace negotiations between the parties began on February 28, 2022, when the Russian and Ukrainian delegations met in Belarus. In March 2022, the delegations held several additional meetings at the Belarusian border, but no progress was made. Although previous talks failed to yield positive results, Türkiye appears to have the potential to bring the parties together and offer solutions due to its neighboring position with both warring countries, its role as a third party outside the war, and its neutral foreign policy. Indeed, at the joint request of the parties, Türkiye was asked to mediate. On March 10, 2022, within the scope of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, an opportunity emerged for negotiations at the level of foreign ministers for the first time, with the aim of ending the war.

A trilateral meeting of foreign ministers from Türkiye, Russia, and Ukraine was held in Antalya on March 10, 2022. The significance of this meeting lies in the success of bringing the parties together at the same table. During this meeting, Çavuşoğlu had the opportunity to listen to both sides and observe their demands and needs (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022a). Third-party analysis of conflicts is crucial for shaping a collaborative dialogue environment for conflict resolution purposes. However, no concrete solution was reached during the Antalya meetings (BBC, 2022).

In the same month, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy requested Ankara to convey his request to Russia to hold talks in Antalya or Istanbul. The parties met in Istanbul on March 29, 2022. In this regard, Türkiye succeeded in bringing the parties together once again, first at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum and then at the Istanbul Talks (Dolmabahçe) (BBC News Türkçe, 2022). After the meeting, Turkish Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu stated that “a consensus and a common understanding were reached on certain issues,” adding, “Today’s talks, as in the previous ones, are a sign of the trust both parties place in Türkiye. We are fully aware of this trust and our responsibilities. We will continue our efforts, in coordination

with the international community, to stop the bloodshed, establish a ceasefire, and achieve lasting peace” (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022b).

Following the negotiations in Istanbul, the Ukrainian side prepared a document containing its demands, which it initialed and conveyed to Russia. In this document, a ten-point peace plan was proposed to the Russian side, outlining principles that could form the basis of a possible future written agreement between Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine stated that, in exchange for international security guarantees, it would accept neutrality and refrain from joining any alliance. It added that it would not host foreign troops or bases and would not conduct military exercises on its territory without the consent of the guarantor powers. Ukraine also expressed its desire to see a group of guarantor powers comprising 11 countries, including Türkiye (Russia, Great Britain, China, the United States, France, Germany, Canada, Italy, Poland, and Israel). In this regard, Ukraine’s wish to include Türkiye among the guarantors is significant (Meduza, 2022).

To avoid jeopardizing a potential ceasefire agreement, it was decided that certain issues would not be discussed in the initial stage of the negotiations. These issues included Crimea, the Donbas region controlled by pro-Russian separatists who had unilaterally declared independence, and the recognition of Russian as an official language in Ukraine. Ukrainian officials suggested that, should a deadlock arise over these red lines at this stage, Türkiye should step in using its personal relationships and acting as a party they could “consult.” This proposal was welcomed by Russia (Göksedef, 2022). The Ukrainian side stated that a referendum emerged as a prominent option for the disputed regions, emphasizing that any vote must be conducted peacefully and without coercion. They added that the results of the talks were sufficient to pave the way for negotiations at the leaders’ level (Tarihi, 2022). This laid the groundwork for a leadership-level meeting to finalize the agreement.

While hopes for stopping the war were further strengthened during the negotiations in Istanbul in April 2022, Western media sources announced the discovery of numerous civilian bodies in Bucha, northwest of Kiev, where Russian forces had withdrawn. The President of Ukraine visited the city and accused the Russian forces of genocide and war crimes. Western governments largely agreed with this assessment (Garner, 2023). In contrast, Russia claimed that the incident was a staged demonstration planned by Ukraine and that it was carried out to blame Russia (Hu & Wang, 2025). Following this event, the results achieved in the Istanbul negotiations, which produced significant progress between Russia and Ukraine, were shelved for the time being. The peace talks, which began in Istanbul in March 2022, halted in April.

Russia’s refusal to allow commercial ships carrying grain to depart from Ukrainian ports has raised concerns about a potential global food crisis (United Nations, 2022). With Türkiye’s initiative, the Black Sea Grain Initiative was signed in Istanbul on July 22, 2022, between Ukraine, Russia, the UN, and Türkiye. The agreement provides for the security and monitoring of shipments by a coordination center to be established in Istanbul and stipulates that the cargoes of ships using the grain corridor will be inspected at designated

points in Türkiye with Russia's participation (Deniz Haber Ajansı, 2022). Türkiye's initiatives regarding the grain agreement are crucial for preventing a global food crisis and ensuring its food security.

Türkiye's diplomatic success as a mediator in the Russia–Ukraine war was realized through the exchange of Russian and Ukrainian prisoners of war. As a result of Türkiye's ongoing dialogue with Russia and Ukraine (Kudrytski, 2022), 215 Ukrainian prisoners of war were released on September 22, 2022, through President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's mediation. More than 2,000 prisoners have been exchanged since the beginning of the Russia–Ukraine war (Altun, 2023). Figure 1 shows the timeline of the Russia–Ukraine war and peace talks.



Figure 1. Russia–Ukraine War and Peace Talks Timeline

In June 2023, Ukraine launched a counteroffensive. However, Ukraine lacked the military equipment to effectively attack Russian forces. Russia's defense, on the other hand, was well-prepared and established minefields to halt Ukraine's advance (Pankhurst, 2023). Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, US President Biden, and other Western leaders declared that Ukraine would win the war and regain control over the territories annexed by Russia. Ultimately, these statements were widely recognized as largely propagandistic and diverted attention from achieving a peaceful resolution to the conflict (Katchanovski, 2025). Former US official Victoria Nuland spoke about the 2022 Istanbul peace talks in a September 2024 interview. She stated that the agreement, which was on the table in Istanbul and was about to be finalized, collapsed because the UK and Western powers advised Zelenskyy that it was not a good deal (Episkopos 2024). Similarly, former German leader Schröder stated in a 2024 interview that the US and its European allies were obstructing a peace agreement that was about to be finalized in Istanbul and that Ukraine was obligated to consult the US on all matters (Aris, 2023). President Erdoğan, meanwhile, stated that they worked sincerely

and, in a result, -oriented manner during their meetings in Istanbul but that peace was not achieved. He also noted that former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson's reluctance to fully commit to peace efforts contributed to the failure to reach a resolution.

Since February 2022, Türkiye has made numerous mediation efforts to stop the war between Ukraine and Russia; however, it has faced certain challenges. Ukraine's significant successes against Russia, achieved with Bayraktar TB2 UAVs, led the Moscow administration to express discomfort over what it perceived as Türkiye's oscillation between itself and the West (Akhiyadov, 2022). Additionally, NATO's siding with Ukraine as a party in the Russia-Ukraine conflict further complicated matters for Türkiye, which is pursuing a neutral foreign policy.

According to the latest developments, Zelenskyy came to Türkiye on November 19, 2025, and requested that talks with Russia resume in Istanbul (Krychkovska et al., 2025).

Conclusion

The Russia-Ukraine war marked the emergence of polarization and conflicts of interest among major powers. Russia sought to compensate for the power it lost following the dissolution of the Soviet Union by attempting to expand its territory and regain influence, aiming to re-establish itself as a superpower on the political stage. Feeling encircled, Russia sought to break this perceived encirclement by asserting its presence in Ukraine and politically balancing NATO, which had been expanding eastward in the short term. Bureaucracy and politicians appear to support Putin through the use of force. However, it is unclear how long wealthy Russian oligarchs and the Russian people, both middle- and lower-income, can withstand the economic sanctions imposed by Western countries and the isolationist policies imposed on Russia. Consequently, there is uncertainty regarding the longevity of political support in Russia. In a period when the UN system, established to resolve global disputes without war, has failed to maintain international peace and security, Türkiye's mediation efforts are particularly significant. The fact that both parties maintain good relations with Türkiye and trust it enables Türkiye to mediate in ending the war. Therefore, Türkiye is seen as a sought-after player at the peace table.

However, there are questions that need to be addressed. For example, is the US truly sincere about ending the Ukraine-Russia war? What is the anticipated course of war? Generally, the US aims to maintain the current situation in Ukraine, seeking to achieve air superiority through the provision of fighter jets and support Ukraine with tanks, with the goal of bringing the parties to the negotiating table to end the war. Russia, on the other hand, has demonstrated that while it can participate in mediation efforts to achieve a significant military victory and gain a stronger seat at the negotiating table, it may resort to delaying tactics.

Although Türkiye's mediation efforts have not yet been successful, they remain significant. Türkiye's diplomatic initiatives during the Russia-Ukraine conflict reflect its pursuit of

protecting national interests, supporting peace, and navigating the complexities of the regional geopolitics. The Ukraine crisis also has the potential to trigger other regional and global crises worldwide. The primary goal is to ensure an equitable and just resolution that prevents the resumption of hostilities once armed conflict ends. The security of all parties can only be guaranteed through such resolutions.

Given the current strategic landscape, it seems unlikely that Ukraine will achieve victory against a nuclear-armed state. Similarly, it appears improbable that Russia can fully defeat Ukraine, a country determined to resist. Among the causes of the Russia–Ukraine war, NATO’s expansion and Ukraine’s relations with the West are particularly significant issues. Therefore, if NATO committed to halting its expansion and Ukraine accepted neutrality, it could be assumed that the stated reason for the Russian invasion would be eliminated and Russian forces could be withdrawn from Ukraine.

As the Russia-Ukraine conflict charts its future course, Türkiye stands at a critical juncture. Strategic foresight, diplomatic acumen, and commitment to multilateralism are considered key factors in mediating efforts that will not only protect national interests but also significantly contribute to regional peace and stability. The ongoing war has effectively prompted nearly all European countries to act in coordination with the US. The importance of NATO has grown, and NATO membership has been promoted as the primary key to ensuring security. Europe has begun to rearm with weapons purchased from the US, and aid to Ukraine has served as a reminder that Europe needs protection from the US. Meanwhile, the combat capability of the Russian military has been tested and diminished. Ukraine may emerge from this process either by conceding Crimea and Donbas to Russia or by leaving all its underground resources under US control. In any scenario, Ukraine is likely to be the losing party. Therefore, Trump’s promise to end the war actually means Ukraine’s complete surrender. While territorial losses are not possible according to the Ukrainian Constitution, returning to the borders of February 24, 2022, is also impossible. Because ending the war under these conditions will not yield a permanent solution, especially one that satisfies Ukraine, the importance of peace negotiations is becoming increasingly clear.

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