



AUSTRIAN INSTITUTE FOR
EUROPEAN AND SECURITY POLICY

Nr. 2025/1

Ukraine's Defiance

Between Ceasefire and Victory

by Lesia Ogryzko
January 2025

AIIES COMMENT

Ukraine's Defiance: Between Ceasefire and Victory

Introduction

The debate surrounding the prospects of Russia's war on Ukraine reveals a stark disconnect between the West's discourse and Ukraine's priorities. While the West often discusses war fatigue, the necessity of an immediate ceasefire, start of negotiations, and lowering the conscription age, Ukraine remains focused on achieving victory or, at minimum, securing robust security guarantees. This divergence underscores a fundamental misalignment in perspectives, with each side seemingly talking past the other.

The War Fatigue

The entire debate about war fatigue in the West is deeply cynical. Had the West demonstrated greater resolve and provided decisive support at the onset of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022—or even in early 2023—the situation on the battlefield and the prospects for a ceasefire would be radically different. Ukraine could have achieved a more favorable position, with reduced war costs, less human suffering, and diminished war fatigue.

Instead, the West adopted a foot-dragging approach, offering Ukraine too little, too late—a so-called "killing me softly" strategy. This hesitancy wasted valuable time and exacerbated war fatigue among politicians and populations in the West. Now, this fatigue drives calls for ending the war as quickly as possible, regardless of what such a

resolution would mean for Ukraine. Ukrainians find it exhausting to hear Western complaints about war fatigue while enduring the daily hardships of war, including daily shelling, electricity cuts, and more. This shortsightedness is devastating for Ukraine amidst calls for an immediate ceasefire that is regarded by many as a silver bullet.

The Illusion of a Ceasefire

What Europe often regards as a ceasefire, Russia sees merely as a pause to rearm and return with greater strength. If allowed such a respite, Russia would learn from past mistakes and launch renewed attacks with improved logistics, precise plans, and better operational readiness. For Europe and the US, pushing Ukraine toward negotiations at this stage would be a grave error. Such a ceasefire would provide Russia time to strengthen its military capabilities while Europe continues to act sluggishly—both in adapting to wartime realities and in scaling up its defense industries.

If Europe truly seeks long-term and sustainable peace, it must refrain from pressuring Ukraine into premature negotiations that would ultimately favor Russia.

The Cynicism of Lowering the Conscription Age

No less troubling is the widespread Western discourse about lowering Ukraine's conscription age. This proposal is both cynical and counterproductive, particularly in the U.S., where less than 10% of the aid approved by

Congress in April 2024 has been transferred to Ukraine. Forcing Ukraine to send even younger men and women to the frontlines without adequate equipment and weaponry reveals a fundamentally flawed approach.

The West's fixation on a World War I and II-era logic of large-scale land battles—where the side with more troops prevails—ignores the reality that victory in this war depends on technological innovation, not sheer numbers. Rather than advocating for increased conscription, the West should invest in Ukraine's ability to achieve a technological edge over Russia. One part of the solution would be significantly increasing the air force capabilities of Ukraine since all major Western-led military operations in the past few decades rested on air force supremacy. At the same time when it comes to Ukraine's case the debate centers around increasing the sheer number of mostly infantry – the most vulnerable of all.

Ukraine's Security Options

Amidst these cynical calls from many corners of Ukraine's Western partners, the country's primary agenda is to secure victory or, at the very least, arm itself to the teeth and obtain credible security guarantees that would place it in a firm negotiating position.

Despite the term, victory is highly debatable both inside Ukraine and abroad and sometimes considered vague. The only plausible definition of

Ukraine's victory is ensuring that Russia cannot attack Ukraine again. Any ceasefire without this assurance would merely be a temporary pause, allowing Russia to rearm and strike again.

Obviously, NATO membership remains the most desirable security guarantee for Ukraine and the most plausible prerequisite for sustainable peace. Ukrainian authorities are well aware that agreeing to a Minsk-3 scenario would be naïve. Previous negotiations with Russia, including over 200 rounds since 2014, have yielded no results. In fact, the West's previous appeasement strategies emboldened Russia to launch its full-scale invasion in 2022, expecting a similarly weak reaction.

If NATO membership remains out of reach—a trajectory seemingly outlined by Trump's policies—Ukraine's next-best option would be to seek bilateral security guarantees from nuclear states that were guarantors under the Budapest Memorandum: the United States, the United Kingdom, and France. While these states argue that the memorandum does not entail legal obligations, they bear significant political and moral responsibility. Both France and the UK appear politically willing to take a leading role in a potential coalition of the willing. However, as in many other cases, the United States' stance will be pivotal, likely setting the tone for the other two nations to follow. There is cautious optimism on this front, given certain signals from the Trump administration in the last few days.

While these options are debated in Ukraine's expert circles, interestingly enough, recent polls in Ukraine indicate that, for the first time since the full-scale invasion, the public prefers the option of acquiring nuclear weapons over NATO membership as the best security guarantee. This shift reflects growing disappointment with the West's slow and inadequate support. While Ukraine has no current plans to pursue nuclear capabilities, the West should act to address these sentiments. Inviting Ukraine to NATO remains the most effective way to mitigate this growing frustration.

Ukraine's victory is a global necessity to uphold sovereignty and international law.

The Trump Factor

NATO membership for Ukraine ultimately depends on the unanimous decision of all member states, requiring geopolitical maturity across the alliance. However, the most critical decision lies with the US. Trump's rhetoric about ending the war in 24 hours is both unrealistic and ignorant of the war's genocidal nature. One of the bigger challenges is that Trump and his circle indeed do not comprehend that this conflict is not merely a territorial dispute, it is about Ukraine's right to exist, which Russia denies. But even without this crucial understanding, Trump will soon realize the impracticality of his quick-fix approach and may pivot to other strategies. If he adopts the

“strength through peace” formula, inviting Ukraine to NATO would be the best course of action. Alternatively, if Putin refuses to cooperate, Trump could decide to strengthen US support for Ukraine. However, Trump's unpredictability and the influence of competing Ukraine strategies within his circle make the outcome uncertain.

Regardless of battlefield developments or Russia's actions, the course of the collective West—and particularly the US—remains pivotal. A Ukrainian defeat would be a geopolitical catastrophe for the US, far worse than the withdrawal from Afghanistan. The hope is that Trump will recognize that a Ukrainian victory aligns with American interests and global stability.

Europe's Call: A Coalition of the Willing

The transatlantic security landscape is increasingly shifting toward coalitions of the willing—countries prepared to take proactive and decisive actions without waiting for cumbersome consensus within NATO. This approach is both pragmatic and promising, as NATO's decision-making is often slowed by its consensus-based structure. Such a framework resonates with the logic of President Trump and could gain traction with the new administration under his leadership.

In Europe, a coalition of the willing is gradually materializing to deter Russia and support Ukraine. Countries such as France and the United Kingdom

have been particularly vocal about sending troops, trainers, or significant aid to Ukraine. These nations are likely to assume leadership roles if necessary, reinforcing their strategic commitment to the region. The Baltic states, too, are ready to contribute, driven by their historical experiences and proximity to Russia. Also, the Nordic countries have emerged as particularly steadfast supporters of Ukraine, providing not only substantial military and financial aid but also facilitating the domestic production of weapons. Political and public support for Ukraine remains strong in this region, alongside their advocacy for Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration. Scandinavian and Baltic nations are pushing for any future agreements to include Ukraine's NATO membership—or, at the very least, a clear roadmap toward accession.

In the absence of consensus from major players like the United States and Germany to grant Ukraine an invitation to NATO, these countries have begun forming a North-South axis of leadership and political maturity. This coalition recognizes the urgency of ensuring

Ukraine's victory to safeguard European security as a whole.

These countries, called the Nordic-Baltic 8, have adopted a strategy that prioritizes supporting Ukraine to prevent the war from spilling over into their territories. This approach is not only pragmatic but also forward-thinking compared to nations that prefer to stockpile arms for future “dark days” rather than assisting Ukraine in its immediate defense. These countries have done the math and concluded that it is far cheaper and more effective to stop and defeat Russia in Ukraine than to face the dire consequences—both economic and human—if Ukraine falls. Together with France and UK, the coalition of the willing is comprised of nations that understand the broader stakes of this war and are willing to act decisively to preserve European peace and stability.

Conclusion

Whether through NATO membership or robust bilateral guarantees, the West must understand that the cost of inaction far outweighs the cost of bold,

timely decisions. The path forward lies in recognizing that Ukraine's victory is not merely a regional goal but a global necessity to uphold the principles of sovereignty, freedom, and international law.

Ukraine's resilience has been remarkable, but its people cannot bear this burden alone. In this sense war fatigue has indeed settled in. And it is the Western resolve to end this war on terms favorable to Ukraine as much as the situation on the battlefield that can truly prevent future conflicts and build a foundation for lasting peace in Europe and beyond.

About the Author

Lesia Ogryzko is the Director of the [Sahaidachnyi Security Center](#), a defense and security think tank based in Kyiv, and a visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations. Previously, she served as an international civil servant within the United Nations system and worked in Ukraine's Government on implementing reforms, including public administration. Lesia has been engaged in war-related matters since 2014, when, at the onset of Russia's war in Donbas, she co-founded the Ukrainian office of the international humanitarian organization Save the Children.

© Austria Institut für Europa und Sicherheitspolitik, 2025

All rights reserved. Reprinting or similar or comparable use of publications of the Austria Institute for European and Security Policy (AIES) are only permitted with prior permission. The articles published in the AIES Focus series exclusively reflect the opinions of the respective authors.

Dr. Langweg 3, 2410 Hainburg/Donau

Tel. +43 (1) 3583080

office@aies.at | www.aies.at