

Possible Security Guarantees for Ukraine in the Context of Peaceful Settlement: Political, Legal and Practical Aspects

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Summary

- ▶ The full-scale Russia's invasion of Ukraine, now in its fourth year, continues to shape the security environment not only in Europe but globally.
- ▶ Recent geopolitical shifts caused by the results of the 2024 US presidential election intensify existing challenges and create new ones for regional and global security.
- ▶ The political aspects of peaceful settlement of the Russia-Ukraine war and future security guarantees for Ukraine depend on the positions of global players – the US, Europe, and the Global South, and influence the practical aspects of formulating and implementing war settlement and security guarantees.
- ▶ Practical steps in developing and implementing a plan for peaceful settlement of the Russia-Ukraine war and future security guarantees for Ukraine affect the formation of a new legal framework not only for settling the Russia-Ukraine war, but also for developing new approaches to resolving armed conflicts and guaranteeing security in new geopolitical realities.

Problem Analysis

Providing Ukraine with security guarantees in political, legal and practical aspects depends on several key factors:

1. The dynamics of the geopolitical situation (primarily considering the new foreign policy course and current position of the US and the Trump administration);
2. The dynamics of transformational processes ongoing in the European community (EU, European part of NATO) – primarily security and foreign policy at both regional and national levels.

These factors have a decisive influence on the formation of a consensual framework for future security guarantees for Ukraine and their political, legal and practical aspects.

1. Dynamics of the Geopolitical Situation and Political Aspects of Ukraine's Security Guarantees

During the first three months in the White House, the Trump administration initiated a strategic pivot in US foreign and international security policy, reflecting the complex conceptual [views](#) of the conservative wing of the Republican Party.

The scale of this strategic review of US foreign and international security policy may mark the beginning of a new complex era in international relations and the evolution of international security systems.

Since 1945, Washington has built its geopolitical influence through its allies and alliances worldwide, ensuring US presence in every region vital to American strategic interests. President D. Trump and his administration see US geopolitical leadership quite differently.

For them, the global network of American allies and alliances is rather a burden that drains US resources instead of bringing direct profits, which are crucial for D. Trump's business approach to world politics.

According to D. Trump, former alliances should be abandoned, and former allies must pay their "dues" (either as debt or as advance payment) for security guarantees from the US or for economic cooperation.

The new US geopolitical influence should come only from the US, which profits from former allies and has friendly relations with potentially hostile authoritarian regimes to minimize any potential threats from them.

These views are reflected in what key administration representatives and President D. Trump himself say about [Europe](#), [NATO](#), the [UN](#), as well as about Ukraine and the political settlement of the Russia-Ukraine war.

Such radical unilateral changes in US foreign and security policy, one of the key global players, contribute to destabilizing the international security system, which, in turn, is built through the distribution of powers in the UN Security Council.

The gradual erosion of trust within the transatlantic Europe-US axis, and consequently the weakening of NATO's deterrent mechanisms, create not only additional risks for European and global security, but also indirectly influence the strategic decisions made by Russia's military-political leadership regarding both the continuation and escalation of military operations in Ukraine and the probable expansion (geographical and geopolitical) of the scale of its aggression, gradually extending it to NATO's eastern flank.

Ultimately, strategically, the Trump administration's "peace plan" for political settlement of the Russia-Ukraine war envisages two key aspects:

1. The role of the United States is reduced to ensuring a stable and functional ceasefire regime.
2. Maintaining the ceasefire regime, further guaranteeing non-resumption of hostilities, security guarantees for Ukraine, and supporting security on the European continent should be ensured exclusively by European countries.

The US [sees](#) its new strategic role in refocusing on other geopolitical directions, primarily the Asia-Pacific region and China.

Europe is forced to respond to the gradual distancing of the US, primarily in its role as a strategic geopolitical and security partner and guarantor of stability (through its own strategic nuclear capabilities, as well as through the US nuclear arsenal in Europe and joint nuclear policy within NATO).

Therefore, Europe is focused on simultaneously solving several tasks:

- ▶ reviewing strategic approaches to ensuring its own security, relying not on transatlantic security mechanisms, but on its own resources and capabilities;
- ▶ revising its own defense and military-industrial potential;
- ▶ practically responding to the growing scale of hybrid, conventional and nuclear threats from Russia.

Such geopolitical dynamics significantly complicate the formation of a sustainable political framework for both peaceful settlement of the Russia-Ukraine war and future security guarantees for Ukraine, and directly affect the practical and legal aspects of these processes.

Given the mentioned geopolitical context and its dynamics, as well as the fact that Russia does not abandon the declared strategic goals of its military campaign against Ukraine (which is simultaneously an important element of the Kremlin's broader geopolitical strategy to restore Russia's status as a global superpower), the following vital military-technical components of security guarantees for Ukraine during ongoing hostilities can be identified:

- ▶ Maintaining strategic and military-technical support from the US in the format of supplying (a) strategic, operational and tactical intelligence data, and (b) ammunition and logistical support for the functioning of certain critical defensive and strike systems, such as Patriot air defense systems and HIMARS multiple rocket launchers.
- ▶ Maintaining volumes and pace of military aid to Ukraine through building up Europe's military-technical capabilities and their mutual integration with Ukraine's defense industry – primarily in the conventional aspect. One of the strategic military advantages of the US over Europe was significantly larger stockpiles of military equipment and ammunition not only in Europe, but also on the territory of the continental United States. Therefore, a key challenge and strategic task for European states should be achieving the volumes and speed of production of corresponding nomenclatures for: (a) meeting operational-tactical and strategic needs of Ukraine's Armed Forces, and (b) ensuring optimal combat readiness of European countries' national armed forces. Solving this task in the shortest possible time is impossible without: (a) mutual integration of defense industry potentials of European countries and Ukraine, and (b) political solution to the problem of access to necessary resources in international markets (including from China and Global South countries).
- ▶ Formation of an effective instrument for ensuring regional security and stability in Europe based on the concept of Coalition of the Willing Deterrent Forces. Since the practical creation of an effective common European army appears to be a long-term prospect, at this stage European countries should form rather operational-tactical than strategic tools for guaranteeing continental security, relying on already existing successful cases of multinational contingents with expanded operational mandates (compared to what is guaranteed by the UN) – for example, NATO stabilization missions in the Balkans – KFOR and SFOR. The use of such an instrument is possible during ongoing hostilities – in case political-diplomatic tools for achieving a lasting and guaranteed ceasefire regime prove to be blocked.

In conditions where the US manages to achieve the strategic result that the Trump Administration sets for itself in the political settlement of the Russia-Ukraine war (namely – achieving a stable and guaranteed ceasefire regime), further responsibility for its observance and for security guarantees for Ukraine, according to Washington's logic, should be assumed by European countries.

In such a configuration, the above-mentioned vital military-technical components of security guarantees for Ukraine after achieving a ceasefire (partial or complete) will take the following form:

- ▶ Maintaining minimally sufficient strategic support from the US in the format of supplying (a) strategic, operational and tactical intelligence data, and (b) ammunition and logistical support for certain critical defensive and strike systems, such as Patriot air defense systems and HIMARS multiple rocket launchers. An alternative to the latter point could be establishing joint production of corresponding nomenclatures by US defense industry enterprises and certain European countries.
- ▶ Building up Europe's military-technical capabilities and their mutual integration with Ukraine's and US defense industries – both in conventional and nuclear aspects; due to US distancing from Europe and from Washington's previous transatlantic commitments, Europe is forced to rethink its own role in ensuring continental security and its own ability to guarantee such security both in general and to individual European countries, primarily Ukraine. Work on both aspects – conventional and nuclear, should be conducted in parallel, since the conventional component requires time (at least in the medium term), and the nuclear deterrence factor, as the full-scale war of Russia against Ukraine clearly showed, is a significant factor of hybrid, information-psychological and geopolitical pressure.
- ▶ Formation of an effective instrument for ensuring regional security and stability in Europe. Practical provision of guaranteeing the ceasefire regime falls on the shoulders of European countries – they must form the core of stabilization forces that would become an effective instrument for observing the CFR and one of the elements of security guarantees for Ukraine. As mentioned above, the mandate of such forces for a number of objective reasons cannot and should not be based on the mandate of UN peacekeeping missions or be a NATO stabilization mission. However, it can and should rely on already existing successful cases of multinational contingents with expanded operational mandates.

The main point of strategic uncertainty in implementing the above-mentioned components of security guarantees for Ukraine is achieving a stable and sustainable ceasefire regime.

The strategic uncertainty of this moment lies in the fact that guaranteeing the ceasefire regime was undertaken by the Trump administration, which, although trying to synchronize its steps with European allies, remains dependent in its actions on a number of subjective factors related to D. Trump's personality.

Therefore, the Coalition of the Willing and Ukraine must be ready to act synchronously in conditions of:

(a) complete inaccessibility of a ceasefire regime, (b) partial implementation of a ceasefire regime, or (c) full implementation of a ceasefire regime.

Given the current geopolitical and military-political dynamics, achieving agreement and full and guaranteed implementation of a ceasefire regime is the least likely scenario in the short and medium term.

2. Dynamics of Transformational Processes in Europe and Practical and Legal Aspects of Peaceful Settlement of the Russia-Ukraine War and Security Guarantees for Ukraine

Not only the strategic change in US political course, but also contradictory tactical statements by President D. Trump and his administration regarding [Greenland](#), [Canada](#), [Mexico](#), the Panama [Canal](#) or [Gaza](#) introduce general chaos into the international security system, making resolution of current conflicts more complex and prevention of new ones almost impossible.

In this new reality, where the US essentially officially repeats Russia's arguments supporting the transition to foreign policy and international security based on the principle of "might makes right", and the role of traditional international institutions decreases, there is an obvious need to form new practical and legal approaches to responding to armed conflicts.

As recent Ukrainian and European experience shows, the time has come for new, less formal inter-regional alliances that are more flexible and capable of responding faster and more effectively to regional or potentially global crises than traditional political-legal mechanisms such as the UN or NATO.

Despite the contradictory efforts of the new US administration aimed at promoting the conclusion of a "peace agreement" between Russia and Ukraine, Washington appears unable to unilaterally resolve the issue of ending the war – at least without the participation of Europe, which plays an equally important role at the negotiating table.

As the European Union becomes increasingly internally fragmented due to

- ▶ the new US political course;
- ▶ internal contradictions in attitudes toward Russia's war against Ukraine, as well as toward European military, economic and political assistance to Kyiv;
- ▶ the absence of a unified understanding of threats to European security;

this poses a direct threat to the EU's ability to make strategic decisions timely and effectively.

At a time when European countries are forced to rapidly change their own strategic agenda, reorienting toward security and military goals in connection with Russia's more obvious plans to expand aggression against Ukraine both geographically and geopolitically, Europe is intensifying work on developing an alternative approach to institutionalizing strategic changes in its policy.

From the perspective of the dynamics of the Russia-Ukraine war and efforts for its political settlement, Europe may finally have its answer to contemporary geopolitical and security challenges – the Coalition of the Willing.

This informal group of Ukraine's partners was formed as a military-political format during a summit held in London on March 2, 2025, called the European Defense Summit.

Notably, the initiative united not only willing European countries – representatives of Ukraine, Germany, France, Italy, Denmark, Spain, the Netherlands, Poland, Norway, Czech Republic, Sweden, Romania and Turkey, but also NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and European Council President António Costa. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also participated in the meeting.

Participants unanimously confirmed their support for Ukraine and affirmed that sanctions against Russia, including the freezing of Russian assets, will remain in force until lasting peace is achieved. "The ceasefire should begin with prisoner exchanges and the return of [Ukrainian] children. This step would demonstrate Russia's genuine desire for peace", – states the joint [declaration](#).

A peace agreement must include Russia, but the Kremlin cannot dictate its terms. Moreover, Kyiv must be included in any peace negotiations, – the leaders agreed.

On March 27, 2025, another Coalition of the Willing [summit](#) took place in Paris, attended by nearly 30 leaders of coalition countries and government representatives.

Organized by French President Emmanuel Macron and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, the event aimed to develop practical security guarantees for Ukraine in case of a ceasefire.

The agreed future 30,000-40,000 contingent was named the Reassurance Force, representing a strategically important conceptual shift: transition from the "peacekeeping forces" format to the "deterrent forces" format.

While the former concept is a more traditional peacekeeping approach closely tied to ceasefire agreements and leaves less room for operational maneuvering, the latter concept is more practical and allows deployed forces to respond more effectively to any changes in the security situation.

According to the preliminary deployment [plan](#), the Reassurance Force will support ground, air and sea monitoring of the ceasefire, while remaining an instrument of rapid and effective response to any violations of the ceasefire regime.

An additional security and stabilization value of the Reassurance Force is their active role in strengthening joint defense capabilities of Ukraine and the Coalition, when units of these Forces will be forced to engage in direct combat operations with Russian forces if Russia decides to resume offensive operations.

At the same time, the Coalition also expects practical US involvement – not so much in the form of deploying its own units on Ukrainian territory, as in providing:

- ▶ ceasefire regime monitoring;
- ▶ all necessary intelligence data to the Reassurance Forces;
- ▶ strategic conventional long-range means to the Reassurance Forces to guarantee rapid and effective coercion of Russia to peace.

Ultimately, Europe has sufficient potential to replace US presence on the continent in the security sphere if necessary.

Given the relatively small share of the US nuclear arsenal deployed in Europe under NATO nuclear sharing arrangements, French and British nuclear arsenals, taken together, would be sufficient to guarantee not only European security in general, but also its key component – Ukraine's security.

These same arrangements can be used to implement the [dialogue](#) already taking place between Berlin and Paris regarding the deployment of French nuclear weapons that could potentially replace American ones in Germany.

However, the legal formalization of such a step requires additional actions to amend NATO strategic and regulatory documents, and, given Washington's changing position, is at least a medium-term realistic prospect.

European countries' air forces are capable of providing adequate air cover for the future Reassurance Force mission in Ukraine, considering the capabilities of Western-made air defense systems already deployed in Ukraine. And the naval forces of Black Sea NATO member states combined with the Ukrainian fleet and maritime drones are quite capable of keeping Russia's weakened Black Sea Fleet at a distance.

Given that the Reassurance Force format agreed upon in political and practical dimensions by the Coalition of the Willing differs significantly in its strategic parameters from the traditional format of peacekeeping forces under UN mandate, as well as from precedents of NATO stabilization missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan, the legal framework for such an international contingent in Ukraine must be based on a different legal framework based on:

- ▶ Ukrainian national legislation regarding the regulation of foreign state military presence on Ukrainian territory; and
- ▶ a system of bilateral security agreements, both already concluded between Ukraine and countries participating in the "Ramstein" initiative, and additional agreements with other Coalition of the Willing member countries.

Such an approach could become the first step in creating a blueprint for new security policy and mechanisms for resolving armed conflicts in a new era of growing geopolitical instability not only for Ukraine and European countries, but also for the Global South.

Forecasts and Prospects

The dynamics of the geopolitical and international security environment around Ukraine, as well as current geopolitical processes, allow for the following forecasts and prospects for peaceful settlement of the Russia-Ukraine war and security guarantees for Ukraine.

In the political sphere:

- ▶ Fluctuations in US geopolitical course potentially leave room for using moments when the Trump administration's position on increasing pressure on Russia coincides with Ukraine's and Europe's position – this will require rapid and operational initiatives and decisions from Kyiv and Brussels (and the Coalition of the Willing).
- ▶ The dynamics of intra-European processes of adapting existing security mechanisms to new security realities will inevitably lead to strategic transformations of European security policy taking into account Ukrainian experience of peaceful settlement and security guarantees.
- ▶ Maintaining Russia's confrontational course even after peaceful settlement of the Russia-Ukraine war and ensuring reliable security guarantees for Ukraine will remain a central factor not only for European but also global security, and will require constant improvement and adaptation of political, practical and legal approaches to ensuring international security.

In the practical/security sphere:

- ▶ Finalization of peaceful settlement processes of the Russia-Ukraine war and ensuring security guarantees for Ukraine will hardly force V. Putin's regime to abandon its strategic goals – attempts to finally destroy existing mechanisms of European and global security in order to return to Russia its former spheres of influence, and with them – the status of a global superpower.
- ▶ The functioning of practical mechanisms for guaranteeing peace and security for Ukraine will constantly be subjected to provocation attempts by the Kremlin using the entire arsenal of hybrid and non-hybrid means, with such provocations continuing to target not only Ukraine but also other European countries and the US.
- ▶ Thus, even effectively functioning mechanisms for guaranteeing peace and security for Ukraine will require constant adjustment taking into account changes in the regional and global security situation.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In the conditions of a new international and security reality created by the systemic crisis of major contemporary international institutions, fueled by ongoing Russia's military aggression against Ukraine and its global consequences, D. Trump's new approaches to US foreign and security policy have added additional geopolitical turbulence.

Thus, in a political sense, the strategic logic of peaceful settlement of the Russia-Ukraine war and future security guarantees for Ukraine should be based on the following priorities:

- ▶ achieving and maintaining maximum synchronization of Ukraine's and Europe's positions regarding peaceful settlement of the Russia-Ukraine war and security guarantees for Ukraine;
- ▶ defending a common position before the Trump administration and thus ensuring necessary correction of Washington's foreign policy and security steps, primarily regarding pressure (both direct and through strengthening political and military-technical support for Ukraine and European allies) on Russia;
- ▶ joint work with European allies on full mutual integration of instruments for guaranteeing peace and security for Ukraine into European and Transatlantic (in whatever form they will be preserved) security mechanisms;
- ▶ ensuring a common sustainable regime of "strategic ambiguity", when political decisions and their implementation do not allow the adversary to draw unambiguous conclusions and effectively plan their actions.

In a practical/security sense, focus should be on:

- ▶ developing and deepening mechanisms of mutual integration not only of military (command, logistics, planning and conducting operations) but also military-industrial systems of Ukraine and Coalition of the Willing member countries;
- ▶ practical work on institutionalizing sub-regional security initiatives aimed at strengthening already existing security mechanisms such as NATO;
- ▶ increasing NATO's Europeanization – refocusing existing and creating new mechanisms for guaranteeing collective security within the Alliance, relying primarily on European countries' potential, with mandatory preservation of strategic transatlantic ties with the US.

Given the peculiarities of the regional and geopolitical situation, legal aspects of ensuring peace observance and security guarantees for Ukraine should include two main levels:

- ▶ national level: deployment, logistics and operations of Reassurance Forces on Ukrainian territory should be based on corresponding norms of national legislation;
- ▶ international level: the international legal framework for Reassurance Forces functioning on Ukrainian territory and other Coalition of the Willing actions regarding peace observance in Ukraine and security guarantees can be composed of bilateral security agreements signed between Ukraine and its allies parallel to the functioning of the international "Ramstein" initiative. If necessary, the system of such bilateral security agreements can be extended to other Coalition of the Willing member countries.