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Models for upholding a potential cease-fire in Ukraine¹

Claudia Major and Aldo Kleemann

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I. Executive Summary

Currently there are no promising approaches for how to convince Russia and Ukraine to end the war, potentially against their will. There is currently no evidence to suggest that Russia wants to end the war. Moscow's goals remain unchanged. Putin pretends to be open to talks, but only on his preconditions, which would be tantamount to Ukraine's capitulation. So far, he has not shown any credible willingness to negotiate, for example by stopping the fighting.

There is reason to fear that Russia will wear down Ukraine and divide the Western camp through tactical negotiations while it continues to fight. Support for Ukraine in Western countries could decline, as tactical negotiations might create the illusion of a tangible end to the war ("peace").

Should a ceasefire occur, it must be clarified how it can be enforced and how Russia can be deterred from further attacks. Because as long as Moscow maintains its goals, rejects an independent Ukraine, and seeks to change Europe's security order - and as long as it possesses the means to pursue these goals - Ukraine and Europe's security remain under threat.

It is not yet clear whether the USA under Trump will pursue a "*peace through accommodation*" or a "*peace through strength*" approach to ending the war. What is clear is that Washington rejects a central role in upholding a potential ceasefire in Ukraine and consider it the duty of European states. But European militaries are currently not in a position to perform this task credibly without U.S. contributions. Moreover, no European country has so far shown any serious willingness to provide troops. To make matters worse, traditional political and international legal models for securing a ceasefire, such as a UN mandate, are not applicable.

What is needed is a *sui generis model* that reliably offers security for Ukraine despite limited European military capabilities, insufficient political will and a lack of unity among Europeans. So far there is a lack of ideas that would both be militarily and politically feasible and would offer reliable protection to Ukraine. What the Europeans can provide on an ad hoc basis would not offer credible protection.

A "*bluff and pray*" approach that deploys too few troops and relies essentially on the hope that Russia will not test it would be irresponsible and increase the likelihood of war in Europe.

Three models are conceivable:

- I. NATO accession
- II. Western troop deployments in Ukraine (up to 150,000 PAX)
- III. Help for self-help and incremental integration of Ukraine into Euro-Atlantic structures with a growing military presence over time ("normative power of facts on the ground")

Progress on model III allows Ukraine to make progress towards model II and I.

All models raise dilemmas for NATO Allies. The majority of the latter so far fear that providing security for Ukraine would come at the expense of their own NATO security and would therefore be too big a risk. They deem the added value of a secure Ukraine for Europe's security and the international order to be less important than assuring their own security.

II. General conditions

a) Unclear U.S. position on Ukraine, but clear expectation of a stronger European role

U.S. President Donald Trump promised to end the war in Ukraine immediately after taking office. The special envoy for Ukraine, General Kellogg, now estimates that it will take 100 days, not 24 hours. However, it remains unclear in which direction the Trump II administration is heading. Some decision-makers, including Defense Secretary Hegseth and Vice President Vance, but also Donald Trump Junior, are calling for an end to the war under conditions that are tantamount to Russian demands ("*peace through accommodation*"). They reject a leading role for the USA in ensuring Ukraine's security once the fighting has ended. Other decision-makers, such as General Kellogg, Security Advisor Waltz and Secretary of State Rubio, advocate a peace through strength approach, which conditions support for Ukraine and imposes limits for Russia ("*peace through strength*"). For them, limited U.S. support in ensuring Ukraine's security is conceivable.

So far, there is no coherent strategy to get Russia or Ukraine to stop fighting - even against their will. While Trump is threatening Ukraine with the withdrawal of U.S. support is threatening Russia with escalation by providing further military support for Kyiv, there is little to suggest that the USA will be able to persuade either Russia, which currently has the upper hand militarily, or Ukraine to stop fighting. Rather, there is reason to fear that Russia will wear down Ukraine and divide the Western camp through tactical negotiations while continuing to fight.

It is not yet clear which approach (either "*peace through accommodation*" or "*peace through strength*") will prevail. Currently, the latter camp appears to be in the ascendancy, but in view of the overall disruptive US approach under Trump, it is difficult to make reliable long-term predictions. Common elements of both U.S. approaches are:

- Rejection of Ukraine's NATO membership;
- Assuring Ukraine's security is seen as a European task; the USA might accept to contribute few or no capabilities to this effort;
- It is the deal itself that counts; its contents matter less.

b) Securing the end of the war as a decisive element

Even if there is currently no sign of a ceasefire, the debate about how to uphold it is already underway.² This debate is particularly challenging and controversial for the Europeans. They would need to bear the main burden, while they lack both the necessary military capabilities and the political will and unity to do so.

² See, among others, **Bundesregierung**: *Drucksache 20/14628. Antwort der Bundesregierung auf die Kleine Anfrage der Abgeordneten Matthias Mossdorf, Eugen Schmidt, Volker Münz und der Fraktion der AfD*, January 20, 2025; **Peter Dickinson**: *No peace without security: Ukraine needs guarantees against new Russian invasion*, Atlantic Council, January 14, 2025; **Samuel Charap**: *Think twice before committing European boots on the ground in Ukraine*, Financial Times, January 13, 2025; **Alina Polyakova**: *America Needs a Maximum Pressure Strategy in Ukraine. Trump Must Gain More Leverage to Bring Putin to the Negotiating Table*, Foreign Affairs, December 31, 2024; **Samuel Charap**: *A Pathway to Peace in Ukraine. Trump Needs a Realistic Game Plan, Strong Incentives, and Patience*, Foreign Affairs, December 24, 2024; **Sumantra Maitra**: *A possible path to peace in Ukraine*, Center for Renewing America, December 10, 2024; **Elie Tenenbaum / Leo Litra**: *Ukraine's Security now depends on Europe*, Foreign Affairs, December 3, 2024.

Enforcing and upholding a ceasefire is just as important for Ukraine's lasting security as deterring Russia. Because as long as Moscow maintains its objectives, i.e., rejects a sovereign Ukraine and wants to change the European security order (see Moscow's 2021 draft treaties), and as long as it has the (military, industrial, personnel and political) means to pursue these goals, Ukraine and Europe are at risk. Under these circumstances, combat pauses simply serve as regeneration breaks for Russia's armed forces. From today's perspective, the 2014-2022 period was a ceasefire (broken several times) during which Moscow improved its starting position.

The Minsk agreements teach us that a ceasefire must be credible and robustly upheld as long as the political causes of the conflict persist, and as long as Russia signals and expands both its readiness and capability for war.

c) What should be upheld? Parameters of a ceasefire

A ceasefire would have to be enforced and designed in such a way that Russia is deterred from violating it and attacking Ukraine again. At the same time, the Western allies would have to ensure that Ukraine also complies with such an agreement and refrains from aggression. However, the focus here is explicitly on protecting Ukraine from Russian aggression.

The geographical situation is an immense challenge: the border between Ukraine and Russia is around 2,300 km long. There are an additional 1,100 km of border between Ukraine and Belarus, with the latter being closely linked to Russia in a way that could be called a "soft annexation". The current front line stretches for around 900 km. Russia currently has around 600,000-700,000 soldiers deployed.

Furthermore, Moscow is expanding its *combat capability* by investing further in the growth, development, and modernization of equipment, industry, and personnel. It is also strengthening its combat readiness by militarizing its society and framing the war in politics and society as a fight for survival of a Russia that is attacked by the West.

However, data indicate that Russia's economy and military could encounter difficulties from 2026.³ Russia's combat capability could suffer and, as a result, its willingness to negotiate could increase. It is also unclear whether Moscow would be able to maintain the current size and equipment levels of its military at after the end of the war, or whether these could be further expanded.

III. Overview and applicability of existing hedging models

In the search for a model to uphold a potential ceasefire, various organisational frameworks and historical examples have been put forward. But none of them is applicable to the Ukraine context.

³ See, among others, **Janis Kluge**: *Russlands Wirtschaft am Wendepunkt, Mit dem Ende des russischen Kriegsbooms steigen die wirtschaftlichen Risiken für den Kreml*, SWP-Aktuell 2024/A 59, November 26, 2024; **Max Seddon / Anastasia Stognei / Daria Mosolova**: *Russia struggles to tame inflation in 'overheating' war economy*, Financial Times, December 20, 2024; **Martin Sandbu**: *Russia's war economy is a house of cards. The financial underpinnings look increasingly fragile*, Financial Times, January 12, 2025;

A contrary opinion is expressed, for example, by **Richard Connolly**: *Russia's Wartime Economy isn't as Weak as it Looks*, RUSI, January 22, 2025.

a) Limited applicability of OSCE, EU, UN and NATO as a framework

Deployments within the OSCE, EU, UN and NATO framework are unlikely:

EU operation:

- Would require a unanimous Council decision and thus the approval of countries critical of Ukraine such as Hungary and Slovakia;
- Smaller coalitions of the willing (Art. 44) would theoretically be possible, but are not politically and militarily feasible, because
 - An EU deployment of this kind would only be possible with recourse to forces already included in NATO defence planning and NATO's "strategic enablers";
 - The EU has not yet carried out such a robust operation on this scale;
 - Without U.S. participation, such a mission lacks credibility.

OSCE:

- A robust mandate would be unlikely, as it would require the support of Russia and Ukraine: OSCE operations take place at the invitation of the host country and participating states agree on mandates by consensus;
- The OSCE lacked credibility since the Minsk Agreements in 2014;
- The OSCE is unable to provide the necessary forces.

UN:

- A robust mandate would be unlikely, as Russia, as a concerned state and permanent member of the UN Security Council, would have to agree to a deployment;
- The availability of troops and their credibility are questionable.

NATO:

- It is unlikely that Russia will agree to the presence of NATO troops in Ukraine, even if Moscow were to agree to negotiations from a position of weakness;
- It is currently unlikely that all NATO countries would agree.

For Germany, operations such as the 2014 anti-IS coalition⁴ and Operation TAKUBA are of interest from a purely legal perspective, as they took place outside the UN, EU and NATO framework in unilateral coalitions. However, they had neither the task of upholding a ceasefire nor of providing deterrence.

⁴ See here for a comparison of the mandate / Bundeswehr participation in Operation 'INHERENT RESOLVE'. **German Bundestag**: *Antrag der Bundesregierung Fortsetzung des Einsatzes bewaffneter deutscher Streitkräfte - Stabilisierung sichern, Wiedererstarben des IS verhindern, Versöhnung in Irak fördern*, Drucksache 20/12893, September 18, 2024; **German Bundestag**: *Bundestag erweitert Einsatz der Bundeswehr gegen "Islamischen Staat"*, 2./3. Beratung Archiv Deutscher Bundestag, November 10, 2016.

b) Overview of previous deployments and models to uphold cease-fires or peace agreements

Previous deployments do not help either. The historical and geopolitical contexts are unique, and none of the models can be directly transferred to Ukraine. However, they do give a sense of possible success criteria and military force requirements.

Model	Description and Evaluation
<p>Korea</p>	<p>Description: Refers to the upholding of the armistice between North and South Korea in 1953. In 1954, the USA still had around 225,000 soldiers on the ground; today there are still around 30,000. Until 1991, the USA stationed nuclear weapons in South Korea. Politically, the USA clearly positioned itself as security guarantee power. The armistice line is 249 km long.</p> <p>Referring to this model, the deployment of European forces with limited U.S. support in Ukraine is being discussed. The aim would not be to defend Ukraine in case of an aggression, but to deter Russia by stationing a sufficient European military presence. The troop strength required for this varies – depending on the tasks – between 40,000-150,000 PAX.⁵</p> <p>Evaluation: Ukraine would carry the main burden for its own security. To avoid any escalation, European troops would not be stationed in the immediate vicinity of the front. The range of supposedly necessary troop levels shows that there is a lack of clarity (and agreement among Europeans) about what is needed to deter Russia. The debate neglects the fact that such extensive troop deployments require corresponding infrastructure for accommodation and supply. In addition, the forces deployed would create gaps in NATO's current plans, which would have to be adapted. The deployment of forces from NATO countries would de facto shift the NATO defence line to Ukraine.</p>
<p>Germany / Forward defence strategy⁶</p>	<p>Description: Ties in with the Korea considerations and refers to NATO's defence plans in the 1950s. The forward defence strategy envisaged that – in the event of an escalation by the Warsaw Pact – defence would be established as far east as possible. Within an area of operations established by higher command, units would then rapidly alternate between delaying action, temporary stationary defence, and surprise counterattack to deny the enemy the initiative and destroy its forces.⁷</p>

⁵ See also FN 2

⁶ See the explanation and the linked historical documents by Christoph Kuhl: *Vorneverteidigung 1981: Ressourcen und Kriegsbild*, Zentrum für Militärgeschichte und Sozialwissenschaften der Bundeswehr, April 23, 2024.

⁷ For an explanation of the *Forward Defence Strategy*, see for example **Edler von Loew, Gerd A:** *Forward Defense in Central Europe*, April 7, 1986: „The concept of forward defense does not negate the necessity of mobility in operations. It must not be misunderstood as a principle of the lines of the "Maginot Line" idea, excluding any kind of mobile operations and allowing only static defense operations along the forward edge of the battle area. It does not exclude the use of the operational factor

	<p>Evaluation: NATO's planned force level was 53 divisions, but it was never reached. Today's Ukraine has a greater territorial depth than the former Federal Republic of Germany. In terms of deterrence, it is preferable to have a forward defence operation that starts as close to the border as possible, but is not stationary at the border. This creates uncertainty for the attacker, since he cannot be sure that the main resistance will take place at the border. However, forward defence may require, at least temporarily, the surrender of Ukrainian territory. Bucha shows the risks involved.</p>
<p>Israel without nuclear weapons</p>	<p>Description: Based on Israel's defence posture, the proposal is to enable Ukraine to deter Russia with its own strong conventional forces. This would require extensive material and financial support on the basis of bilateral agreements as well as the lifting of most restrictions on the use of force. A re-nuclearisation, that is, providing nuclear weapons to Ukraine - which are a key element of the Israeli model - is explicitly ruled out.</p> <p>Evaluation: Both immediately and in the long term, this requires extensive arms deliveries without restrictions for their deployment and/or increased support for Ukraine to produce its own weapons (extensive industrial and technological cooperation). The security guarantee results from the bilateral agreements and the demonstrated willingness to support Ukraine in the event of a Russian invasion. However, such an empowerment would take at least 10 to 15 years, so it does not offer a short-term solution.</p>
<p>UN mission</p>	<p>Description: With reference to the missions in Cyprus (UNPFC/UN Res. 186) and Lebanon (UNIFIL/UN Res. 1701), the deployment of Blue Helmets on the basis of a UN mandate is being debated.</p> <p>UNPFC evaluation: The mission is not financed by mandatory contributions from the regular UN budget and has faced funding problems for decades. This has led to a reduction in troops from around 6,000 to around 850 Blue Helmets along the approximately 180 km buffer zone in Cyprus.</p> <p>UNIFIL evaluation: Almost 10,000 Blue Helmets are currently stationed in Lebanon. However, the UN resolution is continually being violated due to a lack of will on the Israeli side and a lack of assertiveness on the Lebanese side. A stronger mandate has not been possible due to the veto powers of the USA, China and Russia.</p>

"space," but it forces military commanders to fight the decisive battle as close to the eastern border as possible, generally within the divisional sectors of the defense area. Here, the defender has to alternate rapidly between delaying action and defense surprise counterattacks, to avoid massive enemy fire and to form new points of main defensive effort, are included. In this manner the initiative can be regained and the aggressor's lead, resulting from having the choice of the time and point of main effort of the attack, can be reversed."

Kosovo	<p>Description: The KFOR mission in Kosovo since 1999 is seen as a blueprint for successful border security.</p> <p>Evaluation: The KFOR mission based on UN Resolution 1244 offers insights into the forces required to secure a limited area (but does not serve as a deterrent against Russia). The mission began in 1999 with 48,000 soldiers in Kosovo, which covers almost 11,000 square km. Ukraine is almost 55 times larger.</p>
Vietnam	<p>Description: The 1973 Treaty of Paris was signed by the USA, North and South Vietnam and set the terms for the withdrawal of the USA from the Vietnam War. After the withdrawal of the American troops, there was no provision of forces to uphold the agreement, which allowed fighting to continue. In April 1975, North Vietnamese troops occupied the South Vietnamese capital Saigon. The Vietnam War ended with the surrender of the South.</p> <p>Evaluation: As long as intentions and capabilities (in this case, those of North Vietnam) remain unchanged, a politically and militarily credible guarantee of a ceasefire, including the deterrence of the potential aggressor, is crucial for lasting security. Without this protection, there is a risk of renewed escalation.</p>
G7 agreements	<p>Description: The G7 security agreements are a result of the <i>G7 Joint Declaration of Support for Ukraine</i> from July 2023. Since then, more than 20 states have concluded bilateral agreements with Ukraine that intensify cooperation in economic, technological, political, and military areas.</p> <p>Evaluation: The agreements consolidate cooperation with Ukraine and put them on a long-term and often legal basis, but the content varies from country to country. Most importantly, they do not contain legally binding assistance clauses or operational commitments.</p>

IV. Basic features of a *sui generis* model for Ukraine

Since none of the organisational frameworks and models discussed are directly applicable and promising, Europeans must develop a *sui generis* model. They must creatively bridge the gap between what is needed and what is currently available in Europe; and design a new politico-military framework for it.

The examples also show that a possible deployment would not be a short-term operation, but rather a long-term presence – up to decades – until Russia’s intentions no longer pose a threat to Ukraine’s sovereignty and Europe’s security order.

The following questions must be answered:

- What does it take to deter Russia? What capabilities or force levels and what political framework would be required to sustainably deter Russia from resuming or continuing the invasion or starting another one?
- Is the involvement of nuclear powers a mandatory prerequisite for successful deterrence, since conventional forces alone are not sufficient to deter a nuclear power?

- How large should the buffer zone/demilitarized zone around the frontline be? What could its route look like? Which parts could be secured by technical means (unmanned systems, mines, etc.)?
- How and with what means can compliance with the agreement be verified? Do existing procedures, such as the Vienna Document, offer starting points?
- What level of U.S. involvement is conceivable under Trump II?
- What rules of engagement would apply to the non-Ukrainian forces?
- Specifically for Germany: what legal framework could be used to allow for a mandate for German troops to participate?

a) Core elements of a *sui generis* model

The chart above shows the necessary factors for successful ceasefire agreements. These include:

- Clearly assigned responsibility.
- The presence of sufficiently strong troops, secured for the long term.

Based on military principles, a force ratio of 1:3 is required to ensure a credible deterrent. This ratio is based on the assumption that an attacker needs a numerical superiority of more than three to one in order to have a chance of success.

In addition to the numerical factor, technical aspects also play a role, including the range of reconnaissance and weapons effectiveness, troop motivation and training, and knowledge of the terrain. Based on the strength of the Russian armed forces deployed in Ukraine (approximately 600,000-700,000 PAX), and taking into account the Ukrainian armed forces (more than 100 brigades), the ideal additional Western contingent strength required would be around 150,000 soldiers. As these forces would be on permanent standby, there would be a need to rotate them. This would effectively triple the force requirement, as while one contingent is deployed (standby), a second would be in preparation (stand-up) while the third is in the regeneration phase (stand-down).

The effort required could be reduced by eliminating or limiting rotation and by using technical support elements.

The question of how to mandate such a mission primarily concerns Germany. Recourse to Article 51 of the UN Charter and an invitation by Kyiv are being discussed.⁸

Given Trump's calls for more European commitment, Europe would have to bear the main burden of providing security. Germany, the UK, France, the Baltic and Nordic states and Poland would be at the forefront.⁹

A mission entirely without U.S. support is inconceivable because of the mix of capabilities required for such an endeavour. U.S. capabilities in the areas of air patrol, air and missile defence, and C4ISR¹⁰ in general, remain key capabilities and an indispensable prerequisite for the deployment of Allied forces. While most, if not all, U.S. operations could be conducted remotely without requiring a large U.S. military footprint in Ukraine, a U.S. military presence would significantly reinforce the deterrence message.

⁸ Similar to the procedure for '*INHERENT RESOLVE*'. See FN 4 on page 6.

⁹ Poland has recently been reluctant to take an active role, in part because it wants Ukraine to exhaust its own forces first. It also fears that the Ukrainian population would reject Polish troops because of historical conflicts. However, the main reason for this reluctance is probably caution in view of the upcoming presidential elections in May 2025, which will determine the current government's room for manoeuvre.

¹⁰ C4ISR or C⁴ISR = Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance

b) Three models (NATO accession, western deployment, help for self-help with incremental Europeanization)

The most likely *sui generis* models are based on a coalition of the willing. They vary in terms of the number of participants, the contributions and military tasks to be undertaken. It is conceivable, for example, that not only NATO countries but also Ramstein format countries and countries from the "Global South" could participate.

Three models can be considered:

1) NATO accession

The most stable, cost-effective (assuming deterrence is effective) and reliable version of ensuring Ukraine's security would be Kyiv's NATO membership, as promised at the 2023 NATO Vilnius summit and confirmed at the 2024 Washington summit.

However, accession is currently unrealistic. Admitting a country that is approximately 20% occupied carries significant risks – particularly regarding the timing of accession, the border line, the potential for conventional, hybrid, and nuclear escalation, possible escalation in other theatres (such as the Middle East) and NATO's political and military credibility.

First and foremost, NATO accession requires unanimous approval, meaning all 32 NATO Allies must agree. However, some countries, including Germany and the U.S., are currently opposed. Trump and U.S. officials so far reject the possibility of admitting Ukraine to NATO during or immediately after a war. There is growing discussion in Washington about removing the issue of NATO membership from possible negotiations and addressing it separately.

Yet NATO membership remains the long-term goal. Anything short of that is ultimately a less secure, reliable, and credible solution.

2) Credible military security assured via Western deployment of approx. 150,000 soldiers.

To support Ukraine even without NATO membership, Western countries could station troops in Ukraine as part of a coalition of the willing. Europe's defence line would then effectively shift from NATO's eastern flank to the Ukrainian-Russian border.

The model is based on:

- Strong Ukrainian troops, with Western support for training, strategy, equipment and industrial production and development. This buildup could take up to 10-15 years, so it will take time to have an effect;
- Technical means to secure and monitor the ceasefire line and the buffer zone, using drones, mines, etc;
- Optional: regionally defined limits (not for the entire country!) for the size of the armed forces in the regions bordering the buffer zone, as well as credible and enforced verification mechanisms;
- Western troop deployments;
- Massive political, economic and military assistance to Ukraine.

The ongoing political and military integration of Ukraine into Euro-Atlantic structures (NATO, EU, G7, but also bilaterally), as well as closer industrial cooperation, support the long-term viability of this model.

Militarily, the Ukrainian armed forces would continue to bear the main burden, especially in securing the ceasefire line. Mobile Western (primarily NATO) units, possibly with

integrated Ukrainian units, would be stationed well behind the ceasefire line and would each be responsible for a defined section (a "*pocket*"). Given the size of the area to be secured, a force of approximately 150,000 PAX would be necessary to provide a credible deterrent.¹¹ Stationing in the rear, deploying mobile units, and having responsibility for *pockets* increases deterrence against Russia¹², since it would remain unclear where exactly Western units would be deployed in the event of a Russian attack.

The idea of tripwire forces and other smaller deployments, which are currently being circulated inter alia by France, goes in this direction. Yet these approaches are only credible if reinforcements are actually available, either in Ukraine or just over the horizon.

However, such a large contingent is currently illusory: the appropriate units and the political will are lacking. Without specific U.S. *enablers*, such a deployment is impossible. Credibility remains a problem (see IV. Dilemmas).

Even if NATO Allies wanted to commit forces to Ukraine, they would face the problem that they have locked the majority of their forces into NATO's defence planning. NATO's defence plans would therefore have to be revised to accommodate such a shift of forces, but allies have made it clear that they are not willing to do so. Moreover, transferring forces to Ukraine risks weakening the defence of NATO territory. NATO Allies would consciously weaken the protection of their own territory and take risks in order to secure a non-NATO state (Ukraine). Allies could thus provoke Russia, which they want to deter in Ukraine, to launch attacks elsewhere – on NATO's eastern flank, for example.

In addition, there is no significant political support for this in any EU or NATO country. Even strong supporters of Ukraine, such as Poland, remain sceptical. They point to Ukrainian responsibility (e.g., Kyiv would first have to mobilize all available forces), historical reasons (such as the acceptance of foreign troops in Ukraine), security (not risking their own security for that of Ukraine), and domestic political reasons (such as upcoming elections). Some states (such as Finland and Sweden) want to avoid a public debate on upholding a ceasefire, as they believe it distracts from the need to support Ukraine now. Like others, they fear that such a debate carries the risk of talking Ukraine into a defeat (defeatism and *self-fulfilling prophecy*). The public support seems to vary among European countries. For example, a recent poll in Germany revealed that a staggering 59% of the public would support a deployment of the Bundeswehr, together with other European troops, to uphold a ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia.¹³

Almost all European states reject such a mission without U.S. participation as too risky. However, they could imagine participating if the U.S. decided to do so. A British-French leadership role is not enough for most Europeans.

3) Help for self-help and incremental integration of Ukraine into Euro-Atlantic structures (normative power of facts on the ground)

If the Western states decide against major military contributions (such as deployments in Model 2), they can strengthen Ukraine in other areas, i.e. provide "help for self-help", which could include various elements:

- Closer cooperation with Ukrainian industry (technology transfer, co-production, company shares);

¹¹ See explanation in IV. a) Core elements of a *sui generis model*

¹² See the Chart page 7/8 explanations on Forward defence strategy and FN 7

¹³ See **ZDFheute: Ukraine: Deutsche stehen hinter Militärhilfen**, February 4, 2025

- Financing models, as Ukrainian industry can produce faster and cheaper than Western companies (e.g., the "Danish model");
- Support in critical capability areas (e.g., reconnaissance and *Deep Fires*);
- Air support and securing Ukrainian airspace from NATO countries bordering Ukraine (such as Poland and Romania);
- Training of and advice for the armed forces, possibly carried out in Ukraine;
- Western forces in Ukraine performing tasks to relieve Ukrainian forces, e.g., border protection, maintenance, and training;¹⁴
- Intensified economic, energy, and trade relations.

The aim would be to make progress towards the goal of anchoring Ukraine in Euro-Atlantic structures as formulated in the *2023 G7 Joint Declaration* and NATO and EU declarations. Many small technical connections would bring Ukraine so close to the EU and NATO over time that a reversal would be possible only at great cost. The goal would be to harness the normative power of facts on the ground: cooperation on technical issues would create political facts. Such incremental integration with Ukraine, linked to EU and NATO accession process, corresponds to the logic of the early European integration process: small steps, *spillovers*, and a steadily growing latticework of technical integration that creates political facts that would have been difficult to state as a goal in advance. The gradual increase in economic, military and civil integration creates a new political reality and political stability – because only a secure Ukraine can focus on economic and infrastructure reconstruction, democratic reforms, and dealing with the social consequences of war.¹⁵

The strength of this model lies in the fact that Western states would fundamentally strengthen Ukraine's ability to act by supporting strong conventional Ukrainian armed forces.

But there are also risks. For example, the security and deterrence support might not be credible enough, and Russia could test it and continue the war. On the other hand, Ukraine's equipment and capabilities for *Deep Strikes* and *combined arms operations* might not deter a Russian attack, but (depending on Moscow's threat perception) might even increase the likelihood of such an attack. Moreover, in such a militarily strengthened Ukraine, Western supporters might have little ability to influence political changes and their consequences in Ukraine and beyond. This includes, for example, the possibility of an ultra-nationalist government taking office. If such a government were to use its Western-equipped and trained armed forces to retake Ukrainian territory currently occupied by Russia in violation of the ceasefire, Western supporters would have to stop it, with all the military and political consequences that that would entail.

Progress on model 3 (*help for self-help*) would support progress towards model 2 (*deployment*) and model 1 (*NATO accession*).

¹⁴ During the meeting in Paris in February 2024, a number of these concepts and additional forms of assistance were addressed, including cyber defence, collaborative weapon production, border protection, and demining.

¹⁵ This would require the EU accession process to adapt, which cannot be discussed in detail here.

V. Dilemmas, conflicting goals and the need to make decisions

a) Dilemmas and conflicting goals

The Europeans face several dilemmas and conflicting objectives, particularly with regard to Model 2 (*deployment*):

- Either
 - they make the military commitments to Ukraine that would be necessary to deter Russia, but that they cannot provide (about 150,000 PAX), or
 - they make commitments that they can realistically provide, but that will be insufficient to deter Russia (about 10,000/20,000-40,000 PAX).

Providing too few troops, or tripwire forces without reinforcements, would amount to a bluff that could invite Russia to test the waters. There would be little NATO could do about it. A "*bluff and pray*" approach, based on the hope that Russia will not test the West's readiness to defend Ukraine, would be reckless, irresponsible and increase the likelihood of war in Europe.
- Any deployment of troops from NATO Allies would draw the U.S. into the conflict. Without recourse to U.S. capabilities such as strategic airlift, logistics, air and missile defence, and intelligence, credible deterrence is inconceivable. If Russia were to attack again, the U.S. would almost inevitably find itself as a party to the conflict. A scenario in which Russia fights against its European allies and the U.S. merely stands by seems hard to imagine, even under Trump. But if it were to happen anyway, the loss of credibility for NATO would be devastating.
- Europeans must credibly convey to Russia and Ukraine that they are now prepared to fight for Ukraine and against Russia:
 - Even though the Europeans have refused to do so since 2022 and have explicitly and repeatedly avoided direct intervention in Ukraine;
 - Although they reject the promised accession of Kyiv to NATO at the present time, which would clarify the question of security;
 - They must therefore explain why they prefer the worse solution (protection as a coalition of the willing), when the solution of "NATO membership" has been promised.
- Would NATO Allies be willing to accept cuts in their own defence in order to protect Ukraine, a non-NATO state (e.g., by reducing troops on NATO's eastern flank in order to deploy them in Ukraine)?
- Are purely conventional armed forces (such as Ukraine's) capable of deterring a nuclear power like Russia, or is purely conventional protection implausible and would it therefore pave the way to another attack?
- Would an attack on NATO troops in Ukraine undermine NATO solidarity and destroy the Alliance from within?
- The Europeans need to weigh their support carefully. Surrendering Ukraine to Russia would increase the risk of a new war in Europe, as would inadequate Western efforts to uphold any ceasefire in Ukraine, which Russia could test, exposing the West's weakness ("*bluff and pray*"). The same is true if ensuring Ukraine's security involves a very large number of Western troops in Ukraine at the expense of the defence of NATO territory. This could tempt Russia to test weakened Western deterrence and defence elsewhere – such as in the Baltic states.

b) Political decision-making needed

Before deciding on a model to secure a possible ceasefire, Europeans should address fundamental questions:

- **Where will Europe be defended?** Should the border at which deterrence of Russia starts run along the edge of current NATO territory or along the border between Russia and Ukraine?
- **Who will invest political capital in defending and supporting Ukraine?** To provide credible protection for Ukraine in addition to NATO obligations, European allies will have to increase their military contributions. This will require additional, long-term investments in defence capabilities – in terms of personnel, finances, and industry. With the exception of Poland, the Baltic states, and some Nordic countries, many European countries are not prepared to do more than make promises. Are policymakers willing to spend political capital to increase defence investment and support Ukraine?
- **Who will create unity in Europe and who will lead?** Europeans did not react to Trump's election (and his ideas about Ukraine for that matter) together in a unified way but rather unilaterally or in several minilateral formats. Minilateralism, if coordinated, strengthens Europe. But as soon as smaller formats marginalize other Europeans, they undermine Europe's overall ability to act. Without U.S. political leadership, it seems difficult at present to generate unity or organise smaller groups willing to lead. The E3 (UK, FRA, DEU) and E5 (+ITA and POL) formats are promising and should be complemented by the NATO Secretary General, the President of the European Commission, and regional expertise (e.g., Romania for the Black Sea).
- **How can the Europeans develop their own nuclear and conventional deterrence with reduced U.S. contributions?**

VI. Other elements for securing a ceasefire

The only issue discussed here is the military enforcement of a ceasefire. In the event of a cessation of hostilities, the question arises as to which other security policy issues should be addressed in potential negotiations.¹⁶ These include countering expected Russian demands and defining European (and hopefully transatlantic) goals.

The following issues should be areas on which western states refuse to negotiate:

- Recognition of the annexed Ukrainian territories as Russian territory;
- Limitations on NATO's posture in the east (northeast, southeast);
- Restrictions on *Deep Fires*;
- Limitations on conventional and nuclear exercises;
- Restrictions on the development of NATO's *nuclear posture*;
- Restrictions on military assistance to Ukraine (other than nuclear);
- Restrictions on the deployment of Western troops in Ukraine;
- The principle of free choice of alliance and NATO's *Open Door Policy*.

Conditions on the deployment of troops, the number of troops stationed, or certain weapon systems (*Deep Fires*) in Ukraine would be conceivable as part of negotiations. If Russia were to violate the agreement, any restrictions in these areas would be null and void.

¹⁶ Economic, political and legal issues, from reparations and war crimes to snap-back sanctions and a possible ceasefire, are explicitly *not* addressed here.

VII. Conclusion and outlook

There is as yet no coherent strategy to persuade Russia or Ukraine to stop fighting – especially against their will. This dimension has been deliberately excluded from this analysis. None of the historical models currently discussed and none of the currently established reference frameworks for ceasefire agreements provide a blueprint for a sustainable solution. Since none of these models can be applied entirely, Europeans must develop a *sui generis* model that bridges the gap between what is militarily necessary and what is currently politically and militarily possible in Europe. As long as the position and role of the United States remains unclear, there is a real danger that the Europeans will find themselves in a situation where their only choice is between abandoning Ukraine or achieving as much as possible with the means available – but consciously taking risks in doing so. In this case, model 3 (*help for self-help*) provides the basis for paving the way to model 2 (*deployment*) and ultimately model 1 (*NATO accession*).

Dr. Claudia Major is head of the International Security Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP).

Lieutenant Colonel (G.S.) Aldo Kleemann is a Visiting Fellow at the International Security Division of the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP).

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SWP
Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for International and Security Affairs

Ludwigkirchplatz 3-4
10719 Berlin
Phone +49 30 880 07-0
Fax +49 30 880 07-100
www.swp-berlin.org
swp@swp-berlin.org