

Answers to Lenta.RU questions

13 March 2025

1. In your opinion, what are the prospects for a peaceful settlement in Ukraine now? How achievable is the ceasefire proposed by US President Donald Trump?

I am cautiously optimistic that Russia and the United States will be able to agree terms that will enable President Putin to accept an interim ceasefire. More difficult will be getting Ukraine to agree to these terms. But the United States was able to prevail upon Kiev to accept an unconditional temporary ceasefire so maybe the Americans will be able to do the same thing again.

2. Under what conditions can a ceasefire be achieved? What compromises are Ukraine and Russia ready for at this stage?

Any ceasefire agreement will have to deal with the technical issues that Putin raised in his press conference with Lukashenko – how would a ceasefire be implemented, monitored and enforced? And how will Ukraine be constrained from using the ceasefire as a breathing space before resuming hostilities? More important, though, will be advance agreement on the political parameters of a future peace treaty, notably the de-Natoisation and neutralization of Ukraine. That is the fundamental concession Ukraine will have to make to secure a ceasefire that will lead to a permanent peace. For its part, Russia will need to refrain from reiterating its previous demands for the withdrawal of Ukraine's armed forces from the whole of Donetsk, Lugansk, Kherson and Zaporozhe. In other words, the conflict will be frozen along the extant frontline – an outcome that would fall short of Russia's stated territorial demands.

3. What are the US interests in a peaceful resolution in Ukraine? What exactly does the Donald Trump administration seek, in your view?

The Trump administration wants peace because Ukraine and its western allies have lost the war with Russia. The war's continuation is pointless and constitutes an ever-present danger of existential escalation. The new administration's world view is completely different from that of the Biden presidency. It is not interested in ideological crusades. It has a more realistic and pragmatic appreciation of the limits of US global power. It is dedicated to furthering America's national interests and can see many advantages in a détente with Russia.

4. How do you see the role of European countries and the UK in the settlement of the Ukraine conflict? What are their interests and what can these countries influence now?

Hitherto, the British and European contribution to the incipient peace process initiated by Trump has been highly negative. European leaders seem to want the Ukraine war to continue as long as possible as part of a strategy of wearing Russia down. They talk about militarising their societies and a future war with Russia. They whip up Russophobia and make absurd claims about Russian expansionism in Europe. They ignore the pro-peace inclinations of their own citizens. One can only hope they will come to their senses. If they don't, they will, in due course, lose power and be replaced by politicians prepared to follow Trump's course of seeking détente with Russia.

5. And to what extent is the restoration of co-operation between Russia and European countries possible in the future?

Its entirely possible. Its purely a matter of political will. Notwithstanding all the negative things that have happened in the last three years, that will still exists on the Russian side and we can only hope ending the Ukraine war will prompt a change of heart by Europe. As the last Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, said, Russia and Europe live in a common European home and have every reason – political, economic, strategic – to coexist and collaborate for mutual benefit.

6. If the conflict in Ukraine can be ended in the near future, how likely is it to resume in the future? Under what conditions could this happen?

My feeling is that if there is a ceasefire – even an initially temporary one – it will be very difficult for either side to resume the war. Ukraine will be too weak, wounded and inward looking, while Russia will be under pressure from China, India, Brazil, South Africa and other friends, allies and partners to keep the peace. But key will be the maturation of the American-Russia collaboration – which will provide the power and the incentive to hold the peace together.

7. How do you see the future world order after the conflict in Ukraine is over? Will it resemble any of the systems of international relations of the past eras?

The future world order will be an old world order of a multi-polar system of sovereign states. As in the past, the stability of such a system will depend on the relations of the Great Powers and the extent to which they are able to harmonise their interests and maximise their collaboration for the common good.

8. We hear sometimes about the possibility of a kind of Yalta 2.0, broad agreements between Russia and the USA on security issues and the division of spheres of influence — how realistic is this under current conditions?

*Yalta 2.0 would be great! Yalta was not about spheres of influence. It was about Great Power unity and the creation of an integrated global order – a peaceful and politically diverse international system. That peacemaking project – which seemed quite hopeful at the time – was destroyed by the cold war. It was somewhat recovered during the *détentes* of the 1970s and 1980s. There is now every possibility of reviving the collaborative spirit of Yalta.*

9. The conflict in Ukraine and the prospects for its resolution are often compared with the conflicts of the 20th century: the Korean War, the Winter War... to what extent are these comparisons, in your opinion, acceptable?

The most instructive comparison is with the Winter War of 1939-1940. Stalin attacked Finland for security reasons. The Red Army's initial invasion faltered but the Soviets re-grouped and by March 1940 were capable of occupying the whole of Finland. But Stalin held back and signed a peace treaty with the Finns because he feared the war would escalate into a general war in Scandinavia involving Britain, France and Germany as well as the Soviet Union. Finland lost a lot of territory but survived as an independent, sovereign state. Unfortunately, Finland's leaders allied with Nazi Germany when Hitler invaded the USSR in June 1941. The Finns suffered hundreds of thousands of casualties and were lucky to escape Soviet occupation at the end of the war. Happily, the Finns came to their senses and voluntarily entered the Soviet sphere of influence (though not the communist bloc). The result was what became known as 'Finlandisation' – in return for friendly relations with the Soviets, the Finns controlled their domestic affairs and developed their country into one of the most successful European states.

A form of Finlandisation is possible for Ukraine but it needs a government that will agree a peace treaty with Russia and then remain on friendly terms with Moscow. It is entirely feasible for Ukraine to function as both a bridge and a buffer between Russia and the West. Like Finland, Ukraine would be able to enhance its sovereignty and reduce its reliance on malign foreign actors.