بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

The Approach of Winter Will Once Again Intensify Ukrainian-Russian Negotiations

News:

Stubb and Støre conveyed to Putin that Zelenskyy wants to speak with him directly, Ushakov said.

Putin responded by saying they could meet in Moscow. (Source)

The war in Ukraine will continue and is likely to escalate, says Lavrov. (Source)

Comment:

Traditionally, before the onset of cold weather in Ukraine, the negotiation process in the Russian-Ukrainian crisis intensified.

Past experience indicates that this process intensifies during the autumn and winter. This is because it is during this period that Russia gains a critical advantage: strikes on the energy system, which push Ukraine's civilian population to the brink of survival due to the lack of electricity and heat in sub-zero temperatures.

With the onset of spring, and corresponding warming, such activity drops to zero, as the aforementioned critical superiority of Russia over Ukraine disappears.

It appears that this year's negotiation process will follow a similar pattern. This is indicated by the fact that, as in previous years, the parties are setting patently unfeasible conditions. Let's list these conditions and why they are patently unfeasible:

Russia is demanding the withdrawal of the Ukrainian Armed Forces from the territories of four regions (Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson) within their administrative boundaries. This requires Ukraine to surrender major regional centers (Kherson and Zaporizhzhia) without a fight, as well as strategically important fortified areas. No Ukrainian government or society will voluntarily agree to the transfer of territories home to millions of citizens to Russian control.

Russia is demanding that Ukraine's neutral, non-aligned, and non-nuclear status be secured (its renunciation of NATO). This is despite the fact that the path toward NATO membership is enshrined in the Ukrainian Constitution. Moreover, Ukraine and its partners view alliance membership or direct legal security guarantees from the United States as the only mechanism capable of preventing a repeat attack in the future.

Russia demands "demilitarization and denazification." However, in the understanding of Kyiv and the West, the demand for "demilitarization" would mean reducing the Ukrainian army to a state where it would be unable to defend itself, which is considered capitulation.

Russia is demanding the complete lifting of international sanctions against the Russian Federation. However, the US and EU have repeatedly emphasized that lifting most sanctions is only possible after the full restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty and compensation for damages, and not in exchange for a simple ceasefire.

As for Ukraine and the Western countries that support it, including the United States, their demands are as follows:

The non-recognition of Crimea and the aforementioned four occupied regions as Russian territories, and, moreover, the demand for the withdrawal of Russian troops at least to the line by February 24, 2022. For the Kremlin, troop withdrawal would mean admitting complete

military and political defeat. Relinquishing territories already included in the Russian Constitution as Russian is politically impossible for the current Russian government.

Bringing the top Russian leadership to justice (by an international tribunal) and paying reparations. No state will agree to a tribunal against its own leadership and the payment of enormous compensation without complete military defeat and capitulation.

Ukraine's accession to NATO or the receipt of strict military security guarantees from the US and the West. Russia will not agree to this condition, as preventing NATO expansion into Ukraine has been declared by Russia as one of its main official war goals.

It is worth mentioning some differences in the positions of Ukraine and the United States. However, these differences, whether in the Ukrainian or American version, are still unacceptable for Russia.

Some might argue that none of Russia's top officials have openly articulated these conditions in recent days. However, it's worth noting that they have been voiced by both parties multiple times before and never retracted. Furthermore, the relevance of these conditions in October 2026 was also voiced by Russia's second-tier officials.

Thus, in early October 2026 (in an interview with Iranian state media), Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev publicly listed and confirmed Moscow's basic demands for ending the war.

"I'll list them again for the Iranian audience. First and foremost, they are: a neutral, nuclear-free, independent status for the state of Ukraine .... Secondly, a rejection of the current regime's nationalist course in Ukraine and a condemnation of the ban on the Russian language, a ban on everything Russian, anything Russian – as one of the conditions for such a settlement. ... Thirdly, this is the transfer to Russian jurisdiction of what is enshrined in the Russian constitution. Namely, territories in Donbas and some other new regions. That is, the restoration of Russian sovereignty. If this does not happen, we will do it militarily."

The negotiating positions of the Ukrainian side were voiced throughout October by the President of Ukraine V. Zelenskyy himself: "...Our security guarantees are our security guarantees. They cannot be dictated by the Russian side. Therefore, the conclusions are clear: limitations on our army and Ukraine's neutrality are not up for discussion," Zelenskyy stated in an interview with TSN, published on the evening of October 25.

Regarding the territorial issue, in the same interview he stated: "The territorial issue is a red line that can only be discussed at the leadership level."

Zelenskyy noted that for the Ukrainian side, the territorial issue has always been a constant, and American negotiators have been raising it for a long time.

Thus, at the moment, the parties are putting forward conditions that are clearly unacceptable to each other. Therefore, it's likely that this intensification of the negotiating process will fade away with the end of winter, just as it did before.

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