



How to Build Long-term Peace between Russia and Ukraine

Revised Position Paper (Updated August 2026)

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*This paper presents the updated framework for a ‘Track Two’ peacebuilding process developed by Relational Peacebuilding Initiatives (RPI). It outlines a pragmatic roadmap to transition from the current stalemate and attritional conflict into a durable, structured peace. By shifting the paradigm from zero-sum territorial bargaining to a strategy of **Mutual Convergent Development**, this document proposes concrete stepping stones—modelled on historical precedents such as the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)—to build regional trust, ensure environmental and energy security, and foster long-term stability.*

A. Basic Proposal

I. Context and Strategic Landscape

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022—building upon the 2014 annexation of Crimea and conflict in the Donbas—has resulted in massive loss of life, widespread destruction of civilian infrastructure, and unprecedented geopolitical instability across Europe.

Recent developments through 2025 and 2026 highlight a war characterised by severe attrition, deep cross-border drone and missile strikes, high casualties on both sides, and intense diplomatic manoeuvring:

- **Battlefield Realities:** While territorial control has seen incremental shifts—such as slow Russian advances in eastern Ukraine (Donbas/Pokrovsk axis) and fluid dynamics around border regions like Kursk—neither side has achieved a decisive operational breakthrough capable of dictating final terms.
- **Diplomatic Push & International Initiatives:** The diplomatic landscape has seen major multilateral engagements. US-led diplomatic initiatives under the Trump administration, alongside proposals from European nations, BRICS+, and direct bilateral meetings in Istanbul, Abu Dhabi, and Geneva, have repeatedly highlighted both the urgency of a ceasefire and the persistent gap between the primary belligerents' core demands.
- **Humanitarian and Global Toll:** Beyond the direct military casualties, the war has displaced over 10 million Ukrainians, disrupted global agricultural and energy markets, and placed extreme stress on international security architectures.

2. Analysis of Potential Scenarios

Several trajectories remain possible, though their long-term implications vary significantly:

1. **Decisive Military Collapse:** A breakthrough by either side leading to complete military collapse remains unlikely given defensive fortifications, drone saturation, and logistical limits. Should it occur, a forced victory would produce deep internal instability and sow the seeds for future revanchist conflicts.
2. **Protracted War of Attrition:** Continuation of the current trajectory will inflict compounding economic, demographic, and industrial destruction on both nations, creating severe long-term scars across Eastern Europe.
3. **Wider Regional Escalation:** Continued escalation carries perpetual risks of direct involvement by third parties or unintended nuclear confrontation.
4. **Negotiated Armistice and Peace Process:** A negotiated halt to hostilities represents the only viable path to avert permanent ruin. However, a simple military armistice that freezes front lines without an underlying relational framework risks becoming a temporary pause leading to rearmament and resumed conflict.

3. Track Two Peacebuilding and the Relational Approach

To move beyond a fragile freeze, an independent **‘Track Two’ process** is required. This process facilitates confidence-building measures that align mutual self-interest before formal geopolitical settlements are finalised.

Historical Precedents

Following World War II, Western Europe was rebuilt not merely through military guarantees, but through structural interdependence:

- **The Marshall Plan:** Provided essential economic stabilisation.
- **The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC):** Pooled vital industrial resources (coal and steel) between former adversaries (France and Germany), making war not only unthinkable but economically impractical.

Applying this logic to Ukraine, RPI proposes a **Mutual Convergent Development Strategy** centred on shared critical infrastructure and environmental resources.

4. Core Case Study: Lower Dnieper/Dnipro Water, Energy, and Environment Community (LDWEEC)

The destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in June 2023 devastated the ecology, agriculture, and power grids along both banks of the Dnieper/Dnipro River. Addressing this shared disaster provides a concrete starting point for functional cooperation.

Key objectives of the proposed **LDWEEC**:

- **Kakhovka Dam Reconstruction:** Joint restoration of water management systems to alleviate flooding risks and restore agricultural irrigation.
- **Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP):** Establishing an internationally monitored, shared energy regime ensuring safety, cooling water supply, and power distribution to communities on both sides of the line of control.
- **Freshwater Security:** Managing sustainable water flows to Crimea and downstream agricultural zones.

5. Five-Phase Roadmap for Peacebuilding

Preliminary Phase: Maritime & Infrastructure Security

- Extend and codify Black Sea maritime safety agreements, protecting commercial shipping, agricultural exports, and energy infrastructure from long-range strikes.

Phase One: Armistice and Establishing LDWEEC

- Formalise a ceasefire along the established line of control.
- Launch the LDWEEC to manage Dnieper/Dnipro water and energy resources under international oversight.

Phase Two: Integrated Commercial and Trade Zones

- Establish special economic entrepôt zones bridging Ukrainian and Russian-controlled territories.
- Implement relational principles in local business, finance, and community development to support regional cohesion.

Phase Three: Social and Institutional Alignment

- Support local governance through empowered Oblastal Councils.
- Decentralize welfare, healthcare, and social services to prioritize family and community stability.

Phase Four: Confederal Framework

- Transition de facto territorial control into a confederal arrangement.
- Realign administrative status through mutual political recognition, expanding the environmental community model to the full Dnieper basin.

Phase Five: Comprehensive Peace Agreement & Multi-Connected Neutrality

- Conclude a final treaty establishing a federated/confederated structure with strong regional autonomy.
- Establish a multi-connected, neutral status for Ukraine within a broader European security architecture, involving key regional neighbours.

6. Peace Dividends for All Stakeholders

Stakeholder	Key Peace Dividends
Ukraine	• Halt to destruction and civilian loss. • Access to multi-billion-dollar reconstruction funding. • Economic recovery through foreign investment, tech sector growth, and restored agricultural corridors.
Russia	• Transition from war economy strain to long-term market normalisation. • Step-by-step unfreezing of assets and integration into international financial structures (e.g., SWIFT) tied to treaty compliance. • Re-opening of global energy and commercial export routes.
International Community	• Easing of global cost-of-living and energy inflation pressures. • Reduced geopolitical friction between Western nations and the BRICS+ bloc. • Enhanced global food security through normalised grain and fertiliser exports.

B The Deepening Impasse Across the Front

The status of the **Donetsk Fortress Belt**—the vital defensive line anchored by Sloviansk, Kramatorsk, Druzhkivka, and Kostiantynivka—is a pivotal focal point in both battlefield strategy and diplomatic bargaining. The recent claim by the Russian Ministry of Defence regarding the full capture of **Kostiantynivka**—and Kyiv's subsequent rejection of it—illustrates the intense contestation over the anchor points of the Donetsk Fortress Belt.

Moscow's insistence that Ukraine cede these heavily fortified, uncaptured urban centres as a precondition for a settlement has consistently been a non-starter for Kyiv. Recent Ukrainian counter-pushes, tactical rollbacks, and effective drone-led defence across the Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk border sectors further undercut the viability of such Russian demands.

Key Military and Diplomatic Implications

1. Realities on the Ground vs. Political Demands

- **The "Springboard" Threat:** The Fortress Belt represents a decade of fortified defence. Handing over intact defensive infrastructure would dismantle Ukraine's security architecture in the east, leaving lowland access toward Dnipro and Kharkiv completely exposed.
- **Erosion of Russian Leverage:** Russian tactical attrition and recent Ukrainian territorial retakes demonstrate that Moscow lacks the operational capacity to force a collapse of this line. Demanding the voluntary surrender of fortified positions that Russian forces cannot capture militarily creates an unbridgeable diplomatic impasse.

2. Reaffirming the De Facto Line of Control

- **Validation of the RPI Armistice Concept:** The RPI framework emphasises an initial armistice based strictly on the **actual, operational line of control** rather than political claims or unilateral territorial concessions. To address frontline fluidity at the moment of cease-fire, the Armistice Concept relies on a synchronised standstill followed by an immediate tactical disengagement (a symmetrical withdrawal of heavy weapons and ground forces to establish an interim Demilitarised Zone). The precise Line of Actual Control is then retroactively mapped and verified by a Joint Technical Commission utilising satellite telemetry and neutral third-party monitoring, neutralising local fluidity without requiring pre-agreed territorial demarcations.
- **Preventing Strategic Imbalance:** Ukrainian tactical resilience confirms that negotiations cannot require one side to forfeit its primary defensive shield before a verified peace settlement is implemented.

Adjustments to the RPI Peacebuilding Roadmap

1. Phase One (Armistice & De-escalation):

- The line of control freeze must explicitly preserve existing Ukrainian fortifications as a defensive guarantee.
- Rather than bargaining over territorial handovers that compromise core national defence, negotiation efforts should concentrate on **airspace restrictions, long-range drone/missile stand-offs, and third-party verification.**

2. Phase Two & Three (Functional Integration over Boundary Realignment):

- With maximalist territorial demands sidelined by battlefield realities, Track Two dialogues can pivot toward areas where mutual interest exists—such as joint energy grid management via the **Lower Dnieper/Dnipro Water, Energy, and Environment Community (LDWEEC)** and local economic entrepôts.

3. Phase Four & Five (Confederation & Security Guarantees):

- Any future confederal or federated governance model must respect entrenched regional security structures. Maintaining the structural integrity of the Fortress Belt ensures Ukraine enters any post-war security framework from a position of defensive stability rather than structural vulnerability.

Summary

Ukrainian push-back along the Donetsk front reinforces the core thesis of the original paper: a durable peace cannot be built on coerced, unilateral concessions of vital defensive ground. Grounding the preliminary phases of peacebuilding in de facto battlefield realities allows diplomatic momentum to focus on functional cooperation, regional security guarantees, and economic rebuilding rather than unviable demands..

C. Implications of Recent Geopolitical Developments

The recent geopolitical and strategic developments significantly alter the operational environment for the proposed **Relational Peacebuilding Initiatives (RPI) Track Two framework**, strengthening certain core arguments while requiring critical adaptations in implementation:

I. Escalation through Deep Drone Warfare & Asymmetric Operations

- **Strategic Shift:** Long-range drone saturation has transformed the war beyond static trench warfare, allowing both sides to strike strategic depth far behind

frontlines without requiring traditional battlefield breakthroughs or air superiority.

- **Impact on the Framework:**

- **Armistice Vulnerability:** A traditional line-of-control armistice is increasingly fragile when long-range drone and missile capabilities remain unconstrained.
- **Expanded Safeguards:** Phase One (Armistice) must expand beyond ground-based line-of-control freezing to include explicit **airspace and long-range strike de-escalation protocols**, alongside international remote monitoring.
- **Reinforcement of Track Two Need:** The inability of either side to convert deep strikes into decisive territorial gains reinforces RPI's thesis that military operations cannot produce a durable victory, necessitating a relational transition.

2. Targeting of Russian Fuel Infrastructure & Domestic Pressures

- **Strategic Shift:** Sustained drone strikes on Russian refineries have disabled significant domestic processing capacity, prompting export bans, regional fuel rationing, and severe domestic economic friction within Russia.
- **Impact on the Framework:**
 - **New Negotiation Currency:** Russian domestic fuel vulnerability provides a critical economic lever in Track Two dialogue. Energy security is no longer merely a post-war reconstruction goal, but an immediate bargaining element.
 - **Centrality of LDWEEC:** The proposed **Lower Dnieper/Dnipro Water, Energy, and Environment Community (LDWEEC)** gains urgency. Linking the protection and restoration of broader energy infrastructure—including the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant (ZNPP), regional power grids, and refining hubs—offers a concrete pathway where both sides exchange targeted relief for systemic stability.

3. US–Israel / Iran Conflict and Global Energy Shocks

- **Strategic Shift:** Direct military engagement involving the US and Israel in the Middle East has disrupted global energy transit (e.g., Strait of Hormuz chokepoints), driving global oil volatility and competing for Western intelligence and air defence resources.
- **Impact on the Framework:**

- **Pivot to European Leadership:** US strategic distraction underscores that European nations must take primary ownership of the Ukrainian peace process and post-conflict security architecture.
- **Global Macroeconomic Urgency:** Combined disruptions in Middle Eastern energy and Black Sea agricultural/fertilizer routes elevate RPI's **Preliminary Phase** (maritime and grain corridor protection) from a localised confidence-building step to an imperative for global economic stabilisation.
- **Validation of Multi-Polarity:** This shift reinforces the paper's assertion that peace in Ukraine cannot be treated in isolation, but must adapt to a multi-polar order where regional shocks compound across commodity markets.

4. Consolidated European Support and Economic Anchoring

- **Strategic Shift:** Western European nations have increasingly institutionalised long-term defence, financial, and industrial commitments to Ukraine to guarantee stability regardless of broader international shifts.
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- **Impact on the Framework:**
 - **Backing for the ECSC Model:** Stronger Western European integration provides the necessary institutional foundation to anchor RPI's proposed **European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC)** model. European partners are uniquely positioned to oversee the reconstruction funds, regulatory alignment, and market access envisioned in Phases Two and Three.
 - **Structured Incentives:** Expanded European involvement enables a structured "carrot-and-stick" approach: linking progressive sanctions relief and the unfreezing of assets to verified milestones in the five-phase roadmap.

Summary Matrix

Development	Challenge to Framework	Opportunity / Adaptation for RPI Framework
Drone Warfare Escalation	Armistice lines easily breached by aerial strikes.	Incorporate long-range strike limitations into Phase One armistice terms.
Russian Refining Crisis	Escalating economic warfare reduces immediate trust.	Leverage energy infrastructure security as a core component of the LDWEEC process.
Middle East / Iran Conflict	Diversion of US diplomatic and military attention.	Shift primary mediation and guarantor roles to European and non-aligned Track Two channels.
Sustained European Support	Risk of prolonged block-alignment and rigid posture.	Utilise European financial capacity to guarantee post-armistice reconstruction and Phase Two entrepôt trade.

Conclusion

Military force alone cannot deliver lasting stability between Russia and Ukraine. A durable peace requires building functional interdependencies that deliver tangible security, ecological, and economic benefits to all affected populations. By preparing these Track Two mechanisms today, the international community can establish the necessary groundwork for when formal diplomatic opportunities mature.

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