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Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks at a cabinet meeting in Tehran on January 7, 2026.

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## Rejecting the Russian peace



By Parham Pouramezan  
Political science researcher

OPINION  
EXCLUSIVE

The crisis between Ukraine and Russia has its roots in a set of historical, security, and geopolitical factors that began with the collapse of the Soviet Union and intensified with the expansion of Western influence in Eastern Europe. Russia's primary concern is that Ukraine may fall within the Western and NATO sphere of influence—a scenario that Moscow perceives as a direct threat to its national security. On the other hand, since 2014, Ukraine has pursued closer ties with the West, aiming to consolidate its political inde-

pendence and territorial integrity. This strategic divergence ultimately led to a large-scale military conflict, which not only challenged the sovereignty and territorial boundaries of the two countries but also disrupted the European security order.

At a broader level, the Ukraine crisis has become a stage for a larger confrontation between Russia and the West, in which both sides employ military, economic, and diplomatic tools to advance their objectives. For Russia, maintaining influence over Ukraine is vital for strategic survival and preventing geopolitical encirclement. For the West, supporting Ukraine means preventing the forcible alteration of borders and upholding an international order based on rules. The outcome of this con-

frontation is a protracted and attritional war that has made achieving sustainable peace difficult, with ongoing implications for energy security, global economy, and the international balance of power.

In recent days, several important developments have occurred in the Ukraine-Russia crisis. Simultaneously with the initiation of peace negotiations under US pressure, Russia stated that the European-proposed framework for ending the war is "unconstructive" and unacceptable to Moscow. At the same time, Russia launched heavy missile and drone attacks on the Ukrainian capital overnight. This simultaneity of diplomatic talks and ongoing bombardment indicates that even amidst dialogue, the war has not effectively paused,

and the prospects for peace remain fragile. In this brief analysis, I attempt to elucidate and examine Russia's approach to peace in this crisis.

Within the framework of its security-centered perspective, Russia considers peace with Ukraine possible only if a set of strategic conditions is met. The most significant condition is the recognition of Russian control over occupied territories, including Crimea and parts of Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson. Moscow also demands permanent neutrality for Ukraine and the formal abandonment of any attempts to join NATO. From Russia's viewpoint, Ukraine's military structure must be "redesigned" to ensure it poses no threat—a concept framed in terms such as "demilitarization" or "neutralization of threats." Additionally, Russia expects Ukraine to waive all in-

ternational legal claims against Moscow and provide guarantees that Russian territory or territories under Russian control will not be targeted militarily. Furthermore, Russia insists on the lifting of Western sanctions and the return or release of Russian assets seized in Europe and the United States, as Moscow considers peace without the removal of economic pressure "unrealistic." The Kremlin also emphasizes that any agreement must be "bilateral and binding," ensuring Russia's long-term security, including limitations on Western military presence along Europe's eastern borders. These conditions indicate that Russia perceives peace not as a return to the pre-war status quo but as the consolidation of its geopolitical gains; peace is achievable only if Moscow's territorial and strategic objectives are recognized.

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