

# Lasting peace in Ukraine may hinge on independent monitors – yet Trump’s 28-point plan barely mentions them

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Published: December 3, 2025 8:29am EDT



Russian President Vladimir Putin attends a meeting with U.S. representatives Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner (both not pictured) on Dec. 2, 2025.

*Alexander Kazakov/ AFP via Getty Images*

Start-and-stop negotiations for a deal to end the war in Ukraine have been injected with new intensity after U.S. President Donald Trump’s administration unveiled a 28-point peace proposal.

It is far from clear whether the latest flurry of diplomacy, which on Dec. 2, 2025, saw Trump’s envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner meet with Russian President Vladimir Putin, will force the warring parties any closer to a resolution in the grinding, nearly four-year-long conflict.

Yet even if negotiators can broker a welcome deal to stop the current fighting, they will immediately be faced with the challenges of sustaining and implementing it.

And many peace accords fall apart quickly and are followed by new waves of violence.

Our research as scholars focusing on peace monitoring and Ukraine suggests that one thing is key in managing mistrust between parties involved in any peace plan: multifaceted third-party monitoring.

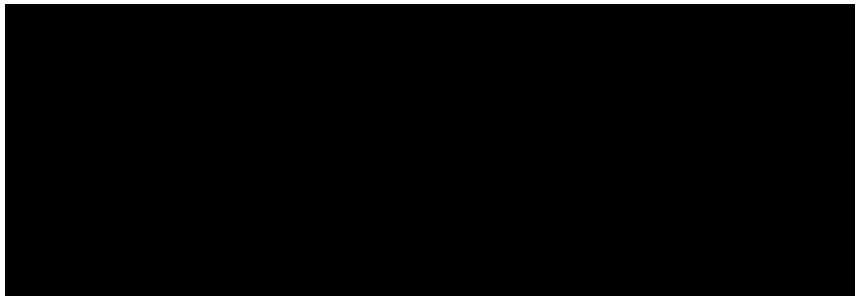
The University of Notre Dame's Peace Accords Matrix, – the largest collection of implementation data on intrastate peace agreements – shows clear evidence that built-in safeguards, such as monitoring and verification by third parties, can increase success rates in peace agreements by more than 29% – meaning no resumption of fighting in the first five years of an accord.

Peace Accords Matrix team members regularly provide support to ongoing peace processes and in the design and implementation of agreements. We believe the program's research could be applied to the challenges facing future peace in Ukraine.

## **Lessons from Colombia**

The Peace Accords Matrix team's work in Colombia is instructive on how an effective monitoring mechanism could be shaped in Ukraine.

Notre Dame's Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies was tasked with carrying out on-the-ground and real-time monitoring of the 2016 peace deal between the Colombian government and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, better known as FARC.



The Peace Accords Matrix's 30-staffer team in Colombia has served as an independent body monitoring 578 peace accord commitments in areas such as rural reform, political participation and securing justice for victims. These staffers have, for example, traveled to reintegration camps to speak to former combatants in verifying United Nations data on the number of weapons surrendered and destroyed, among other accord targets.

Armed with quantitative and qualitative data, matrix members regularly meet with stakeholders – including victims, former guerrillas and politicians – to assess the status of implementation and to identify areas that need to be prioritized.

Over the past decade, the work has highlighted when and where there has been insufficient progress in boosting livelihoods and leadership opportunities for women and ethnic minorities.

This reporting has prompted new attention toward implementing these obligations laid out in the accord.

## **What does Ukraine need?**

Our experience shows that when it comes to securing a lasting peace in Ukraine, it is imperative that a mandate for robust monitoring is spelled out clearly and realistically. To be effective, a monitoring body must have the independence to fully report and document violations.

That's just the first step. Consider the failure of the Minsk agreements, signed in 2014 and 2015 to end fighting in the Donbas region of Ukraine between Ukrainian troops and Russian-backed separatists.

Those accords failed in part because the monitoring mission, led by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, lacked any defined mechanism to press for any action or change once violations – and there were many – had been established.

While the organization's Special Monitoring Mission may have contributed to some temporary de-escalation in the Donbas conflict, ultimately Russia was able to exploit the weaknesses of the Minsk agreements and commit hostile acts, laying the groundwork for the current war.

Research suggests that monitoring works best when it extends beyond physical ceasefire lines to encompass the cyber domain, too. Moscow has carried out extensive cyberattacks on Ukrainian infrastructure throughout the conflict. Such aggression could continue invisibly despite a ceasefire, allowing one party to pre-position capabilities for future attacks or to conduct espionage without triggering traditional monitoring mechanisms.

Unlike conventional military activities, such cyber hostilities are inherently difficult to monitor and verify. A comprehensive monitoring arrangement will need to grapple with these threats, requiring carefully designed information-sharing protocols with the few international actors capable of monitoring the online activities of both sides.

## **A bigger tent**

A key element of ensuring a durable peace is building trust between conflict parties over time. With the right mandate and authority, monitoring bodies can create space and structure for follow-on dialogue as implementation obstacles emerge. Durable peace processes require fine-tuning to adapt to changing political realities on the ground.



The war in Ukraine has dragged on for nearly four years.

*Russian Defense Ministry/Anadolu via Getty Images*

Involving public stakeholders in the implementation of a peace agreement is another key element, our research shows. Third-party monitoring can provide the framework for soliciting outside perspectives and participation.

Over the past decade, Ukrainian nongovernmental organizations have steadily developed expertise in monitoring and accountability in areas including elections, procurement, humanitarian operations and potential war crime activity.

Building on this experience by involving broader segments of civil society – including the country’s highly trusted faith-based communities – would strengthen the legitimacy of third-party monitoring in the eyes of the domestic public and assuage uneasy acceptance of any peace accord.

## **Ready on Day 1**

While the United Nations and other multinational bodies are well placed to support some core monitoring tasks, those planning for peace now should, we believe, consider the benefits of involving a wider range of third-party actors. Indeed, many Ukrainians are skeptical that institutions of which Russia is a member can carry out their work with the needed independence.

As we have seen with the Peace Accords Matrix’s experience, the involvement of an independent research institution can open up new possibilities for monitoring.

And ideally, monitoring missions should be ready to go from Day 1, or as close to that as possible.

Comparative research has shown that the speed at which a monitoring mission starts its work can affect its relevance. Yet, many monitoring bodies are wracked by delays due to lack of planning, support and resources.

The current 28-point peace plan being mulled by Russia and Ukraine makes only a brief mention of monitoring, by a “Peace Council, headed by President Donald J. Trump.”

But our experience shows that prioritizing third-party monitoring and delving into the details of how it would be carried out – even as ceasefire negotiations are ongoing – can help ensure the success of a future deal.

It would serve as a vital signal to Ukrainians that, unlike the aftermath of the Minsk agreements, this time the international community will continue to engage and act to ensure their country’s peace.

The authors do not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organization that would benefit from this article, and have disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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