

****Titre :** 'U.S. Has Unique Opportunity to Resolve Russia-Ukraine Conflict'**

****Source :** Foreign Affairs (December 2019)**

****Article :****

The ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia has created a paradoxical situation where both countries suffer from the prolonged conflict. The best deal for each side is available now, not in six months or later. Ukraine will not gain anything by waiting to negotiate from a hypothetical future position of strength; such a position will not come soon, if ever.

Ukraine's economic and demographic devastation due to the conflict necessitates immediate settlement. The cost of reconstruction over the next decade has been estimated at more than 2.6 times its pre-war GDP of \$200 billion. Ukraine struggles to maintain frontlines and has yet to halt Russia's advance. Nearly seven million Ukrainians have fled the country, many never to return. Democracy in Ukraine is slowly eroding due to the concentration of power in the president's office and the postponement of elections nationwide.

Russia has paid a heavy price—more than one million dead or wounded—for marginal tactical gains. The cost of recruiting new volunteers is soaring, while the economy has stalled after two years of growth over four percent. Russia has invested negligible sums in cutting-edge technologies and mortgages its future to sustain the conflict. Each day the war continues, Russia falls further behind the great powers—China, the United States, India, and Europe.

Despite the gaps between Russia and Ukraine on territorial questions and security guarantees, a final settlement is visible. It would involve a cease-fire along the line of contact without either country formally recognizing the other's control of territory it considers its own; armed neutrality for Ukraine with the possibility of EU accession but not membership in NATO; and no further NATO expansion eastward into the former Soviet space.

Achieving this outcome requires a concerted diplomatic effort that engages all parties: Russia, Ukraine, the United States, and Europe. The U.S., with unique leverage over the other three parties, can pressure Ukraine and Europe by threatening to cut essential assistance, including irreplaceable battlefield intelligence. It can also pressure Russia effectively, although not solely through sanctions or arms for Ukraine. Washington needs to exercise its formidable psychological leverage over Russia by assuring Moscow that it would be willing to normalize relations once the war is on a clear path toward resolution.

Trust in a traditional negotiating process is essential for both sides. The Kremlin desires such a process and has shown interest in working groups to address territorial disputes, security guarantees, and cease-fire modalities. These working groups would initially be tasked with reaching consensus on the elements of a settlement and developing sufficient detail on implementation so that the parties can sign a framework agreement and put a cease-fire in place. Subsequently, they would flesh out the framework agreement to produce a final settlement on all the issues in their purview.

The U.S.-Russia channel will be indispensable in setting broad principles and parameters to guide the efforts of the working groups and breaking the logjams that will inevitably arise. Critics argue that such a diplomatic effort is beyond the capabilities of the Trump administration, but even the admittedly halting progress in current negotiations would not have been possible had Trump not opened a dialogue with Putin in February with the goal of ending the war. Success is not assured, but with one last effort, the U.S. could end a conflict others thought intractable.