

RUSSIA ATTEMPTS TO USE PEACE TALKS AS A TOOL FOR MANIPULATION

The Kremlin merely feigns interest in peace talks.

Russia hopes to restore bilateral relations with the United States to their previous level and formalise Ukraine's defeat.

Any apparent thaw is illusory: Russia will continue to see the United States as its principal global adversary.

Russia believes the international environment is undergoing a shift in which existing institutions and the Western-centric world order built around them are losing relevance. Chaos and fragmentation serve Russia's interests, as they make it easier for the country to assert itself with characteristic brutality.

In 2025, Russia's policy towards the West appeared to shift. In Moscow's official messaging, European states were now framed as more hostile than the United States, historically Russia's main adversary. This change stemmed from the Kremlin's ambition to exploit the new US administration to restore bilateral relations and pursue a settlement that would formalise Ukraine's defeat.

However, Russia's policy towards the United States remains fundamentally unchanged. Moscow still regards Washington as its foremost global adversary, believing that their interests clash in several regions, including the Middle East, Latin America and the South Caucasus.

Yet – at least for now – Russia's state institutions have been instructed by the Kremlin to project openness and willingness to cooperate with the United States for several reasons.



Putin delivering a monologue on the “root causes of the conflict”.

Source: Alexander Kazakov (Reuters)

HOPES TO MARGINALISE THE WEST

First, Russia seeks to fully restore diplomatic relations between the two nations. Re-establishing direct flights and visa issuance, especially for business and economic circles, is also essential for Moscow, as it would greatly facilitate espionage, influence operations and the movement of sanctioned goods into Russia. Ending sanctions quickly is another high priority, given their clear impact on Russia’s defence industry and the regime’s sustainability.

Russia also pursues more ambitious goals regarding strategic arms. Presenting itself as a “responsible nuclear power”, Moscow hopes to open the door to broader security talks, including efforts to impose restrictions on NATO activities along the alliance’s border with Russia. The size of Russia’s nuclear arsenal and its loud nuclear sabre-rattling give Moscow its only real leverage to appear as an equal among global powers, allowing it to exploit arms-control discussions in several ways.

In parallel with official diplomacy, Russia is attempting to use the network of the Russian Orthodox Church in its anti-Western influence operations, seeking new sympathisers among extremist circles and spreading false claims about the persecution of Orthodox believers in Ukraine. While Russia’s leadership likes to preach about the West’s moral decline, it cynically uses democratic freedoms to advance its goals through the Church network, while harshly persecuting peaceful religious communities that originate in Europe and the United States.

COOPERATION IS ONLY A RUSE

Russia's immediate and more ambitious aims both serve to expand its influence and marginalise the United States and the West more broadly.

In the economic sphere, Russia eagerly offers nominal cooperation and hopes to benefit in two ways: first, by binding US and Russian interests more closely together; second, by widening what Moscow perceives as existing rifts between the US and Europe. One area where Russia envisions “pragmatic cooperation” is the Arctic, where the Kremlin could signal a preference for working with Washington while keeping China out of the region.

In addition to military and political measures, Russia plans to use economic inducements to subjugate Ukraine. One such instrument could be an international investment fund ostensibly created to support Ukraine's post-war reconstruction. In reality, any profits generated would be shared between Russia and other partners, creating conditions in which Moscow could more easily impose its will on Ukraine. Russia also intends to involve China as a minority partner.

The investment fund would additionally be used to finance media and educational campaigns aimed at erasing Russia's image as an aggressor. Because the fund would be financed primarily from Russian assets frozen in the West, Moscow would seek to retain control over how these assets are used and to ensure that seized funds are not deployed solely on terms acceptable to the West and Ukraine.

RUSSIA WANTS TO BUY TIME

Russia is setting long-term operational objectives in its war against Ukraine. This confirms that the recent uptick in peace-talk rhetoric is merely a tactic to buy time. Moscow has no intention of ending the war until its objectives are achieved or the conditions are favourable for doing so.

For Russia, any potential settlement must harm the interests of Ukraine and the countries supporting it. To this end, Russia continually attempts to use peace talks as a tool for manipulation, once again exploiting Western goodwill to justify new and broader demands.

Moscow uses negotiations over ending the war in Ukraine as a means to normalise its bilateral relations with the United States. Despite this illusory thaw, Russia's aims remain unchanged: it seeks to marginalise the United States and NATO and to reshape Europe's security architecture according to Moscow's vision.