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Complex Diplomacy and Negotiations in a Complex World

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Abstract: Although there is a substantial body of specialized research in the field of international negotiations, the current geopolitical context is rendering future peace talks increasingly complex, largely due to power asymmetries between the parties involved in conflict. Diplomatic mediation efforts are often shaped not only by strategic considerations but also by psychological, cultural, and informational factors. At the same time, the progressively devastating consequences of conflict may weigh more heavily in accelerating the push toward an agreement one that will increasingly reflect the contours of an evolving geopolitical order.

Keywords: diplomacy; asymmetry; power; war; negotiations

1. Introduction

The invasion of Ukraine in 2022 marked a crucial moment in modern military history, opening new avenues for studying the evolutionary nature of warfare (Slusher, 2025). This entire period since the outbreak of the war has turned the battlefield into a real laboratory for testing new military technologies, doctrines and operational adaptations (Slusher, 2025).

The complexity of international politics is also manifested in the conduct of military conflicts in which advanced technology based on drones and artificial intelligence also causes difficulties in peace negotiations. However, regardless of the evolution of the war, starting from Greek mythology to the one that the Russian Federation is waging in Ukraine, it brings suffering and losses, it reflects a reality of its long history regarding the association with discord and confusion, but also with the honor and defense of what is cherished (Freedman, 2019, p. 10). Beyond all the grim consequences (...) it can be a source of extraordinary solidarity (Freedman, 2019, p. 10) and yet diplomatic efforts have not reached an end to the war. Even though war is treated as an alternative to diplomacy rather than an extension of it, the current explanations for ending the war differ (...) fundamentally from those for triggering it (Filson, Werner, 2002, p. 819).

The harsh reality that must be accepted regarding the war in Ukraine is a multidimensional disaster, which is likely to get much worse for the foreseeable future. When a war is successful, little attention is paid to its causes, but when the outcome is disastrous, understanding how it happened becomes paramount (Mearsheimer, 2022).

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This disaster must be seen above all through the loss of human life, to which are added the costs for reconstruction and recovery, which at the level of 2025 were estimated at 524 billion dollars (506 billion euros) in the next decade (UN News, 2025), but also through the greater long-term financial risk that the EU assumes, in part, based on the expectation that the loans will eventually be repaid from Russian assets or from loans for war reparation (Folk, 2025).

2. Literature Review

As is well known, in order for the parties to the conflict to start peace negotiations, the concrete situation of the confrontation between them highlights the fulfillment of two main conditions: firstly, the parties realise that they are caught in a mutually damaging impasse on the battlefield. Secondly, they consider a realistic negotiated solution (Negotiating an End to the War in Ukraine, 2023). Obviously, under such conditions, certain factors can be determining factors in the ongoing and which can be external shocks, such as a financial crisis, disasters or disease outbreaks, pressure from non-governmental actors, such as civil society organizations and the business community (Negotiating an End to the War in Ukraine, 2023) etc. What is extremely important in the pre-negotiation stage refers to clarifying the causes, because this constitutes a sufficient explanation for the war (David & Wan, 2025, p. 4). The Russian-Ukrainian war has highlighted the ability of the Ukrainian state to notably avoid the collapse of state authority (Kaldor & Cooper, 2025, p. 10), especially since for Ukraine the problem is not only about political control of the territory, but about the way power is exercised (Kaldor & Cooper, 2025, p. 10). Throughout this period of pre-negotiations, it is difficult to identify one model or another of negotiation, even in these conditions of complex diplomacy that are confronted with the irreconcilable nature of the differences between the two sides; one of these being the struggle for democracy and sovereign self-determination, the other for expansion and the creation of a puppet government in Kiev (Kaldor & Cooper, 2025, p. 10).

This conflict brings to attention the way in which the past continues to shape modern geopolitics but also the fact that space is power, especially in terms of places with strategic resources that are becoming scarce, such as food, water and energy, highlighting an ethnic, linguistic and cultural division that cannot be ignored, the spatial significance represented by Ukraine and its role as an interface between West and East (Kilian, 2022, p. WE3).

The involvement of President Donald Trump through his special diplomacy as well as unconventional movements can unblock the situation, but lasting peace requires de-escalation, the involvement of coalitions, verification regimes and legal fixation (Tsvetkova, 2025). The critical but especially sensitive aspects of the negotiations are expressed through the final results, knowing that the purpose of any negotiation is to produce mutual benefits for the parties involved. Most likely, these will be identified from the evolution of the negotiations and their dynamics, the rational approach to the conflict, the nature and size of future commitments.

The war in Ukraine highlights that in international relations there is a need for a revalorization of diplomatic resources and at the same time a competition is configured in global governance and reaching a peace agreement is already a pressing problem at international level. All diplomatic efforts to conclude an agreement make all negotiations bring to the fore the context of the war and less the negotiation process itself. The context can be represented by the fact that geopolitics has returned and that space is power, especially in terms of places with strategic resources that are becoming scarce - such as food, water and energy, highlighting an ethnic, linguistic and cultural division that cannot be ignored (Kilian,

2022, p. WE3). Of course, Ukraine has a special significance and role as an interface between West and East (Kilian, 2022, p. WE3).

The major issue is whether this conflict has reached the critical stage for the start of effective negotiations, so „two main conditions” must be met: first, they realize that they are caught in a mutually damaging stalemate on the battlefield. Second, they consider a realistic negotiated solution (Negotiating an End to the War in Ukraine, 2026). In the context of the war in Ukraine, negotiations are seen as an opportunity to seize power and negotiate territories and assets. In this conception of the international order, there are a handful of states that dominate the rest (...). Peace in this concept is simply an agreement to balance the interests of the already powerful (Kaldor & Cooper, 2025, p. 13).

The viability of the ongoing negotiations should also be directed by taking into account the limits in the negotiation whose positive aspects outweigh the negative ones, and at the same time reducing the asymmetry between the parties involved, since asymmetry means discord and discord is negative (Pfetsch, 2011, p. 41).

The European Union has reacted quickly and decisively to Russia's aggression unleashed on 24 February 2022 by adopting restrictive measures against Russia and by stepping up political, humanitarian, military and financial support for Ukraine's economy, society and future reconstruction (EU support for Ukraine, 2026) alongside all diplomatic efforts, however the EU is not a full-fledged security actor and, from the very beginning, was not institutionally designed to deal with military crises such as the one in Ukraine (ec.europa.eu, 2026).

Although, the warring parties are engaged in negotiations from different positions, the problem for Ukraine is not only about political control of the territory, but about how power is exercised (Kaldor & Cooper 2025, p. 10) which can be expressed in several forms. This is context-dependent and shaped by the parties' perceptions of their relations. By resorting to different resources and engaging in certain tactical moves, international actors can create conditions in line with their foreign policy objectives (Vukovic, 2025, p. 50).

However, nevertheless, perhaps the most important aspect in this stage of preparation for negotiations is the ability of many states and international organizations to shape future international relations, in which the economic component can be decisive in the reconfiguration of alliances and treaties of cooperation in various fields, especially from the perspective of losses (Meier, Müller, Mutschler, Schularick, 2026,), but also of subsequent security guarantees, since this protracted war has transformed the battlefield into a real laboratory for testing new military technologies, doctrines and operational adaptations (Slusher, 2026). In such a context, power provokes reactions and, therefore, is measured according to the ability of others to resist those applications of resources and tactics (Vukovic, 2020, p. 50).

Although nationalism is both the essential vitality for waging war and the pressure that complicates diplomatic compromise (Yamauchi & Hosoya, 2023), the negotiations will ultimately lead to a peace agreement that in the resulting new geopolitical situation, international relations will be re-established on the basis of power relations and less on the irreconcilable nature of the differences between the two parties in conflict. Even the reciprocal relations between the two sides will be rebuilt in accordance with the new geopolitical situation resulting from the war (Shulatov, 2007, pp. 110–111). It is important to note that beyond all the material and human costs (Since the start of the full-scale war, 2023) of the war at the media level, communication flows are incorporated into the international politics of relations, sometimes respecting the political conjuncture of the moment, sometimes stimulating a favorable vector of emerging political relations (Togo & Streltsov, 2023, p. 273). Overcoming power asymmetries can

facilitate an agreement through which the parties assume the negotiated commitments that will also be supported by the new geopolitical situation resulting from the end of the war, given that any war has „in principle” a negotiated solution.

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