



U.S. and Ukraine Sign Bilateral Security Agreement

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The signing of a security agreement between the U.S. and Ukraine should increase the chances of maintaining support for Ukraine in the long term. However, there is a risk that the U.S. will treat the agreement as an alternative to Ukraine's membership in NATO. It may also facilitate a transfer of responsibility for Ukraine's defence to European countries. As a result, even if Russia enters into negotiations with Ukraine, it will use them to buy time to rebuild its potential and may try to achieve its ultimate strategic goals.

On 13 June, during the G7 summit, the U.S. and Ukraine signed a 10-year agreement on security cooperation. It defines the areas and goals of political, defence, and economic cooperation and establishes a consultation mechanism in the event of a resumption of Russian aggression in the future, (e.g. in order to annex further territories). The G7 countries announced their readiness to sign such agreements at the previous summit in July 2023. Since then, a total of 32 countries have declared such intention, and 17 have already signed agreements (starting with the United Kingdom and followed by Germany, France, Denmark, Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Finland, Latvia, Spain, Belgium, Portugal, Sweden, Iceland, Norway, Japan, and the United States).

Since the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the U.S. and its allies have been strengthening Ukraine's defence potential and trying to weaken Russia with sanctions. The U.S. has so far provided military aid worth over \$50 billion, while European countries have given about \$40 billion, but Europe is providing more humanitarian and economic support. Military assistance is coordinated through the Contact Group for Defence of Ukraine (the so-called Ramstein Format), which consists of about 50 countries. However, the U.S. does not have a broader strategy to end the war and build sustainable peace in Europe. The Biden administration and other Western leaders have only announced that they will support Ukraine "for as long as necessary". The scale, scope, and

pace of support are limited by fears of escalation by Russia and NATO being drawn into the conflict. More than two years after the outbreak of the war, the risk of a reduction in American support is also increasing, as indicated by problems and delays this year with Congress approving the aid package for Ukraine and by the statements of Donald Trump, who is running again for president. During the presidential debate on 28 June, Trump claimed that the U.S. is incurring too high of a cost of supporting Ukraine.

Strengthening Ukraine's Defences. The aim of the agreement is primarily to strengthen Ukraine's ability to defend itself and deter Russia in the long term. The U.S. declares assistance in the development of the entire spectrum of capabilities: integrated air and missile defence; the ability to conduct joint fires (coordinated strikes by various types of armed forces); development of land forces, air forces, and navies; cybersecurity; protection of critical infrastructure; command and control; and logistics. Unlike other countries, the agreement does not specify the amount of aid that would be provided this year, let alone in the following years. It emphasises that funding depends on Congress. It also stresses that in addition to bilateral U.S. assistance, further support from other partners, synchronisation of activities, and co-responsibility for achieving the assumed goals will be crucial. Emphasis was placed on the need for Ukraine to take greater responsibility for the development of its defence potential. The agreement also includes a section on U.S. supervision of the transferred

equipment and technologies. Ukraine must prepare regular reports, enable inspections, and provide insight into logistics management platforms.

The U.S.-Ukraine agreement is the only one so far to include a UN registration clause, which may increase the political cost of terminating it by future administrations before the end of its 10-year period. A mechanism of annual review will put additional pressure on its implementation.

The consultation mechanism in the event of renewed Russian aggression is less categorical than in other agreements. The U.S. refers to a possible increase in support and consultations that will determine the type and scope. The agreement also contains no reference to “active deterrence”, which was included in the British and French agreements. This term not only indicates readiness to provide Ukraine with long-range systems, but suggests the possibility of attacks against targets on Russian territory. However, the lack of this term in the agreement may have no impact on deterrence, as the U.S. has already agreed to limited attacks on military targets in Russia.

Ukraine’s Membership in NATO. The U.S. priority was to sign the agreement before the NATO summit in Washington, when the Alliance celebrates its 75th anniversary (9-11 July). The agreement is said to be “supporting a bridge to Ukraine’s eventual membership in NATO”. This formulation is intended to calm Ukraine’s fears that bilateral agreements will be an alternative to Ukrainian accession. In this way, the United States is trying to prevent tensions that occurred at the 2023 Vilnius summit when Ukraine demanded an invitation to the Alliance or at least a clear perspective and conditions for membership. The U.S., but also Germany and other countries, opposed it. In their opinion, launching a formal accession procedure could lead to Ukraine being admitted before the end of the conflict and draw NATO into the war. However, such arguments may serve as cover for the lack of consensus in the U.S. and Germany regarding Ukrainian membership. They may assume that postponing the decision will make it easier to negotiate a ceasefire with Russia and create conditions for a sustainable peace. As a result, NATO only proposed shortening the accession procedure and creating new mechanisms of political cooperation with Ukraine. It also adopted a general declaration that Ukraine will be invited “when the allies agree and conditions are met”. Although the U.S. supports this declaration with the term “bridge to NATO”, it presents a wide-ranging reform agenda including actions concerning good governance, rule of law, anti-corruption, interoperability with NATO, and the defence industry.

The United States also indicates possible goals regarding the course of the war and its end. It is ready to support Ukraine’s efforts to win the war and achieve a “just peace”. It emphasises that Ukraine’s security must be based on the restoration of full territorial integrity. At the same time, the U.S., like other countries, suggests that the “peace formula” promoted by Ukraine may be one of the ways to achieve this goal. They thus leave room for future negotiations with Russia based on other peace initiatives (e.g., such as the one proposed by Turkey).

Conclusions and Perspectives. The agreement, which emphasises the importance of cooperation with allies and control over arms and technologies transfer, could make it easier for Congress to approve future support for Ukraine. The declared goals of ending the war, however, will not significantly affect the scale of American support. If Trump wins the November presidential elections, the scale of U.S. deliveries, especially those based on presidential drawdown authority, may be diminished. The agreement may also facilitate the transfer of greater responsibility for Ukraine’s security to European countries. Therefore, it will be important for NATO to take responsibility for coordinating assistance in order to reduce the negative political consequences of a potential reduction in U.S. engagement. The agreement may also be viewed by American decisionmakers as an alternative to NATO membership, which will make it difficult to develop a consensus in the U.S. and the Alliance regarding Ukrainian accession.

The Russian authorities will not give up on their declared strategic goals of subjugating Ukraine and enforcing a zone of limited security guarantees (buffer zone) along NATO’s Eastern Flank. There is a significant risk that they will use negotiations to create conditions for limiting American support for Ukraine, rebuilding Russia’s military potential and will use the threat of escalation to force concessions from Ukraine and NATO. If Russia is allowed to rebuild its potential, while the U.S. limits its engagement in European security and NATO members have no determination to strengthen their own armed forces, the risk of direct confrontation between Russia and the Alliance will increase. Russia can only be forced to negotiate a genuine ceasefire if threatened with the risk of losing control over the occupied territories. However, this would require substantial strengthening of Ukraine’s military potential and the U.S. to approve attacks against military targets in Russia on a much bigger scale.