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No Peace on Putin's Terms

Why Russia Must Be Pushed Out of Ukraine

By [Kaja Kallas](#)

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Ukrainian soldiers riding a tank near Bakhmut, Ukraine, September 2022

Ammar Awad / Reuters

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has never been solely about Ukraine. It is also about the international rules-based order and the security architecture of Europe. In December 2021, the Kremlin gave NATO and the European Union an ultimatum: end NATO's open-door policy

and limit its right to self-defense by refraining from deploying forces and weapons in countries that joined the alliance after 1997—or risk a war.

Since then, horrors that we thought belonged to history have once again happened in Europe. Russia is waging a genocidal war in [Ukraine](#), shocking the world with the magnitude of its war crimes. It is targeting civilians, destroying civilian infrastructure, and using mass killings, torture, and rape as weapons of war. This is not an accident but rather a feature of the Russian way of war. The Kremlin has made clear that it wants to wipe Ukraine off the map. Its false claim to be pursuing “denazification” comes close to an incitement to commit genocide—a crime whether or not genocide actually occurs. And such incitement is working. In areas that Ukrainian troops have liberated from Russian occupation, there is evidence of mass killings, torture, rape, and deportations to Russia.

Russia’s strategy is built around two weapons: pain and fear. The Kremlin aims to inflict pain on Europe by starving it of energy and to stoke fear of a nuclear [war](#). The idea is to coerce Ukraine and its partners into a premature peace agreement that would legitimize Russia’s conquest of territory. Faced with pain, Europe can endure and even prosper. The EU and its member states have understood that they can no longer depend on Russian fossil fuels and are shifting rapidly toward other energy sources. Concerning fear, let us remember what U.S. President Franklin Roosevelt said in 1933: “The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.” If we allow nuclear blackmail to work even just this once, we will wake up in a much more dangerous world.

Now is not the time to push for premature peace. Unless Russia abandons its goal of conquering new territory in Ukraine, peace talks have little chance of achieving anything. History shows that appeasement only strengthens and encourages aggressors and that aggressors can be stopped only with force. As the prime minister of Estonia, a frontline NATO country that endured half a century of Soviet occupation, I know what peace on Russia’s terms really means. Russian peace would not mean the end of suffering but rather more atrocities. The only path to peace is to push Russia out of Ukraine.

LIVING HISTORY

In the Baltic region, we remember the face of Russian occupation painfully well. Imperialism and colonialism are the Kremlin’s twin ideologies, and have been since long before February 24, 2022, when Russia [invaded](#) Ukraine. Russia veils its hostile actions with claims to “liberate” people—people who have not asked for liberation. And the Kremlin attempts to justify its messianic zeal by reminding the world of the Soviet Union’s role in defeating Nazi Germany. What Russia always neglects to mention is that the Soviet Union, together with its then ally Nazi Germany, started World War II.

Although the Soviet Union eventually collapsed, its imperialist ideology did not. In Estonia, our history books were rewritten after the end of Soviet rule, but the same did not happen in Russia. And although Nazi crimes have been unequivocally condemned and tried before tribunals, Communist crimes have not. Russia has never truly had to come to terms with its brutal past or bear the consequences of its actions. We had the Tokyo and Nuremberg tribunals, but there was never a Moscow tribunal. Instead, Russian President [Vladimir Putin](#) has revived Stalinism—so

effectively, in fact, that in 2019, 70 percent of Russians approved of Stalin and his policies, according to a Levada Center poll. If people admire one dictator, there is no moral obstacle to submitting to another one. If people's minds and eyes are shut to old atrocities, there are no limits to committing new ones. This helps to explain the brutal crimes of Russian soldiers in Ukraine.

U.S. President [Ronald Reagan](#) rightly referred to the Soviet Union as an “evil empire.” Yet many did not challenge Russia, which proclaimed itself the successor of this evil empire and took over its permanent seat on the UN Security Council, where it proudly embraced the Soviet Union's playbook of evil. With its use of force in Georgia, Moldova, Syria, Ukraine, and elsewhere, Russia has shown that it took this succession literally. The impunity it has enjoyed has consequences for European peace and security; Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine is a crystal clear example of this.

Now is not the time to push for premature peace.

[Estonia](#) shares a border and a long history with Russia. Large countries can make mistakes and survive. But small ones have a much smaller margin of error. For us, the need to halt Russian aggression in Ukraine is an existential matter. Following World War II, we Estonians lost everything to Soviet terror: we lost our territory, our freedom, and a fifth of our population. We were forgotten and abandoned behind the Iron Curtain for half a century.

We have learned a few things from this history. First, you need to fight for your freedom, whatever the odds, because not fighting is much worse. Today, Ukrainians are proving the same thing to the world. Second, if you want peace, you must prepare for war. Estonia has been spending two percent of its GDP on defense for many years. Starting next year, Estonian defense spending will be approximately three percent of GDP. We are doubling the size of our territorial defenses and increasing the lethality and range of our armed forces by acquiring new weapons, including high-mobility artillery rocket systems, long-range shore-to-ship missile systems, and midrange air defense systems. Finally, you must follow the motto “Never Alone Again.” When we restored our independence in 1991 after 50 years of occupation, we decided we would never again be without friends and allies. That is why we joined the EU and NATO. Many central and eastern European countries did the same, seeking safety from Russian aggression, and now Sweden and Finland will join the alliance as well, a direct response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Those who blame [NATO](#) for provoking Russia through “expansion” or “escalation” are propagating the Kremlin's imperial ideology.

A TIME FOR RESOLVE

From the start of Russia's full-scale war of aggression in [Ukraine](#), my government has supported Ukraine militarily, economically, and politically. Although the United States is Ukraine's largest supporter in total dollar terms, Estonia is its largest supporter in per capita terms. Despite not being Ukraine's direct neighbor, Estonia has also been among the most welcoming countries to Ukrainian refugees in per capita terms. We have sought to increase the cost of aggression by isolating Russia and by leading the call for accountability. As a result, Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, recently announced that the EU would help establish a

specialized court to try Russia's crimes, including the crime of aggression. Estonia has also sent investigators to Ukraine and to the International Criminal Court to ensure that war criminals will be held accountable.

Starting in December 2021, Estonia sent arms, including Javelin antitank weapons, to Ukraine that played a key role in the battle of Kyiv a few months later. Unfortunately, it took us longer to deliver the howitzer artillery systems Ukraine needed. This year, many countries have made historic U-turns and decided to send heavy weapons to Ukraine. But had we and other democratic countries sent the arms and ammunition we are sending now in January or February 2022, many lives would have been saved. We were too restrained. We should learn from this now and give Ukraine all the military aid that it needs to win this war.

The free world must not scale back its military support for Ukraine or seek to freeze the conflict to pursue peace talks. Any pause in the fighting now would only serve Russia's military interests. It would allow Russian forces to rest and regroup, only to continue their aggression later. In the end, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, we would have both dishonor and war. After all, the international community had the chance to deter future Russian aggression in 2008, after the invasion of Georgia, and again in 2014, when Russia seized and then illegally annexed [Crimea](#). But the free world's responses to those outrages was weak. Principles were exchanged for cash, truth for gas. And Russia's confidence only grew.

FREEDOM ISN'T FREE

This year has shown that the Russian army is beatable and that Ukraine is capable of winning the war. But to win, Ukraine needs our support—military, political, moral, and financial. Ukrainian victory means a Russian withdrawal from Ukraine. It means an independent, democratic, and whole Ukraine that is free to choose its foreign policy and alliances. Ukrainian victory also means full accountability for war criminals, including those responsible for the crime of aggression committed against Ukraine. And it means that the aggressor will pay for everything it destroyed. To that end, the UN General Assembly passed a landmark resolution in November stating that Russia must be held accountable for its aggression against Ukraine and recommending the creation of a registry of damages. The resolution also recognized the need for [Russia](#) to make reparations for injuries caused by its violations of international law. Only this kind of Ukrainian victory can guarantee of peace and security for countries around the world.

In addition to helping Ukraine achieve victory, we must help the country integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community. Making Ukraine a candidate for European Union membership was a momentous decision and we must support its bid as much as possible. And we must assist Ukraine on its path toward NATO membership, based on commitments made in Bucharest in 2008 and in Madrid in 2022. Ukraine's full postwar Euro-Atlantic integration is fundamental for its future and necessary for European peace and security.

Finally, European countries must never cease strengthening their own defenses. Russia is waging a hybrid war, not just in Ukraine but in [Europe](#) and beyond. The Kremlin hopes that high energy prices and flows of refugees will weaken public support for Ukraine in Europe and leave European countries with fewer resources to send to Ukraine. Russia spreads disinformation,

interferes in elections, carries out cyberattacks, and weaponizes other countries' dependence on its natural resources. Freedom from dependence on Russia means freedom from Russian blackmail.

What is at stake in Ukraine is not just Ukraine's existence but Europe's security architecture, with its core principles of territorial integrity, sovereignty, and prohibition of the use of force. We cannot allow the fundamental principles of the UN Charter and the European security architecture to be trampled underfoot. For that reason, Ukraine must win, the Russian aggressor must fail, and war criminals must face justice. No peace that is reached before these goals are achieved can ensure anyone's security.

- *KAJA KALLAS is Prime Minister of Estonia. This article draws from a speech she delivered in November at the Paasikivi Society in Helsinki.*