# Peace deal in Ukraine demands more than ceding land, warns displaced citizens



The prospect of a peace deal in Ukraine, one that might involve “ceding land for peace,” demands a deeper understanding that transcends the simplistic narratives often propagated by media outlets. Conversations surrounding such potential agreements must acknowledge the stark realities faced by individuals like Adeline, a Ukrainian woman whose life was irrevocably altered by the conflict. Recently, she revealed to a visitor from Lviv the haunting absence of her home in Nova Kakhovka, a place now mired in Russian occupation. The ecological devastation following the destruction of the Kakhovka dam in 2023 only compounds the tragedy, as Adeline mourns potential dreams—like opening an art gallery—that have been lost in the fallout of war.

The land currently controlled by Russia spans an area comparable to that of both Portugal and Slovenia, housing about 5 million people while also displacing 2 million refugees who now roam the globe. The conditions for those trapped in the occupied territories are dire, underscored by severe repression and a systematic push for Russification. Refugees such as Adeline live with memories and remnants of their homes, facing an emotional landscape that defies any attempt to “whitewash” the situation with euphemistic phrases like “land for peace.” This notion trivialises the harsh realities of occupation, as countless families have not merely lost property, but their very livelihoods and family histories.

Currently, there exists a profound scepticism among Ukrainians regarding any peace proposals that arise, especially when it comes to those involving territorial concessions. Surveys indicate that a mere 29% of Ukrainians might consider a plan put forth by Donald Trump, whereas 51% express support for options proposed by European leaders. The disparity of opinions underscores a vital truth: peace is not merely about the cessation of hostilities, but about genuine security, recovery, and stability. The notion of “ceding” land is equated with offering up something valuable that has been wrongfully taken—akin to a car stolen by a thief.

Moreover, the conflict shows no signs of abating; Russia continues to launch drone and missile attacks, undermining any semblance of negotiations. Noteworthy is the statement made recently by Vladimir Medinsky, Russia’s envoy, who harboured dismal references to historical conflicts, reminding Ukrainians of the Swedish wars that spanned over two decades. His comments evoke a grim reality: the desire for peace faces formidable challenges, requiring resilience and sustained support as Ukraine braces for what lies ahead.

While military analysts suggest that Ukraine may manage to preserve its current holdings, the nation faces ongoing pressures that speak to the urgency for both strategic defence and technological advancements. Ukraine is emerging as a leader in drone manufacturing, producing over 2 million last year as it seeks to bolster its defence capabilities. However, a pressing issue looms: recruitment. One frontline commander lamented a manpower reduction, as his battalion operates at only 30% capacity, exemplifying the human cost of prolonged conflict.

With Russia supposedly gearing up for new ground offensives, the international community's support remains essential. Recent changes in leadership in Europe, particularly with the advent of Germany's Chancellor Friedrich Merz and the assertive stance of UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer, offer a glimmer of hope for a robust coalition willing to support Ukraine. While Ukraine seeks US military aid, including standardised Patriot air-defense systems, it also hopes Europe will escalate economic sanctions against Russia. The winding path to a ceasefire may hinge on adapting to shifting geopolitical priorities and securing sustained international support.

Beyond military strategies, Ukraine will confront a new set of challenges once the conflict draws to a close. Vital questions will arise regarding national unity in the wake of war, the reintegration of over 3 million veterans, and the logistics of free and fair elections amidst an already tumultuous political landscape. The shadow of Putin's regime, which thrives on discord, could cast a long pall over Ukraine's efforts to heal.

The risk remains that Europe’s attention may wane, reminiscent of its disengagement from the tragedy in Bosnia after the 1995 Dayton agreements. Current international aid underpins Ukraine’s non-military budgets, and long-term financial commitments will be necessary to restore a shaken economy. Critics in Europe, from Portugal to Poland, may resist footing the bill, making it essential for leaders like Merz to advocate for the confiscation of Russia’s frozen assets to fund reconstruction.

As the conflict continues, the notion of a definitive peace—much like a so-called “Victory in Ukraine” day—remains elusive. The idea that a hasty, unbalanced deal could somehow close this tragic chapter is a dangerous misconception. Without the determination for a sustained struggle, alongside a unified front from both Ukraine and Europe, a meaningful and just peace may remain the stuff of hope for a future beyond the decade.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/23/ukraine-donald-trump-peace-deal-land), [[4]](https://www.apnews.com/article/daacdc431f42912dfb91548794f03a3c)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/23/ukraine-donald-trump-peace-deal-land), [[5]](https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/07/europe/ukraine-nova-kakhovka-dam-environment-damage-intl-hnk/index.html/)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/06/07/ukraine-one-year-after-the-destruction-of-the-kakhovka-dam-a-report-denounces-an-environmental-war-crime_6674067_4.html), [[6]](https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/how-ukraines-dam-collapse-is-turning-into-a-slow-moving-ecological-catastrophe)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrhydroenergo-seeks-damages-russias-destruction-dam-2024-06-06/), [[7]](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/16/fears-of-environmental-disaster-mount-after-ukraine-dam-blast)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/23/ukraine-donald-trump-peace-deal-land), [[2]](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/06/07/ukraine-one-year-after-the-destruction-of-the-kakhovka-dam-a-report-denounces-an-environmental-war-crime_6674067_4.html)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/23/ukraine-donald-trump-peace-deal-land), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrhydroenergo-seeks-damages-russias-destruction-dam-2024-06-06/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/23/ukraine-donald-trump-peace-deal-land), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrhydroenergo-seeks-damages-russias-destruction-dam-2024-06-06/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2025/may/23/ukraine-donald-trump-peace-deal-land> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2024/06/07/ukraine-one-year-after-the-destruction-of-the-kakhovka-dam-a-report-denounces-an-environmental-war-crime_6674067_4.html> - A report by Truth Hounds and Project Expedite Justice labels the destruction of the Kakhovka dam in June 2023 as an 'environmental war crime.' The incident led to massive flooding and displacement, severely impacting regions such as Kherson, Mykolaïv, Dnipropetrovsk, and Zaporizhzhia. The dam's destruction, attributed to Russian forces, caused over $11 billion in damage. The report highlights immense financial, human, and environmental losses, including the drying up of the Kakhovka reservoir, loss of water for fisheries, agriculture, and industry, and significant biodiversity damage. Residents have adapted by shifting to less water-dependent crops, but agriculture remains challenged without the reservoir. Downstream regions experienced severe flooding, resulting in numerous deaths and extensive property damage, complicating recovery efforts. Despite some natural revitalization, the area remains a semi-desert, with long-term ecosystem restructuring predicted. The report urges international recognition of the event as a war crime.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrhydroenergo-seeks-damages-russias-destruction-dam-2024-06-06/> - Ukrhydroenergo, Ukraine's hydro-electric company, is pursuing international arbitration to seek 2.5 billion euros in damages from Russia for the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam and power station in June 2023. The dam's destruction caused extensive flooding, disrupted drinking water supplies, and impacted the cooling system of Europe's largest nuclear power plant. The dam had been under Russian control since their invasion in February 2022. Ukrhydroenergo's CEO emphasized that the responsibility lies with the Russian military. Due to frequent missile attacks, Ukraine's energy infrastructure, particularly its hydro-electric and thermal power plants, has suffered significant losses. The conflict has resulted in substantial reductions in Ukraine's generating capacity, leading to power outages and supply limitations across the country.
4. <https://www.apnews.com/article/daacdc431f42912dfb91548794f03a3c> - An AP investigation has revealed that the death toll from the June 2023 collapse of the Kakhovka Dam in Russian-occupied southern Ukraine is much higher than the 59 officially reported by Russia. The real number is likely in the hundreds. Russian authorities have deliberately undercounted the deaths, controlling death certificates and removing unclaimed bodies, effectively hiding the true scale of the catastrophe. Residents of Oleshky, one of the hardest-hit towns, faced dire conditions and many drowned, with bodies buried in mass graves without proper documentation. The incident shows the dangerous and devastating impacts of the ongoing conflict in the region.
5. <https://www.cnn.com/2023/06/07/europe/ukraine-nova-kakhovka-dam-environment-damage-intl-hnk/index.html/> - The collapse of the Nova Kakhovka dam in southern Ukraine has sparked fears of an ecological catastrophe, with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky describing the situation as 'an environmental bomb of mass destruction.' Water levels continued to rise after the Russian-occupied dam and hydro-electric power plant was destroyed, forcing more than 1,400 people to flee their homes and threatening vital water supplies as flooding inundated towns, cities, and farmland. Kyiv and Moscow have traded accusations over the dam’s destruction, without providing concrete proof that the other is culpable. It is not yet clear whether the dam was deliberately attacked or whether the breach was the result of structural failure. Zelensky, however, said Russia bears 'criminal liability' and Ukrainian prosecutors are investigating the dam incident as a case of 'ecocide.'
6. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/how-ukraines-dam-collapse-is-turning-into-a-slow-moving-ecological-catastrophe> - Ukrainian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrij Melnyk called the destruction of the dam 'the worst environmental catastrophe in Europe since the Chernobyl disaster.' The fish and waterfowl that had come to depend on the reservoir 'will lose the majority of their spawning grounds and feeding grounds,' Simonov said. Downstream from the dam are about 50 protected areas, including three national parks, said Simonov, who co-authored a paper in October warning of the potentially disastrous consequences, both upstream and downstream, if the Kakhovka Dam came to harm. It will take a decade for the flora and fauna populations to return and adjust to their new reality, according to Filiuta. And possibly longer for the millions of Ukrainians who lived there.
7. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/16/fears-of-environmental-disaster-mount-after-ukraine-dam-blast> - At least 28 people are reported to have died and dozens of villages remain flooded due to the collapse of Ukraine's Soviet-era Nova Kakhovka dam. The destruction of the Nova Kakhovka dam on June 6 in the southern region of Kherson unleashed 18 cubic kilometres (4.3 cubic miles) of water that submerged villages and farmland. The man-made flood washed away chemical fertilisers from cultivated fields, flushed away pollutants from the riverbed, submerged cemeteries and released at least 150 tonnes of machine oil from the breached dam with additional fuel and industrial waste likely to have been discharged from plants around it. Floodwaters contaminated with chemicals and by bodies of people and animals are not just undrinkable. They also raise the risk of waterborne diseases, including diarrhoea and cholera.