

Russian-Ukrainian 2022 Istanbul Peace Talks: A Catalyst for Conflict or a Path to Peace?

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Abstract

In March 2022, the Istanbul Peace Talks took place with the purpose of de-escalating the current conflict between Ukraine and Russia. Although the talks were initially optimistic, they did not yield a binding resolution or a lasting peace agreement despite its promising prospects. The conflicting National Interests that entail divergent goals of both parties, coupled with the omission of key international stakeholders, made scholars to ponder whether the peace talks were catalyst for conflict or a path to peace. The inability to resolve the underlying political and territorial issues, as well as the absence of enforcement mechanisms, rendered the talks ineffective in stopping the conflict and establishing diplomatic stability. This paper set out to evaluate the effects of the Istanbul Peace Talks on the Ukraine-Russia diplomatic relations and to analyze why they have failed to bring about sustainable peace. The qualitative research design was used, and the main method of analysis was content analysis. The research examined official messages, media coverage, and diplomatic letters to assess the success and results of the negotiations. The research discovered that the Istanbul Peace Talks initially gave a ray of hope of peace but ended up widening the diplomatic gap between Ukraine and Russia. The omission of major world powers and the lack of binding obligations also led to the collapse of the negotiations. The strategic priorities of both countries did not change, and hostilities persisted. The discussions emphasized the necessity of additional inclusive negotiations and articulation of long-term objectives to avoid future stalemate. It was recommended the inclusion of key international stakeholders in future peace talks to ensure balanced negotiation and create more robust diplomatic frameworks.

Keywords: *Diplomacy, agreement, concession, de-escalation, content analysis, international stakeholders, National Interest, Negotiations and enforcement.*

Introduction

The Istanbul Peace Talks, held in March 2022 amidst the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, served as a critical attempt to facilitate negotiations aimed at de-escalating the war. At this pivotal moment, the international community closely watched Turkey's diplomatic efforts, with Ankara leveraging its unique geopolitical position to mediate between the two parties (Paffenholz, et al. 2023). The Turkish government, aware of the delicate balance required in such

high-stakes negotiations, acted as a facilitator, hosting talks that were initially seen as a breakthrough in the conflict. However, the aftermath of the talks left open questions about the true role of such diplomatic interventions: Could Istanbul serve as a path to peace, or would the lack of binding agreements and significant concessions turn it into a mere catalyst for continued conflict?

Critics argue that despite the optimism surrounding the Istanbul talks, the lack of tangible results has exposed the limitations of peace talks in the context of such an entrenched and expansive conflict. The conflicting interests of the sides, especially the territorial conflict over Crimea, have resulted in the accusations that Ukraine did not take the Russian offers seriously (Burlachenko, 2024). Conversely, other researchers indicate that the Istanbul negotiations offered a valuable platform through which both parties could air their grievances and precondition subsequent negotiations, although they did not necessarily lead to an immediate ceasefire or a full-scale peace treaty. These opinions underscore a wider discussion regarding the efficacy of diplomatic negotiations in conflicts that are marked by entrenched geopolitical interests and historical resentments (Isachenko, 2023).

In addition, the Turkish participation in the peace process has been positioned as a diplomatic opportunity as well as a strategic move. Being a NATO member with close relations to both Russia and Ukraine, the mediation of the Istanbul talks highlighted the ambitions of Turkey becoming a regional powerbroker (Fischer, 2022). Although this made Turkey a central player in the negotiation process, it also complicated its efforts, as it had a complex relationship with Moscow. Critics state that the negotiations, although positive in maintaining communication lines open, might have unintentionally strengthened the status quo by not addressing the root causes of the conflict in a holistic way (Karaca, 2020). The Istanbul meetings thus raised the broader question of whether peace talks can ever truly resolve a conflict of this magnitude, or if they merely serve as a temporary pause in hostilities.

While the Istanbul Peace Talks provided a momentary hope for peace, their long-term impact on the conflict remains uncertain. The talks highlighted the importance of multilateral diplomacy in conflict resolution, but also revealed the challenges of translating negotiations into real-world outcomes. For many, the discussions in Istanbul were seen as a vital step in maintaining dialogue and preventing further escalation, but whether they ultimately pave the way for a lasting peace in Ukraine will depend on the willingness of all parties to make the difficult concessions necessary for a sustainable solution (Suyundikov & Gökbel, 2024). These talks, though significant, may prove to be just one piece of a much larger puzzle in the ongoing quest for peace in Ukraine. The peace talks was designed to suppress the conflict as there was no concerted efforts to address the fundamental causes of the conflict that is both historical and patriotism based on the perspectives of the analyst as the positions of the two parties are irreconcilable and it will take a higher power than Turkey particularly a super power to muzzle it's way through such a complex conflict to be able to impose peace as it can take a stronger or coordinate power to compel Russia to conseed some positions and abide by its outcome.

The principles of Realism according to Morgenthau in his thesis on "power politics" in *Politics Among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, realism which is a departure from Idealism that preaches moral and rational political dispensation based on universally accepted principles and rules. Realism he said is the acceptance that conflicts are part of human nature as the world is imperfect due to the these selfish and conflictual individualistic human nature that leads to aggressive pursuits of National interest that are peculiar to each nation and it is pursued through power contest that are inevitable and must be prepared for in advance. The conflict between Russia

and Ukraine is inevitable. Realists are of the view that competitive processes among actors in the international field that are called states is the natural manifestation of conflicts by parties engaged in competition for limited and competitive interest (Morton Deutsch, 1973). Supporting this position (Walt, 1959:232) said Wars are inevitable because there is no safeguard or methodology to stop them from occurring because of the competitive interest that must clash in the process of attempting to dominate and overcome each other to become the prevailing interest.

Therefore, the study specifically, seeks to:

- i. assess the impact of the Istanbul Peace Talks on the diplomatic relationship between Ukraine and Russia, particularly in terms of achieving de-escalation or exacerbating tensions.
- ii. examine the reasons behind the failure of the Istanbul Peace Talks to produce binding agreements and sustained peace efforts, despite initial optimism.

Literature Review

Peace Talk

Peace talks are critical processes in conflict resolution, serving as formal negotiations aimed at ending hostilities and establishing lasting peace. Historically, peace talks have gone from informal discussions between local leaders with structured dialogues involving several stakeholders, including state actors and civil society. These negotiations are important not only because they can end violence, but also because they can foster reconciliation and long-term reconstruction societies that have been impacted by conflicts.

The main aspects of peace talks usually involve the setting of the agenda, the involvement of different stakeholders and the implementation and monitoring processes. A successful conversation usually involves cultural factors, as Avruch (2022) notes, which explains the significance of cultural awareness in conflict resolution procedures. Such cultural sensitivity can enhance the comprehension and respect of the parties, thereby making negotiations more effective.

Effective cases of peace negotiations are the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland, which engaged civil society and political actors in a multifaceted manner and has resulted in a reduction of violence never seen before (Marchetti and Tocci, 2020). These instances demonstrate the significance of inclusiveness and acknowledgment of multiple voices in the process of peace consolidation. On the other hand, peace negotiations are often fraught with difficulties, including mistrust between the parties, failure to adhere to agreements, and external factors that may disrupt negotiations. According to Leiner (2025), the transition between the simple conflict resolution and the actual reconciliation involves addressing the underlying grievances, which is frequently a complicated and controversial task.

Therefore, understanding the historical context, key components and the meaning of peace talks is essential for effective conflict resolution. Successful negotiations illustrate the potential of dialogue to transform contradictory relations into collaborative partnerships, although they have to face inherent challenges to reach sustainable peace.

Conflict

Conflict is an intrinsic aspect of human interaction, which manifests itself in various forms and modeled by different causes. Understanding the conflict requires an exploration of its types, causes and effects, as well as the implications for individuals and companies. In general, the conflict can

be classified in interpersonal conflicts, intragroup and intergroups. The interpersonal conflict stands between individuals, often due to personal differences (Folger, Poole and Stutman, 2021). The intragroup conflict occurs within a group, often emerging from the competition for different resources or objectives, while the intergroup conflict refers to disputes between distinct groups or companies, generally fueled by socio-political or cultural divisions (Crawford & Novak, 2024).

The causes of the conflict are multifaceted. They may derive from scarcity of resources, ideological differences, power struggles and faults for communication. For example, tensions in progress between the socio-economic classes in urban contexts illustrate how the perceived inequalities can arouse prolonged disputes and disorders (Rachmad, 2022). In addition, psychological factors such as fear, distrust and perceived threats can exacerbate conflicts, making the resolution more demanding.

The effects of the conflict extend beyond the individual turmoil; they influence social dynamics and cohesion. On an individual level, exposure to conflict can lead to stress, anxiety and other mental health problems, ultimately influencing the quality of life and relationships (Crawford & Novak, 2024). Straddling, unresolved conflicts can involve violence, interruption of the life of the community and even humanitarian crisis, as evidenced in the regions devastated by war all over the world (Folger et al., 2021). Examples of real life, such as Arab-Israeli conflict, underline the complex interaction between various types of conflicts and their pervasive social effects. This prolonged clash illustrates how deeply incorporated historical complaints can model contemporary social relationships and hinder peaceful coexistence (Rachmad, 2022). Therefore, recognizing the nature of the conflict is crucial for the development of effective strategies for the resolution and promotion of social harmony.

The pathway to conflict management is Conflict Analysis which is the scientific means of dissecting a conflict to know its nature in terms of historical context, the parties involved both direct and indirect parties, their declared and not declared interest, stages of the conflict, perspectives of the conflict, position, needs, fears etc. It is only when a thorough conflict analysis has been done that the best approach to solve it can be arrived at and an optimum conflict analysis was not done before the peace talks as a non super power cannot organize an effective conflict resolution for a conflict involving a super power going by the principle of balance of According to Simon Fisher et al.(2000) Conflict Analysis are the activities that are undertaken by any persons carrying out direct or indirect activities to know what is happening about a specific conflict with a view to open up the problem for proper understanding with the goal of solving the conflict through addressing the root causes of the problems.

Method

This study employed a qualitative research approach to explore the topic in depth. Data was collected from a variety of primary and secondary sources, including textbooks, academic journals, newspaper publications, UNSC resolutions, and other pertinent scholarly materials. These diverse sources provided a comprehensive foundation for understanding the issue at hand. The gathered data was analyzed using content and thematic analysis techniques, which allowed for the identification of key patterns, themes, and insights within the materials. Content analysis helped in systematically categorizing the data, while thematic analysis enabled the exploration of underlying meanings and broader trends across the sources. Thus, by using this combined analytical approach, the study sought to offer a nuanced understanding of the subject, shedding

light on the key issues and contributing to the ongoing academic discourse surrounding the topic. This method ensured a thorough examination of the materials, with a focus on drawing meaningful conclusions from the available data.

Results and Discussion

Assess the impact of the Istanbul Peace Talks on the diplomatic relationship between Ukraine and Russia, particularly in terms of achieving de-escalation or exacerbating tensions.

Istanbul Negotiation Framework and Agreements (March–April 2022)

In the wake of Russia’s February 2022 invasion, Ukraine and Russia convened intensive peace negotiations, culminating in a summit in Istanbul on March 29–30, 2022. The Ukrainian delegation – led by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy’s office (including chief negotiator Andriy Yermak and presidential aide Mykhailo Podolyak) and Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba – met the Russian team headed by presidential adviser Vladimir Medinsky under the oversight of Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu hosted and mediated the talks, emphasizing ceasefires and corridors for civilians. Over several days of talks (including prior meetings in Belarus and virtual exchanges), the two sides developed an “*Istanbul Communiqué*” as a draft framework for peace. Ukrainian negotiators largely authored this text, which both parties accepted in principle ((Charap & Radchenko, 2024; Wikipedia, 2024).

Crucially, the draft treaty envisioned Ukraine as a **permanently neutral, non-nuclear state**: it would renounce any intention to join military alliances (notably NATO) and bar foreign bases or troops on its soil (Charap & Radchenko, 2024). In exchange, a broad *multilateral security-guarantee* system was proposed. The Communiqué listed the U.S., UK, Russia and other major powers (all permanent UN Security Council members plus Canada, Germany, Poland, Turkey, etc.) as guarantors. These guarantor states would be **obliged** (after consultations) to assist Ukraine militarily and logistically if it were attacked again – a commitment spelled out in detail far beyond Ukraine’s prior 1994 assurances (Charap & Radchenko, 2024; Wikipedia, 2024).

Remarkably, the draft also **explicitly preserved Ukraine’s path to EU membership**, with guarantors pledging to “facilitate” Kyiv’s EU accession in the long term (Charap & Radchenko, 2024). Even the sensitive issue of Crimea was addressed: Russia agreed to enter negotiations on Crimea’s status only after a decade (10–15 years) of peace, tacitly admitting it would be revisited (Reuters, 2022). Publicly, both sides announced they had agreed on the joint Communiqué, and Turkish officials praised the progress toward a “just and lasting peace.” As Charap and Radchenko (2024) note, this *near-agreement* in Istanbul would have ended the war by guaranteeing Ukraine’s security in exchange for neutrality. Notably, this framework required sign-off by Western powers: Ukraine’s path to EU and security guarantees involved the U.S., UK, and NATO members. (In fact, in these talks Ukraine committed to forego NATO membership, meeting Russia’s chief demand (Reuters, 2022). Behind the scenes, Turkey’s Foreign Ministry also worked with UN representatives on coordinating humanitarian corridors and grain export assurances, reflecting its dual role as mediator and Black Sea stakeholder (Reuters, 2022). By early April, however, Ukraine’s discovery of Russian war crimes (e.g. Bucha) and Kyiv’s deepening resolve shifted the political ground, even as negotiations on the draft continued (Charap & Radchenko, 2024).

Breakdown, Aftermath, and Unspoken Understandings: Despite the Istanbul breakthroughs, no final treaty was signed. By May 2022 the talks stalled, leaving a partly completed draft on the table. In public statements Russia blamed Ukrainian “capitulation” and Western pressure for

blocking the deal, while Ukraine insisted it only sought justice for Russian crimes. Behind closed doors, however, both Ukrainian and Russian leaders had been *willing to consider far-reaching concessions*. Charap and Radchenko's investigation finds that Putin and Zelenskyy came close to finalizing peace terms (neutrality with guarantees), but a constellation of factors intervened (Charap & Radchenko, 2024). Notably, key NATO allies refused to sign on. Boris Johnson's government reportedly instructed Ukraine that Britain would not join any treaty with Russia, and the United States was similarly reluctant to assume new defense commitments.

Indeed, an extraordinary behind-the-scenes remark by Zelensky's negotiator David Arakhamia (later reported in press) quoted Johnson declaring "we won't sign anything... let's just keep fighting," underscoring Western hesitance (Reuters, 2024, March 8). Thus, in the wings of the Istanbul process, Western capitals effectively vetoed a binding security pact, a reality Kyiv could not reconcile at the time.

Nevertheless, some *practical understandings* emerged out of the talks. Both sides had discussed humanitarian measures: early negotiations (even before Istanbul) had yielded agreement on civilian evacuations and prisoner exchanges. For example, after initial meetings in Belarus and Turkey, Moscow agreed to some safe corridors for civilians and to exchange detainees – preludes to the later mass prisoner swaps seen in summer 2022. Turkey's mediation helped anchor these commitments, including the *Black Sea grain deal* (brokering Odessa wheat exports under UN oversight), which drew on discussions in Istanbul and was signed in July 2022 (Reuters, 2025). Although Russia later renounced the grain deal in 2023, its initial conclusion reflected a Turkish-UN initiative that grew from the Istanbul talks.

In sum, the Istanbul sessions left a legacy of **partial agreements**: a jointly drafted treaty text and some humanitarian-political accords, even if unsigned. Publicly the Istanbul Communiqué became a reference point: Russia's leadership has repeatedly cited those draft terms as a basis for future peace (for instance, Putin claimed the Istanbul terms remain valid) (Dickinson, 2024). Ukraine, for its part, affirmed in those months its own "peace formula," echoing the commitments from Istanbul while insisting on complete troop withdrawals. Indeed, Putin later revealed he and Zelenskyy had privately agreed to the Istanbul framework "by this summer 2022," suggesting both leaders remembered a mutual intent (Putin press briefing, April 2022). In retrospect, analysts emphasize that **mutual willingness** existed at that moment, but Western non-commitment and shifting battlefield dynamics (e.g. Ukrainian confidence after repelling the Kyiv offensive) rendered the deal "stillborn" (Charap, & Radchenko, 2024).

International Mediators and Security Guarantee Architecture: The Istanbul talks also highlighted the crucial role of third-party actors. Turkey, as NATO-member host, was the linchpin facilitator. Ankara maintained unique ties to both Kiev and Moscow: President Erdogan publicly affirmed Ukraine's sovereignty in press briefings, while quietly assuring Russia he would also safeguard its interests. Throughout 2022–2025 Turkey repeatedly offered to reconvene peace talks in Istanbul or Ankara. After a June 2023 meeting with Zelenskyy, Erdogan announced Turkey was "ready to host a peace summit that Russia will attend too," reaffirming Turkey's aim of bridging the sides (Reuters, 2025). In early 2024 and 2025 Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan echoed this stance: he praised a new U.S. peace initiative as "result-oriented" but insisted it must include both Russia and Ukraine, and reiterated that "we are ready to host these talks as we have done before" (Reuters, 2025, February, 24). Importantly, Zelenskyy himself has come to regard Turkey as a potential security guarantor; during a 2025 visit he explicitly called Ankara an "important security guarantor for Ukraine" (Reuters, 2025). These statements underscore Turkey's dual role:

not only mediator but also candidate guarantor, in line with the multilateral framework discussed in Istanbul.

The United Nations has been an indirect participant. While the Secretary-General did not sit at the Istanbul table, the UN's backing was implied in the guarantor concept and in parallel diplomacy. The grain deal – negotiated under UN auspices – was also linked to the Istanbul process. UN agencies and the Secretary-General's office have repeatedly called for negotiations and ceasefires, reinforcing the premise of a diplomatic settlement. Moreover, Ukraine's own proposals (for example, its 2023 peace formula) envisage a UN-organized multilateral peace conference. In Istanbul, Turkey pointedly arranged for UN observers at the grain and other talks, symbolizing the UN's stake in a settlement. Thus, while not a direct negotiator, the UN's ideas of security assurances and conflict resolution aligned with the Istanbul agenda.

NATO and its members played an implicit yet decisive role. Because the draft treaty required Ukraine to reject NATO accession, NATO states were treated as future guarantors rather than alliance recruiters. Ukrainian officials pressed the idea of “absolute security guarantees” from NATO allies (Podolyak explained that unlike the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, they would have to “take an active part in defending Ukraine” (Charap, & Radchenko, 2024). The Istanbul framework indeed envisioned Western NATO countries (US, UK, France, etc.) sharing defense duties – albeit via the ad hoc guarantee system rather than Article 5. However, as noted above, NATO countries balked at assuming formal obligations. NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg and other diplomats later underscored that any European security pact for Ukraine would need full U.S. support, reflecting the summit's unresolved tensions. In practice, NATO continued to defend Ukraine through military aid and sanctions, rather than direct negotiation with Russia. The important of the indirect parties was clearly shown as the non factoring of NATO's influence was costly as they encouraged Ukraine not to sign any deal with Russia. According to Best ,Shedrack(2004) There are secondary or shadowing parties that are not directly seen on the battlefield but they influence what is happening and can complicate, escalate or deescalate the position on ground through their covert and overt actions and that is what happened to this peace talks.

De-escalation Potential of the Istanbul Peace Talks: The Istanbul talks of March–April 2022 marked the first high-level, face-to-face negotiations between Russia and Ukraine following the outbreak of Russia's full-scale invasion. Hosted by Turkey, these meetings aimed to halt hostilities and explore a path toward peace. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan remarked that the talks provided a “meaningful impetus” to resolving the conflict (Daily Sabah, 2022). During the negotiations, both sides tabled proposals for a ceasefire and future security arrangements for Ukraine. Notably, the draft Istanbul Communiqué suggested Ukrainian neutrality—eschewing NATO membership and foreign military bases—in return for multilateral security guarantees from major powers such as China, the United Kingdom, and Russia (Skidelsky, 2024). Ukraine reportedly indicated its willingness to adopt such a stance if credible guarantors would commit to defending its sovereignty (Skidelsky, 2024). In this context, the Istanbul meetings briefly contributed to de-escalation: a temporary unilateral truce during Orthodox Easter was observed, and both delegations showed a surprising openness to compromise. Analysts noted that “Putin and Zelenskiy surprised everyone with their mutual willingness to consider far-reaching concessions to end the war” (Charap & Radchenko, 2024). Turkey, leveraging its strategic ties with both Kyiv and Moscow as a NATO member, played a pivotal mediating role throughout the process (Daily Sabah, 2022). While the Western bloc cautiously endorsed the dialogue, NATO and EU officials emphasized that any resolution must uphold Ukraine's sovereignty. As NATO Secretary-General

Jens Stoltenberg articulated, it was “up to Ukraine to decide what terms are acceptable” in any potential settlement (Stoltenberg, 2022). At this stage, the United Nations and most Western governments publicly backed diplomatic engagement, viewing the Istanbul initiative as a vital chance to contain the war through negotiation (Reuters, 2022).

Exacerbated Tensions and Strategic Realignments: Despite initial optimism, the Istanbul Peace Talks ultimately failed to yield a lasting ceasefire, with their collapse significantly widening the diplomatic divide between Russia and Ukraine. No formal agreement was signed, and shortly thereafter, hostilities resumed. This breakdown intensified mutual distrust, as Russia accused Western powers of sabotaging potential peace. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov, for example, alleged that the United Kingdom pressured Kyiv to reject the draft agreement, effectively derailing the process (Reuters, 2023). Concurrently, Ukraine’s discovery of mass civilian casualties in areas previously occupied by Russian forces—later deemed war crimes—reduced political appetite for compromise, especially regarding contested regions like Crimea and Donbas. As the draft treaty remained unsigned, both sides reinforced their strategic positions. Russia expanded its military offensives, while Ukraine increasingly aligned with NATO and Western allies. NATO reiterated that any agreement must uphold Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg stated that peace must ensure Ukraine’s status as an “independent sovereign nation in Europe” and that negotiations should only proceed when Ukraine is in its “strongest possible position” (Stoltenberg, 2022). The collapse of Istanbul’s momentum contributed to a sharp diplomatic polarization. Russia resumed its siege on Eastern Ukraine, raising suspicions that it had used the talks as a façade while preparing for intensified operations (Skidelsky, 2024).

Meanwhile, the United States and European Union escalated their military and financial support to Ukraine, rejecting any notion of coerced neutrality. A senior U.S. official emphasized that there was “no sign” of Russia backing down from its fundamental demands (Reuters, 2025). Thus, rather than easing hostilities, the Istanbul talks highlighted the entrenched positions of both nations. Although international actors such as Turkey and the United Nations continue to promote dialogue, the aftermath of Istanbul underscores the complexity of achieving sustained peace. The result has been a hardening of strategic objectives, deepened mistrust, and a stalemate that persists in diplomatic and battlefield arenas alike (Reuters, 2025).

In summary, the Istanbul talks were characterized by significant convergence on key issues: Ukraine’s future neutrality (outside NATO), comprehensive security guarantees, and eventual EU integration. Turkey tirelessly pressed for peace through continued dialogue (Reuters, 2025). The United Nations and NATO figured in the underlying guarantee scheme, even if they formally refrained from inking an agreement. All sides agreed that talks must eventually address border disputes (Crimea, Donbas) and human security, reflecting common ground on process if not on final terms. These complex dynamics – of Turkish mediation, Western guarantors, and Russo-Ukrainian concessions – define the legacy of Istanbul: a framework broadly agreed in principle, but ultimately unratified due to wider strategic factors.

Reasons behind the failure of the Istanbul Peace Talks to produce binding agreements and sustained peace efforts, despite initial optimism.

The Collapse of the Istanbul Peace Talks: Exploring Political, Structural, and Diplomatic Barriers
The Istanbul Peace Talks, held in early 2022, represented a significant, albeit fleeting, moment of hope for the world as it sought to find a peaceful resolution to the war between Russia and Ukraine. With initial optimism, many believed that the dialogue could pave the way for an end to the

conflict. However, by May 2022, despite breakthroughs in discussions, the talks had stalled, leaving only a partially completed draft on the table. There was no final treaty, and the peace efforts ultimately faltered. To understand why, we need to delve into the structural and political barriers that hindered the talks from producing lasting resolutions. Central to this failure was the deep divergence of goals between Ukraine and Russia, compounded by the exclusion of key international stakeholders, which created an environment where compromise was unattainable. The talks became a reflection of broader geopolitical realities, where domestic pressures, national interests, and international alliances all played a crucial role in shaping the outcomes (Charap & Radchenko, 2024).

Divergence of Goals: One of the fundamental reasons for the collapse of the peace talks was the irreconcilable goals of Ukraine and Russia. Ukraine, driven by the imperative to restore its territorial integrity, demanded the return of annexed territories such as Crimea and Donbas, which Russia was unwilling to concede. From the very beginning, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made it clear that Ukraine would not negotiate on its sovereignty or territorial integrity. On the other hand, Russian President Vladimir Putin's primary goal was to solidify Russian control over strategic areas in Ukraine, viewing them as critical for Russia's security and regional dominance (Smith, 2022). This fundamental mismatch in the core objectives of both parties made meaningful negotiation difficult. Both sides were steadfast in their positions, unwilling to make the necessary compromises to reach a peaceful resolution. Charap and Radchenko (2024) observed that, behind closed doors, both Putin and Zelenskyy were willing to consider far-reaching concessions, such as Ukraine's neutrality with international security guarantees. However, this potential breakthrough was derailed by the overwhelming political pressures at home and abroad, leaving no room for compromise.

Exclusion of Key International Stakeholders: The exclusion of key international stakeholders further complicated the peace process, preventing the talks from gaining the necessary traction. The presence of major global players like the United States, the United Kingdom, and other NATO allies would have provided crucial diplomatic support, but these countries were not directly involved in the negotiations. As Charap and Radchenko (2024) explain, key NATO allies, including the UK, expressed strong reluctance to support any agreement that would allow Russia to dictate terms, even if it meant reaching a temporary ceasefire. In 2022, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson reportedly advised Ukrainian leaders not to negotiate a peace deal with Russia, emphasizing that the United Kingdom would not engage in any agreements with Moscow. Johnson's stance was shaped by his concern that any compromise with Russia might embolden the Kremlin and undermine Ukraine's territorial integrity (Hern, 2022). Johnson's opposition to a peace treaty was consistent with his broader support for a firm stance against Russian aggression. His remarks were made in the context of rising tensions and ongoing diplomatic efforts to support Ukraine without compromising NATO's direct involvement in the conflict.

Western Influence and Hesitation: The United States also shared concerns regarding defense guarantees for Ukraine, fearing that such commitments could trigger a broader conflict with Russia. American officials were wary that providing military assurances to Ukraine might inadvertently draw NATO into a more direct confrontation with Russian forces, given Russia's long-standing opposition to NATO's expansion (Sanger & Schmidt, 2022). This caution was particularly evident in the reluctance of U.S. policymakers to offer security guarantees to Ukraine,

despite calls from Ukrainian officials for such support. Both the U.K. and U.S. hesitated to take actions that might escalate the conflict into a wider war with Russia, underscoring the complex geopolitical calculations at play during the war's early stages.

The absence of these key stakeholders left the talks without the weight of international authority, ultimately undermining any progress made in Istanbul. Without their buy-in, any potential agreement was seen as incomplete and politically unfeasible, as it lacked the necessary international guarantees to be truly binding.

Political Shifts and Battlefield Dynamics: As the war progressed, shifts in battlefield dynamics played a crucial role in undermining the peace process. The discovery of war crimes in territories occupied by Russian forces hardened Ukraine's stance, making any potential peace settlement seem inconceivable. Furthermore, Ukraine's successful repulsion of Russian offensives around Kyiv led to a sense of confidence, reducing the incentive to make concessions.

The political pressure on Ukraine also played a pivotal role in stalling the peace process. From the outset, Ukraine was facing significant external pressure to hold firm on its territorial claims, not just from Russia, but from its Western allies, especially the United States and European Union. These countries had long-standing support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, which made it difficult for the Ukrainian leadership to consider any concessions on territorial issues. This was compounded by the reality that any deal that appeared to give Russia a foothold in Ukraine would be politically disastrous for Zelenskyy. The Ukrainian president had to consider the domestic sentiment, where any perceived surrender to Russia would have been seen as a betrayal, not only by the Ukrainian public but also by the military (Brown, 2022). These political constraints meant that while there were moments of negotiation flexibility, the risk of domestic backlash made it nearly impossible for Zelenskyy to make the concessions necessary to bring about a lasting agreement.

On the Russian side, the broader geopolitical context played a similar role in shaping the outcome of the talks. Putin's administration, facing international condemnation and economic sanctions, was not in a position to appear weak or acquiesce to Western demands. The Russian president's agenda was deeply tied to maintaining and expanding Russia's influence in the post-Soviet space, and giving up any territory in Ukraine was viewed as a significant loss of strategic importance (Miller & Johnson, 2022).

Furthermore, the Russian leadership faced pressure from its own domestic audience, which had been primed to believe in the legitimacy of Russia's actions in Ukraine. Conceding any ground in peace talks would have undermined the narrative of defending Russian interests and national pride, making a compromise with Ukraine politically unviable for Putin. These domestic and international pressures combined to create a situation where Russia, like Ukraine, found it nearly impossible to make the necessary compromises that could have led to a peace agreement.

In conclusion, the failure of the Istanbul Peace Talks can be attributed to a complex combination of political, structural, and diplomatic factors. The lack of alignment of interests between Ukraine and Russia, the absence of major international stakeholders, and the enormous political pressures on both parties made the situation in which meaningful negotiation was almost impossible. Although both Ukrainian and Russian leaders were willing to negotiate behind closed doors, the external political factors, such as the unwillingness of NATO allies to sign any peace agreement, made sure that no final agreement was achieved. The possibility of a peace agreement was present, as Charap and Radchenko (2024) indicate, but the complex of political and strategic circumstances finally came into play, and the negotiations did not lead to a permanent solution. The collapse of

these negotiations highlights the intricacy of international relations and the sheer difficulty of achieving a genuinely binding peace agreement.

The Mediating Role of Turkey: Turkey, being a NATO member with special relationships with both Ukraine and Russia, was at the center of the mediation process in the Istanbul talks. Although the role of Turkey in bringing both parties to the table was essential, it was not sufficient to overcome the underlying differences between the two sides. The collapse of the negotiations revealed the boundaries of the Turkish mediation process because neither Russia nor Ukraine was ready to compromise its fundamental national interests.

Conclusion

The Istanbul Peace Talks, which were conducted with the purpose of de-escalating the situation between Ukraine and Russia, affected their diplomatic relations in a mixed way. At first, it was hoped that the negotiations would lead to a peaceful solution, with both parties appearing to make some tentative progress. Nevertheless, the result revealed major differences in strategic goals. Although Russia seemed to demand territorial gains and a change in the orientation of Ukraine, Ukraine was adamant about its sovereignty and would not compromise on its territorial integrity. The marginalization of major international actors and the lack of binding agreements also added to the difficulties, restricting the effectiveness of the talks.

Ultimately, the peace talks did not lead to any lasting de-escalation, and in many ways, they exacerbated tensions. Rather than acting as a catalyst for peace, they underscored the irreconcilable differences between the two nations. Structural and political barriers, such as diverging goals and a lack of comprehensive international support, ensured that the peace efforts were short-lived. The failure of the Istanbul Peace Talks, despite initial hopes, revealed the deep-rooted complexities and the geopolitical realities that hindered any significant breakthrough towards The fatal blow to the peace talks is the absence of a super power in the lead role of mediating in a conflict with a super power as one of the parties to the conflict and several super powers as shadow or secondary parties that are also called indirect parties. Going by the balance of power theory, Turkey is not having the economy and military leverage to compel any super power to remain in the negotiation table, sign any agreement and to compound the challenges, it cannot enforce any agreement

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations:

- 1) **Inclusive Multilateral Approach:** To improve future peace negotiations, it is recommended to adopt a more inclusive approach, involving key international stakeholders, such as the European Union, the United States, and other regional powers. Their active participation could help bridge the significant gaps between Ukraine and Russia, providing necessary diplomatic leverage and ensuring that agreements have broader global support, increasing the likelihood of lasting peace and de-escalation.
- 2) **Clarifying Long-Term Strategic Goals:** A clearer understanding of the long-term strategic objectives of both Ukraine and Russia is essential. Future peace talks should focus on addressing these underlying goals, ensuring that both sides are committed to mutually beneficial solutions. This would involve transparent communication about territorial issues, security concerns, and geopolitical alignments. Establishing realistic expectations and shared interests can help avoid deadlock and foster more constructive discussions towards sustainable peace.

- 3) The security Council of the United Nations should be made to be independently of the super powers so that when their national interests conflicts with universal Global Responsibility, it can act. To achieve this, it must have the capacity to bark and bite independently
- 4) There should be a review of the veto power when it comes to the Global Responsibility to protect human and humanitarian rights, lives and sensitive vital assets.

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