

## **Russia-Ukraine War: What Lies Ahead**

The Russia-Ukraine war has remained in the global headlines. Russia's battlefield advancements, though extraordinary, were marred by internal economic challenges. Inflation soared, and interest rates reached a staggering 21%, signalling the strain of prolonged conflict. Additionally, reports of essential goods, such as butter, being locked in cabinets show us the impact of sanctions on everyday life. These economic difficulties, exacerbated by heavy defence spending and labour shortages, are expected to deepen, with analysts projecting significant constraints by 2026.

On the geopolitical front, Russia's readiness for peace talks, particularly with the return of Donald Trump to the White House, has been a focal point. Putin's strategy seems rooted in leveraging Trump's campaign promises and ego, portraying the Kremlin as open to diplomacy and seeking a pause in the conflict. Such a ceasefire, experts warn, could allow Russia to rearm and regroup, setting the stage for renewed aggression. Putin's ultimate goal of eradicating Ukraine's sovereignty remains firmly entrenched in Kremlin policy, making any negotiated settlement a reprieve rather than a path to lasting peace.

Ukraine's reliance on Western support continues to be a cornerstone of its defence strategy. The flow of equipment, training, and financial aid from the West is crucial to countering Russian advances. The Trump administration's proposed security guarantees for Ukraine—modelled on an Israel-style defence approach—highlight a shift towards bolstering Ukraine's self-reliance. While this strategy involves substantial weapons sales and defence industrial development, it places the financial burden on European allies rather than the United States.

The broader implications of the Russia-Ukraine conflict extend beyond the battlefield. Though lacking the cohesion of NATO-style alliances, the transactional relationships between Russia, China, North Korea and Iran pose a solid challenge to the existing world order. Despite mutual distrust, the deepening ties between Russia and China underscore their antithesis to Western influence. This evolving axis adds another layer of complexity to today's geopolitics, with potential ramifications for global security and economic stability.

In 2025, experts predict an escalation in the Russia-West conflict driven by mutual distrust. The potential for ceasefires may offer temporary relief but raises questions about long-term security guarantees for Ukraine. European capacity to step up remains limited, and NATO's credibility faces scrutiny under Trump's administration.