

Michael von der Schulenburg, Hajo Funke, Harald Kujat – Peace For Ukraine

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The disastrous derailment of early peace efforts to end the war in Ukraine

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This is a detailed reconstruction of the Ukrainian-Russian peace negotiations in March 2022 and the associated mediation attempts by the then Israeli Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, supported by President Erdogan and former German Chancellor Schröder. It was drawn up by retired General H. Kujat and Professor Emeritus H. Funke, two of the initiators of the recently presented peace plan for Ukraine. And it is also in connection with their peace plan that this reconstruction is so extremely important. It reminds us that we cannot afford to delay ceasefire and peace negotiations again. The human and military situation in Ukraine deteriorates dramatically, with the added danger that it could lead to a further escalation of the war. We need a diplomatic solution to this cruel war for Europe and the Ukraine – and we need it now!

From the detailed reconstruction of the March peace efforts 6 conclusions emerge:

1. Just one month after the start of the Russian military intervention in Ukraine, Ukrainian and Russian negotiators had come very close to an agreement for a ceasefire and to an outline for a comprehensive peace solution to the conflict.
- 2) In contrast to today, President Zelensky and his government had made great efforts to negotiate peace with Russia and bring the war to a quick end.
- 3) Contrary to Western interpretations, Ukraine and Russia agreed at the time that the planned NATO expansion was the reason for the war. They therefore focused their peace negotiations on Ukraine's neutrality and its renunciation of NATO membership. In return, Ukraine would have retained its territorial integrity except for Crimea.
- 4) There is little doubt that these peace negotiations failed due to resistance from NATO and in particular from the USA and the UK. The reason is that such a peace agreement would have been tantamount to a defeat for NATO, an end to NATO's eastward expansion and thus an end to the dream of a unipolar world dominated by the USA.
5. The failure of the peace negotiations in March 2022 led to dangerous intensification of the war that has cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, especially young people, deeply traumatized a young generation and inflicted the most severe mental and physical wounds on them. Ukraine has been exposed to enormous destruction, internal displacements,

and mass impoverishment. This is accompanied by a large-scale depopulation of the country. Not only Russia, but also NATO and the West bear a heavy share of the blame for this disaster.

6) Ukraine's negotiating position today is far worse than it was in March 2022. Ukraine will now lose large parts of its territory.

7. The blocking of the peace negotiations at that time has harmed everyone: Russia and Europe – but above all the people of Ukraine, who are paying with their blood the price for the ambitions of the major powers and will probably get nothing in return.

Michael von der Schulenburg

HOW THE CHANCE WAS LOST FOR A PEACE SETTLEMENT OF THE UKRAINE WAR AND THE WEST WANTED TO CONTINUE THE WAR INSTEAD

A detailed reconstruction of events in March 2022

Hajo Funke and Harald Kujat

Berlin, October 2023

In March 2022, direct peace negotiations between Ukrainian and Russian delegations and mediation efforts by the then Israeli Prime Minister, Naftali Bennet created a genuine chance for ending the war peacefully only four to five weeks after Russia had invaded Ukraine. However, instead of ending the war through negotiations as Ukrainian President Zelensky and his government appeared to have wanted, he ultimately bowed to pressures from some Western powers to abandon a negotiated solution. Western powers wanted this war to continue in the hope to break Russia. Ukraine's decision to abandon negotiations may have been taken before the discovery of a massacre of civilians in the town of Bucha near Kiev.

In the following is an attempt of a step-by-step reconstruction of the events that led to the peace negotiations in March and their collapse in early April 2022.

IN EARLY MARCH 2022, ISRAELI PRIME MINISTER NAFTALI BENNETT UNDERTOOK MEDIATION EFFORTS ...

Naftali Bennett had undertaken mediation efforts beginning in the first week of March 2022. In a video interview with Israeli journalist Hanoch Daum on February 4, 2023, he spoke for the first time in detail about the process and the end of the negotiations. This video interview is the basis of a detailed report in the Berliner Zeitung of February 6, 2023: "*Naftali Bennett wanted peace between Ukraine and Russia: who blocked? Israeli ex-premier spoke for the first time about his negotiations with Putin and Zelensky. The ceasefire was reportedly within reach.*" (Berliner Zeitung, Feb. 06, 2023).

Soon after the war broke out, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky had asked Bennett to help open a channel of communications with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Putin responded by inviting Bennett to Moscow: "*On March 5, 2022, at Putin's invitation, Bennett had flown to Moscow in a private jet provided by Israeli intelligence. In the conversation in the Kremlin, Putin, Bennett said, had made some substantial concessions, in particular, he*

had renounced his original wartime goal of demilitarizing Ukraine. ... In return, the Ukrainian president agreed to renounce joining NATO – a position he also repeated publicly a short time later. This removed one of the decisive obstacles to a ceasefire ...”. According to the Berliner Zeitung, other issues, such as the future of the Donbass and Crimea, as well as security guarantees for Ukraine, had also been the subject of intensive talks during these days. (Ibid)

In the interview, Bennett explained further: *“I had the impression at the time that both sides were very interested in a ceasefire (...). According to Bennett, a cease-fire was within reach at that time, and both sides were prepared to make considerable concessions.... But Britain and the U.S., in particular, wanted this peace process to end and set their sights on a continuation of the war.”* (Ibid)

In early March 2022, President Zelensky contacted not only Naftali Bennett, but also former German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and asked him to use his close personal ties to Putin to mediate between Ukraine and Russia in hope to find ways to end this war quickly. In an interview published in the weekly edition of the Berliner Zeitung on October 21/22 of this year, Schröder spoke publicly for the first time about his role in the efforts that led to the peace negotiations in Istanbul on March 29, 2022. Like Bennet, also he came to the conclusion that the reason why these peace negotiations were abandoned was because the Americans obstructed them. He said: *“At the peace negotiations in March 2022 in Istanbul with Rustem Umerov (then security advisor to Zelensky, now Ukrainian defense minister), the Ukrainians did not agree to peace because they were not allowed to. They first had to ask the Americans about everything they discussed,”* and continued: *“But at the end (of the peace negotiations) nothing happened. My impression was that nothing could happen because everything else was decided in Washington. That was fatal.”*

The Turkish Foreign Minister, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, who organized the Istanbul meeting at the time, had previously made similar comments. In an interview with CNN Turk on April 20, 2022, he said: *“Some NATO states wanted the Ukraine conflict to continue in order to weaken Russia.”*

...WHILE PARALLEL PEACE NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN UKRAINIAN AND RUSSIAN NEGOCIATORS WERE UNDERWAY

Direct negotiations between a Ukrainian and a Russian delegation had already been underway since late February 2022, and in the third week of March, *“only a month after the outbreak of the war, they (had) agreed on the broad outlines of a peace settlement. Ukraine promised not to join NATO and not to allow military bases of foreign powers on its territory, while Russia promised in return to recognize Ukraine’s territorial integrity and to withdraw all Russian occupation troops. Special arrangements were made for the Donbas and Crimea.”* (Cf. Michael von der Schulenburg: UN Charter: Negotiations! In: Emma of March 6, 2023)

To further the peace negotiations, the Turkish President offered to host a Ukrainian-Russian peace conference in Istanbul on 29 March, 2002. During the negotiations mediated by Turkish President Erdogan, the Ukrainian delegation presented a position paper, which led to the Istanbul Communiqué. Ukraine’s proposals were translated into a draft treaty by the Russian side.

The text of the **Istanbul Communiqué of March 29, 2022** included 10 proposals:

Proposal 1: Ukraine declares itself a neutral state and promises to remain non-aligned and to refrain from developing nuclear weapons in exchange for international legal guarantees. Possible guarantor states include Russia, Britain, China, the United States, France, Turkey, Germany, Canada, Italy, Poland, and Israel, but other states would also be welcome to join the treaty.

Proposal 2: These international security guarantees for Ukraine would not extend to Crimea, Sevastopol, or certain areas in the Donbas. The parties to the treaty would have to define the boundaries of these areas or agree that each party understands these boundaries differently.

Proposal 3: Ukraine commits not to join any military coalition and not to host any foreign military bases or troop contingents. Any international military exercises would be possible only with the consent of the guarantor states. For their part, the Guarantor States confirm their intention to promote Ukraine's membership in the European Union.

Proposal 4: Ukraine and the Guarantor States agree that (in the event of aggression, armed attack against Ukraine, or military operation against Ukraine) each of the Guarantor States, after urgent and immediate mutual consultations (to be held within three days) on the exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defense (as recognized in Article 51 of the UN Charter), will provide assistance (in response to and on the basis of an official appeal by Ukraine) to Ukraine as a permanently neutral state under attack. Such assistance will be facilitated by the immediate implementation of necessary individual or joint measures, including the closure of Ukrainian airspace, the provision of necessary weapons, and the use of armed force with the aim of restoring and then maintaining the security of Ukraine as a permanently neutral state.

Proposal 5: Any such armed attack (any military operation at all) and any action taken in response will be reported immediately to the UN Security Council. Such action will cease as soon as the UN Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.

Proposal 6: In order to protect against possible provocations, the agreement will regulate the mechanism of fulfillment of Ukraine's security guarantees based on the results of consultations between Ukraine and the guarantor states.

Proposal 7: The treaty will apply provisionally from the date of its signature by Ukraine and all or most of the guarantor states.

The treaty will enter into force after (1) Ukraine's permanent neutral status is approved in a nationwide referendum, (2) the relevant amendments are incorporated into the Ukrainian Constitution, and (3) ratification occurs in the parliaments of Ukraine and the guarantor states.

Proposal 8: The desire of the parties to resolve the issues related to Crimea and Sevastopol will be included in bilateral negotiations between Ukraine and Russia for a period of 15 years. Ukraine and Russia also commit not to resolve these issues by military means and to continue diplomatic resolution efforts.

Proposal 9: The parties continue consultations (involving other guarantor states) to prepare and agree on the provisions of a treaty on security guarantees for Ukraine, ceasefire modalities, withdrawal of troops and other paramilitary formations, and opening and ensuring safely functioning humanitarian corridors on a continuous basis, as well as the exchange of bodies and release of prisoners of war and interned civilians.

Proposal 10: The parties consider it possible to hold a meeting between the presidents of Ukraine and Russia to sign a treaty and/or take political decisions on other unresolved issues.”

APPARENT INITIAL SUPPORT OF MEDIATION EFFORTS BY WESTERN POLITICIANS.

Proof of initial Western politicians’ support for the negotiations emerges from the sequence of telephone calls and meetings during the period from early March to at least mid-March. On March 4, Scholz and Putin spoke on the phone; on March 5, Bennett met Putin in Moscow; on March 6, Bennett and Scholz met in Berlin; on March 7, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, and Germany discussed the issue in a videoconference; on March 8, Macron and Scholz spoke on the phone; on March 10, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Kuleba and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov met in Ankara; on March 12, Scholz and Zelensky and Scholz and Macron spoke on the phone; and on March 14, Scholz and Erdogan met in Ankara. (Cf. Petra Erler: Re: Review March 2022: Who did not want a quick end to the war in Ukraine, in: “News of a Lighthouse Keeper,” Sept. 1, 2023)

NATO SPECIAL SUMMIT OF MARCH 24, 2022 IN BRUSSELS OPPOSES ALL NEGOTIATIONS

But this initial support quickly turned sour, with NATO opposing any such negotiations before Russia doesn't withdraws all its troops from Ukrainian territories. This, in fact, killed all negotiations. Michael von der Schulenburg, former UN Assistant Secretary-General (ASG) in UN peace missions, writes that “NATO had already decided at a special summit on March 24, 2022, not to support these peace negotiations (between Ukraine and Russia).” (Cf. Michael von der Schulenburg: UN Charter: Negotiations! Emma, March 6, 2023). The US president had flown in especially for this special summit to Brussels. Obviously, peace as negotiated by the Russian and Ukrainian negotiating delegations was not in the interest of some NATO countries.

AT FIRST ZELESKY STICKS TO THE OUTCOME OF THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS

“As late as March 27, 2022, Zelensky had shown the courage to defend the results of the Ukrainian-Russian peace negotiations in public before Russian journalists – and this despite the fact that NATO had already decided at a special summit on March 24, 2022, not to support these peace negotiations.” (Ibid)

According to von der Schulenburg, the Russian-Ukrainian peace negotiations had been a historically unique feature, made possible only because Russians and Ukrainians knew each other well and *“spoke the same language and probably even knew each other personally.”* We know of no other war or armed conflict in which the conflict parties agreed on specific peace terms so quickly.

On March 28, Putin, as a sign of goodwill and in support of the peace negotiations, declared readiness to withdraw troops from the Kharkov area and the Kiev area; this apparently occurred even before his public announcement.

THE PEACE NEGOTIATIONS UNRAVEL

On March 29, 2022, the day of the Istanbul meeting, Scholz, Biden, Draghi, Macron, and Johnson again spoke on the phone about the situation in Ukraine. By this time, the stance of key Western allies had apparently hardened. They formulated preconditions for negotiations

that were in blatant contrast to Bennett's and Erdogan's peace efforts: *"The leaders agreed to continue to provide strong support to Ukraine. They again urged Russian President Putin to agree to a ceasefire, to cease all hostilities, to withdraw Russian soldiers from Ukraine and to allow for a diplomatic solution (...)"* (Petra Erler: Re: Review March 2022: Who Didn't Want a Quick End to the War in Ukraine (in "News of a Lighthouse Keeper" September 1, 2023).

The Washington Post reported April 5 that in NATO, continuing the war is preferred to a cease-fire and negotiated settlement: *"For some in NATO, it's better for Ukrainians to keep fighting and dying than to achieve a peace that comes too soon or at too high a price for Kiev and the rest of Europe."* Zelensky, he said, should *"keep fighting until Russia is completely defeated."*

BORIS JOHNSON'S MESSAGE TO UKRAINIANS ON APRIL 9, 2022: WE MUST CONTINUE THE WAR

On April 9, 2022, Boris Johnson arrived unannounced in Kiev and told the Ukrainian president that the West was not ready to end the war. According to Britain's Guardian on April 28, PM Johnson had *"instructed"* Ukrainian President Zelensky *"not to make any concessions to Putin"*:

"Ukrainska Pravda" reported on this in detail in two articles on May 5, 2022:

"No sooner had the Ukrainian negotiators and Abramovich/Medinsky agreed in broad terms on the structure of a possible future agreement after the Istanbul results than British Prime Minister Boris Johnson appeared in Kiev almost without warning.

Johnson brought two simple messages with him to Kiev. The first is that Putin is a war criminal; he should be pressured, not negotiated with. The second is that even if Ukraine is willing to sign some agreements with Putin on guarantees, but that the collective West is not. We can sign [an agreement] with you [Ukraine], but not with him. He will screw everyone over anyway," one of Selensky's close associates summed up the essence of Johnson's visit. *There is much more behind this visit and Johnson's words than just reluctance to engage in agreements with Russia. Johnson took the position that the collective West, which as recently as February had suggested that Zelensky should surrender and flee, now feels that Putin is not really as powerful as they had previously imagined. Moreover, there is an opportunity to put pressure on him. And the West wants to take it."*

The Neue Züricher Zeitung (NZZ) reported on April 12 that the British government under Johnson is counting on a Ukrainian military victory. Conservative Member of the House of Commons Alicia Kearns said, *"We'd rather arm the Ukrainians to the teeth than give Putin a success."* British Foreign Secretary (and later Prime Minister) Liz Truss professed in a keynote speech that *"victory for Ukraine (...) is a strategic imperative for us all and therefore military support must be massively expanded"*. Guardian columnist Simon Jenkins warned: *"Liz Truss risks inflaming the war in Ukraine for her own ambitions."* This, he said, was probably the first Tory election campaign *"to be fought on Russia's borders."* Johnson and Truss wanted Zelensky *"to keep fighting until Russia is completely defeated. They need a triumph in their proxy war. In the meantime, anyone who disagrees with them can be dismissed as a weakling, a coward, or a Putin supporter. That this conflict is being exploited by Britain for a sleazy upcoming leadership contest is sickening."*

Following his second visit to Kiev on April 25, 2022, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the U.S. wants to use the opportunity to permanently weaken Russia militarily and

economically in the wake of the Ukraine war. According to the New York Times, the U.S. government is no longer concerned with a fight over control of Ukraine, but with a fight against Moscow in the wake of a new Cold War.

At the April 26, 2022, meeting of defense ministers from NATO members and other countries convened by Austin in Ramstein, Rhineland-Palatinate/ Germany, the Pentagon chief declared the military victory of Ukraine as a strategic goal.

The American magazine “Responsible Statecraft,” wrote on September 2, 2022:

“Did Boris Johnson help prevent a peace deal in Ukraine? According to a recent article in Foreign Affairs, Kiev and Moscow may have reached a tentative agreement to end the war as early as April. According to several former senior U.S. officials we spoke with, Russian and Ukrainian negotiators appeared to have tentatively agreed on the outlines of a negotiated interim solution in March 2022,” write Fiona Hill and Angela Stent. *“Russia would retreat to its Feb. 23 position, when it controlled part of the Donbas region and all of Crimea, and in return Ukraine would promise not to seek NATO membership and instead receive security guarantees from a number of countries. The decision to let the deal fail coincided with Johnson’s visit to Kiev in April, during which he urged Ukrainian President Zelenskiy to break off talks with Russia for two main reasons: Putin is impossible to negotiate with, and the West is not ready for an end to the war.”*

In his article, the authors asked questions that have become increasingly important as the war has progressed:

“This apparent revelation raises some important questions: Why did Western leaders want to prevent Kiev from signing what appeared to be a good negotiating deal with Moscow? Do they view the conflict as a proxy war with Russia? And most importantly, what would it take to return to a negotiated outcome?”

In his announcement of the partial mobilization, Putin stated on September 21, 2022:

“I would like to make this public for the first time today. After the start of the special military operation, especially after the talks in Istanbul, the Kiev representatives expressed quite positive views on our proposals. These proposals were mainly about ensuring Russia’s security and interests. But a peaceful solution obviously did not suit the West, which is why Kiev, after agreeing on some compromises, was actually ordered to nullify all these agreements.”

On the occasion of the visit of an African peace delegation on June 17, 2023, Putin demonstratively showed the agreement accepted and initialed in Istanbul ad referendum to the cameras.

CONCLUSION: MISSED OPPORTUNITY

Based on the publicly available reports and documents, it is not only plain that there was a serious willingness to negotiate on the part of both Ukraine and Russia in March 2022.

Apparently, the negotiating parties even agreed on a draft treaty ad referendum. Zelensky and Putin were ready for a bilateral meeting to finalize the outcome of the negotiations. Fact is that the main results of the negotiations were based on a proposal by Ukraine, and Zelenskyy courageously supported them in an interview with Russian journalists on March 27, 2022, even after NATO decided against these peace negotiations. Zelensky had already expressed similar support beforehand in a sign that proves that the intended outcome of the Istanbul

negotiations certainly corresponded to Ukrainian interests. This makes the Western intervention, which prevented an early end to the war, even more disastrous for Ukraine. Russia's responsibility for the attack, which was contrary to international law, is not relativized by the fact that responsibility for the grave consequences that Ukraine's Western supporters that ensued must also be attributed to the states that demanded the continuation of the war. The war has now reached a stage where further dangerous escalation and an expansion of hostilities can only be prevented by a cease-fire. It may now be the last time that a peaceful resolution through negotiations could be achieved. There are peace proposals from China, the African Union, Brazil, Mexico, Indonesia, and a proposal developed at the invitation of the Vatican as early as June 2022. On 3 October this year, we presented the German Government our own peace proposal that tried to incorporate all other peace proposals made earlier. See **Ending the war by a negotiated peace – Legitimate self-defense and the quest for a just and lasting peace are not contradictory** [HERE](#).

Since the failed Istanbul negotiations The course of the war and the current extremely critical timing should be reason enough for a responsible world community and UN member states to rethink and press for a ceasefire and peace negotiations.

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