



Neil Abrams @neil_abrams

Oct 21 · 53 tweets · [neil_abrams/status/1583459564950724608](https://twitter.com/neil_abrams/status/1583459564950724608)

A common Twitter exchange:

Tankie: Stop arming Ukraine!

Reasonable person: What exactly do you suggest instead?

Tankie: Pressure Ukraine to implement the Minsk accords!

So what are the Minsk accords, and why is the tankie line on Minsk ridiculous?

A thread.

Tankie propaganda on Minsk is an attempt to shift blame from Russia, where it properly belongs, to Ukraine, where it doesn't: "If only Ukraine implemented Minsk, we wouldn't be in this situation!" It's straight gaslighting. To simplify things, I'll call it "gasminsking."

I'm gonna keep this as short as possible, since explaining the intricacies of the Minsk process is only slightly more alluring than the thought of blowing my brains out. But it's important because tankies, when pressed for details on a "peace deal," use Minsk as their trump card.

You won't hear most tankies talk about Minsk, but a few do. Take Caitlin Johnstone, for instance:

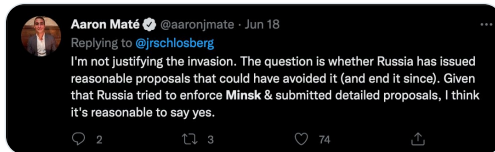
The US power alliance could very easily have prevented this war with a few low-cost concessions like enshrining Ukrainian neutrality, rolling back its war machinery from Russia's borders and sincerely pursuing detente with Moscow instead of shredding treaties and ramping up cold war escalations. Hell, it could likely have prevented this war just by protecting President Zelensky from the anti-Moscow far right nationalists who were openly threatening to lynch him if he began honouring the Minsk agreements and pursuing peace with Russia, as he was originally elected to do.

Of course, the undisputed king of gasminsking is [@aaronjmate](#). Maté is smarter than most tankies. His takes tend to be less inane than those of, say, an [@mtracey](#). So when asked for specifics on a peace deal, he's done enough Wikipedia diving to have a ready-made answer: Minsk.



Tankie gasminsking boils down to a few claims, two of which we'll examine here: First, Minsk has always offered the best path to peace, and still does. Second, Minsk's failure to bring peace was the result of Ukraine's refusal to abide by the terms.

But first, some background:



In late-February 2014, mere days after Yanukovych fled, Russian troops occupied Crimea. Soon after, the Kremlin launched a major initiative to stir up separatist, anti-government protests in other parts of eastern and southern Ukraine.

That spring, the Kremlin financed and organized demonstrations of paid protesters across eastern and southern Ukraine. The idea was to create the appearance of an organic local uprising. Leaked tapes from Putin adviser Sergei Glazyev reveal the scope of these efforts.

One of the key ideas that Glazyev pushes during his conversations is that all 'uprisings' must appear to be from the local population. This had been the plan in Crimea on 26 February that the Crimean Tatars and other Ukrainians who gathered in support of Ukraine's unity thwarted. The tapes show that the same attempts were planned in Odesa and Zaporizhzhya.

While Glazyev and Zatulín are clearly not the ones making key policy decisions, the role effectively spelled out by these tapes, of financing attempts to orchestrate apparent local insurrections has received lots of confirmation from other sources. That Russia's appetite extended to all of the so-called 'Novorossiia' is certainly suggested by another document which Novaya Gazeta reported in February 2015. If authentic, this is a plan, linked with Konstantin Malofeyev, for ensuring the 'integration' of Ukraine's eastern oblasts with the Russian Federation. As the newspaper pointed out, the document is of interest particularly since it was believed to have been passed to the Kremlin in early February while Yanukovych was still in power in Ukraine.

There is a conversation on the Glazyev tapes that same day between Glazyev and Kirill Frolov, a Russian national from the pro-Russian group calling itself the Union of Orthodox Citizens of Ukraine. Glazyev stresses that rallies are not enough and says that there needs to be a session of the Regional State Administration where they declare the post-Maidan government in Kyiv illegitimate. Frolov expressed concern that the council members might not come, but is told that there have been such sessions in Kharkiv and Donetsk, and it must happen in Odesa.

Source for the Glazyev leaks, including transcripts:



Glazyev tapes debunk Russia's lies about its annexation of Crimea an...

Although the international community has remained united in refusing to recognize Russia's annexation of Ukrainian Crimea five years ago, it has been disturbingly willing to accept Russia's narrative...

<https://khpg.org/en/1551054011>

That Russia had to wholly manufacture this uprising shows just how anemic separatist sentiment was among residents of eastern and southern Ukraine, a fact confirmed by opinion polls at the time. <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=236>

Percentage of those, who want Ukraine to join Russia¹

	Ukraine and Russia must unite into a single state 2013, %	Ukraine and Russia must unite into a single state February, 8-18 2014, %
AR Crimea	35.9	41.0
Donetsk	29.8	33.2
Lugansk	29.4	24.1
Odessa	22.8	24.0
Dnipropetrovsk	14.7	13.8
Kharkiv	13.9	15.1
Zaporizhzhya	8.9	16.7
Vinnytsya	8.6	2.7
Kyiv (city)	3.7	5.3
Poltava	3.3	4.3
Kyiv (region)	3.0	6.4
Lviv	0.3	0.0

Not that this is surprising; Crimea is Ukraine's only majority-ethnic Russian province. But note how much lower support for joining Russia was than the % of ethnic Russians in each region. Even ethnic Russians weren't all that enthusiastic about joining Russia.

Number of Russians by region (Oblast) per the last systematic census in 2001 [edit]

Oblast	Number in 2001 ^[84]	Percent in 2001
Sevastopol	270,000	71.6
Autonomous Republic of Crimea	1,180,400	58.3
Luhansk Oblast	991,800	39.0
Donetsk Oblast	1,844,400	38.2
Kharkiv Oblast	742,000	25.6
Zaporizhia Oblast	476,800	24.7
Odesa Oblast	508,500	20.7
Dnipropetrovsk Oblast	627,500	17.6
Mykolaiv Oblast	177,500	14.1
Kherson Oblast	165,200	14.1
Kyiv	337,300	13.1
Sumy Oblast	121,700	9.4
Kirovohrad Oblast	83,900	7.5
Poltava Oblast	117,100	7.2
Kyiv Oblast	109,300	6.0
Cherkasy Oblast	75,600	5.4
Zhytomyr Oblast	68,900	5.0
Chernihiv Oblast	62,200	5.0
Chernivtsi Oblast	37,900	4.1
Vinnitsya Oblast	67,500	3.8
Lviv Oblast	92,600	3.6
Khmelnitskyi Oblast	50,700	3.6

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So it's no wonder the Kremlin had forged a fake rebellion out of whole cloth. Still, local residents weren't buying it, and it never got off the ground. So Putin responded by sending irregular Russian forces into the Donbas to pose as native rebels.

There's a mountain of evidence confirming the presence of irregular Russian forces in the Donbas operating under the Kremlin's direction. See, for instance, this excellent and meticulously-researched report:

https://www.imrussia.org/media/pdf/An_Invasion_by_Any_Other_Name.pdf

The Russian irregulars seized considerable territory and set up Russian proxy administrations in Donetsk and Luhansk. Only then did Kyiv, bankrupt and with no military worthy of the name thanks to Yanukovich's outrageous plundering, launch its first military operation.

Incredibly, Kyiv's improvised forces, cobbled together from state and private actors and financed in part from small donations, started absolutely kicking ass, recovering most of the lost territory and confining the Russian irregulars to a small slice of land.

Faced once again with humiliating defeat, Putin brought out the big guns. In August 2014, he sent thousands of regular Russian troops into the Donbas. The arrival of actual Russian army units turned the tide, reconquering most of the land Ukrainian forces had recently recovered

Russian defense expert Igor Sutyagin estimated that several thousand Russian regulars were present in the Donbas at this time, a number that would peak at 10,000 by mid-December 2014. https://static.rusi.org/201503_bp_russian_forces_in_ukraine_o.pdf

Russian Forces in Ukraine

Following their increasingly large-scale, direct and conventional involvement in combat against Ukrainian troops in the middle of August 2014,³ Russian troops in Ukraine numbered between 3,500 and 6,000–6,500 by the end of August 2014, according to different sources.⁴ That number fluctuated, reaching approximately 10,000 at the peak of direct Russian involvement in the middle of December 2014. The Russian Ministry of Defence (MoD) had to involve 117 combat and combat-support units to generate the approximately 42,000 troops rotating in the vicinity of the Russo–Ukrainian border: either stationed there, delivering artillery fire against Ukrainian territory from Russian soil, or directly participating in combat operations on Ukrainian sovereign territory. It is noteworthy that 104 of these 117 units

Likewise, as of September 2014 the Russian Committee of Soldiers' Mothers, an independent NGO in Russia, estimated that 10-15,000 regular Russian troops had already been sent to Ukraine.



Thousands of Russian soldiers sent to Ukraine, say rights groups

Moscow denies deploying regular troops, but reports suggest up to 15,000 soldiers have been sent to assist separatists since July

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/01/russian-soldiers-ukraine-rights-groups>

The OSCE, whose representatives had been observing events on the ground since 2014 (until Russia kicked them out in 2021), has documented the presence in the Donbas of thousands of Russian soldiers.



Russia's Ongoing Violations in Ukraine

Statement to the Permanent Council on Russia's ongoing violations of international law and defiance of OSCE principles and commitments in Ukraine.

<https://osce.usmission.gov/russias-ongoing-violations-in-ukraine-13/>

jamming station, and the Orlan-10 drone. Nor has Russia ever acknowledged the tens of thousands of persons in military-style dress, whom the OSCE Border Observation Mission has seen cross into Russia-controlled parts of Ukraine. Russia has noted that OSCE observers did not witness members of its armed forces carrying weapons across the border in plain sight, yet Russian soldiers have been observed bearing weapons in the conflict zone. Last week

In 2016, the International Criminal Court found evidence of “direct military engagement between the respective armed forces of the Russian Federation and Ukraine ... from 14 July 2015 at the latest.” https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/itemsDocuments/2017-PE-rep/2017-otp-rep-PE-Ukraine_ENG.pdf

Of course, there also the testimony of the Russian nationals dispatched by the Kremlin to take command of the irregular forces. They freely acknowledge the war effort would have failed were it not for the arrival of Russian army units.



Former Donbas militant leader admits 'republics' exist because of Puti...

Alexander Borodai, one of the first leaders of the self-proclaimed 'Donetsk people's republics' has admitted that without Russia's military intervention, he and the other 'insurgents' would be dead

<https://khpq.org/en/1565889311>

The Russian military's success against Ukraine's dilapidated forces compelled Kyiv to sue for peace. The result was the Minsk accords. They consisted of two agreements, the first signed in Sept. 2014 and the second, dubbed Minsk II, following in Feb. 2015.

To crudely summarize, Minsk's key provisions called for an immediate ceasefire, the withdrawal of forces, the decentralization of power to Donetsk and Luhansk, and the holding of local elections in the two regions.

Crucially, the elections were to be carried out under Ukrainian law, with Ukraine's involvement, and under the supervision of the OSCE.

But Russia's Donbas proxies just went ahead and held sham elections on their own, outside the Minsk framework and with no monitoring.



So-called elections not in line with Minsk Protocol, says OSCE Chair, c...

Bern, October 31, 2014 - Swiss Foreign Minister and OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Didier Burkhalter, reminded all parties that the Minsk Protocol and the Memorandum of September 5 and 19 respectively s...

<https://www.osce.org/cio/126242>

I mean, the Kremlin was well aware that most of the local population was not behind its occupation. So conducting free and fair elections under international monitoring wasn't exactly an option, was it?

Here, again, are opinion polls by region on support for joining Russia. Local enthusiasm at the prospect of becoming the 47th and 48th oblasts of Russia wasn't exactly overwhelming.

Feb. 2014 (left): <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=236>

Apr. 2014 (right): <https://www.kiis.com.ua/?lang=eng&cat=reports&id=302&page=1>

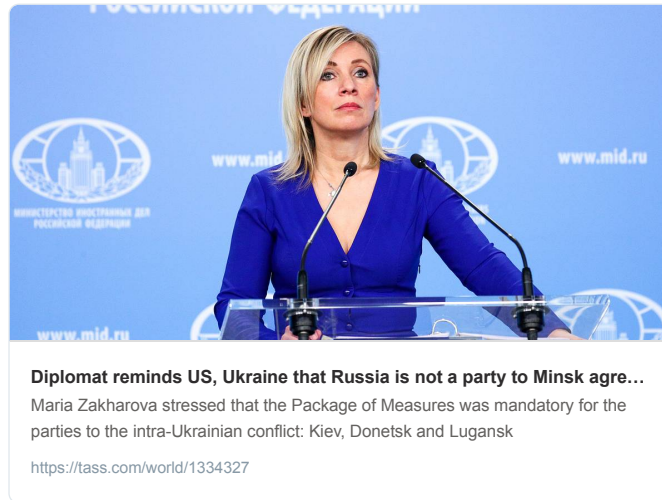
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	South-East as a whole	Dnipropetrovsk region	Donetsk region	Zaporizhka region	Luhansk region	Mykoleiv region	Odessa region	Kharkiv region	Kherson region
Certainly, yes, I do	7,1	3,7	11,9	2,2	13,2	3,5	3,2	9,2	1,0
Rather, yes	8,3	3,2	15,6	4,0	17,1	3,7	4,0	6,9	2,5
Difficult to say for sure, partly yes, partly no	12,5	6,9	17,3	9,9	12,4	6,0	11,9	17,3	11,4
Rather, no	16,0	13,1	17,3	17,5	20,6	6,7	19,3	16,1	11,1
Certainly, no, I don't	53,7	71,0	34,9	64,0	31,3	78,7	59,5	49,5	73,5
REFUSE TO ANSWER	2,4	2,0	3,0	2,5	5,5	1,5	2,2	1,0	0,5

Russian election-rigging wasn't the only problem. Both sides repeatedly violated the ceasefire, too. But only Russia's forces went so far as to conquer *more* territory, taking advantage of Ukraine's weak military position.

What's worse, Russia wouldn't even admit it was a party to the agreements. This prompted a logical question: "Well then why the hell did you sign them?" Russia's stance was "if you want Minsk to be implemented, talk to the Donbas 'rebels', whom we have nothing to do with."

(source:



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UKRAINE CRISIS 6 SEP 2021, 02:47

Diplomat reminds US, Ukraine that Russia is not a party to Minsk agreements

Maria Zakharova stressed that the Package of Measures was mandatory for the parties to the intra-Ukrainian conflict: Kiev, Donetsk and Lugansk

For Ukraine, this was a nonstarter, as the Donbas “rebels” operated under Moscow’s control and relied on the presence of Russian forces. As a result, Ukraine insisted that Russia take responsibility for fulfilling its end of the Minsk bargain.

As if all that weren’t enough, the Minsk accords turned out to be a jumbled mess of mutually-contradictory provisions which were accordingly interpreted by the two sides in polar-opposite terms. Mercifully, Duncan Allen of Chatham House explains it all so I don’t have to.

It is precisely because Minsk-2 reflects this stalemate on the battlefield that it is an inherently contradictory document. As noted, the agreement makes the return of the border to Ukrainian control contingent on a political settlement agreeable to Russia and its proxies. However, it also includes provisions favouring the re-establishment of Ukrainian control over Donbas before a settlement has been finalized. Articles 1 and 2 envisage a lasting ceasefire and the pullback of heavy weaponry from the contact line before a dialogue on elections is held. Article 4 is ambiguous about whether the dialogue begins the day after the pullback has started or the day after it has finished; Ukraine can credibly argue that the pullback of heavy weaponry must be completed before election preparations begin. More important still, Russia has yet to withdraw its troops, equipment and irregulars from Ukraine, as article 10 in effect requires it to do without preconditions – thus relinquishing control over the border.⁶³ Russia has meanwhile strengthened the DNR/LNR’s armed formations and tightened its control over them, such that they are now effectively appendages of its own military.⁶⁴ Taken together, these circumstances make it impossible to hold elections in Donbas according to OSCE/ODIHR standards, as stipulated in article 12.

Minsk-2 can therefore be read in quite different ways. Ukraine’s version puts the re-establishment of control in the east before a political settlement. Russia would evacuate its troops and return the border to Ukraine. Elections would be held according to OSCE/ODIHR standards. Donbas would be reintegrated in line with the national decentralization programme (with some extra powers) and subordinated afresh to the authorities in Kyiv. As a result, Ukraine would be restored as a sovereign state. Russia’s version of Minsk-2 reverses key elements of this sequencing. A finalized political settlement would come before Ukraine retakes control of Donbas: elections would be held in the DNR and LNR; and Kyiv would agree a comprehensive devolution of power to these regimes. This would entrench Russian-controlled statelets, breaking the back of the Ukrainian state, preventing the central authorities from running the country as an integrated unit and torpedoing its westward integration. Only then would Ukraine regain control over the border, although whether Russia would allow that is moot.⁶⁵ In short, Minsk-2 supports mutually exclusive views of sovereignty: either Ukraine is sovereign (Ukraine’s interpretation), or it is not (Russia’s interpretation)²⁰ – this is the ‘Minsk conundrum’.

Consequently, Minsk was stillborn from the start and would largely remain so all the way up to Russia's second invasion in 2022. Here's the link to the Chatham House report:

<https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/05/minsk-conundrum-western-policy-and-russias-war-eastern-ukraine-o/minsk-2-agreement>

But it's silly to argue, as tankies like @caitoz and @aaronjmate do, that Ukraine is the only side standing in the way of Minsk's implementation. Look at this breakdown of the Minsk provisions as of 2020 and note how many labeled "not implemented" depend exclusively on Russia.

The 'Steinmeier Formula'

Table 1. Overview of the implementation of the Minsk II

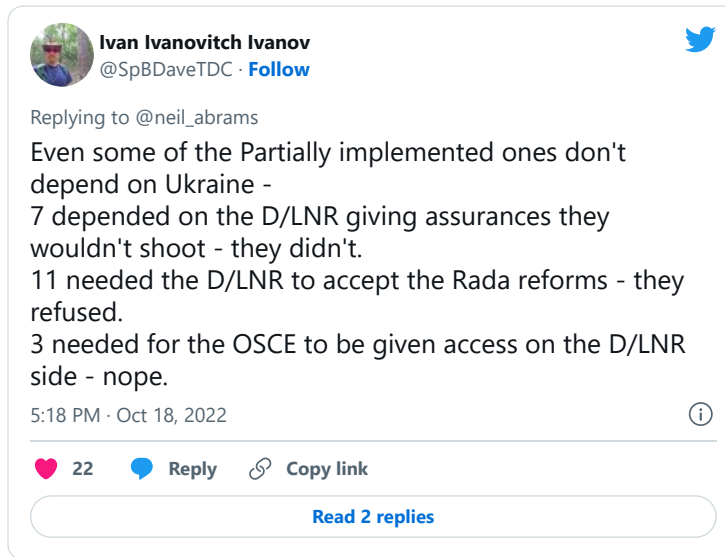
Overview of the implementation of the Minsk II (European Parliament, 2018)	Agreement Status
1. Immediate, full bilateral ceasefire	Not implemented
2. Withdrawal of all heavy weapons by both sides, establishment of a security zone	Partially implemented
3. Monitoring of ceasefire by the OSCE	Partially implemented
4. Modalities for local elections under Ukrainian law on special status of the Donbas	Partially implemented
5. Pardon and amnesty of figures involved in the conflict	Not implemented
6. Release and exchange of all hostages and other illegally detained people	Partially implemented
7. Safe delivery of humanitarian aid to those in need, based on an international mechanism	Not implemented
8. Restoration of full social and economic links with affected areas	Partially implemented
9. Full Ukrainian control over its border with Russia throughout the conflict zone	Not implemented
10. Withdrawal of foreign armed groups, weapons and mercenaries from Ukrainian territory	Not implemented
11. Constitutional reform including decentralisation, special status for the separatist regions	Partially implemented
12. Local elections in Donetsk and Luhansk regions according to OSCE standards.	Not implemented
13. Trilateral working groups between the Ukrainian government, the separatists and Russia	Yes, but limited results

@caitoz @aaronjmate Restoring Ukraine's control over its border? Removing all foreign armed groups from Ukraine? Holding free and fair elections in the Donbas? Russia ain't about to let any of that happen. Ever.

Source for above:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/339490058_The_Steinmeier_Formula_A_Path_to_Peace

Many of the “partially implemented” provisions, too, remain that way largely if not entirely because of Russia’s intransigence.



Another key to understanding Minsk’s failure was that Ukraine signed the agreements under duress, having just been beaten back by the arrival of Russian army units. Thanks largely to Yanukovych’s looting, you’ll recall, Ukraine no longer possessed a proper military of its own.

So Minsk reflected Ukraine’s weak position and Russia’s comparable strength at the time of signing. The terms, if implemented, would have been devastating to Ukraine’s sovereignty, resulting in an effectively independent Donbas under Russia’s de facto control.

Lots of civil wars end with the successful adoption of a federal state structure that grants autonomy to a secessionist region. But this wasn’t a civil war; it was a state-to-state war being treated as a civil war. Donbas “autonomy” would thus amount to Ukraine’s partition.

In addition, over the ensuing years Ukraine built its military into the formidable fighting force the world has come to recognize this past year. So as time wore on, Kyiv had less incentive to abide by Minsk, having agreed to the terms when it was in a far weaker position.

Not that Ukraine has any moral obligation to comply. The only reason the Minsk accords exist in the first place is because Russia, by invading Crimea and Donbas, broke *its own* past pledges to abide by Ukraine’s territorial sovereignty.

The first was the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, in which Russia agreed to respect the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan in exchange for the latter three handing their Soviet-era nukes back to Russia.



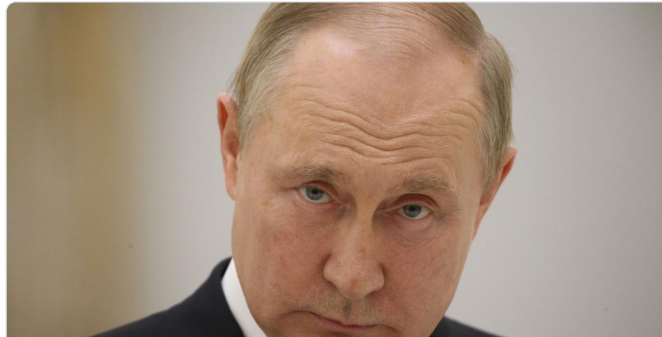
Nor was the Budapest Memorandum the only instance in which Russia promised to respect Ukraine's sovereignty—yes, including Crimea. Moscow made the same pledge in 1997 when it signed the Russian–Ukrainian Friendship Treaty.

Registration Number	52240				
Title	Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Ukraine and the Russian Federation				
Participant(s)	Russian Federation Ukraine*				
Submitter	Ukraine				
Places/dates of conclusion	<table border="1"><thead><tr><th>Place</th><th>Date</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Kiev</td><td>31/05/1997</td></tr></tbody></table>	Place	Date	Kiev	31/05/1997
Place	Date				
Kiev	31/05/1997				
EIF information	1 April 1999 , in accordance with article 39				
Authentic texts	Ukrainian Russian				

So anyone who wants to come at me with some sanctimonious lecture about Ukraine violating its sacred treaty obligations can get the fuck out of here with that shit.

Anyway, Russia's extensive history of shirking its treaty commitments, from the Budapest Memorandum up through the Minsk accords, sheds light on another tankie talking point: The supposed sabotage by the U.K. of an April 2022 interim peace agreement.

In early April, Ukraine and Russia were reportedly close to an interim settlement. Then, U.K. PM Boris Johnson showed up in Kyiv and told Zelensky the West wasn't ready for Kyiv to sign anything, after which negotiations stalled.



The World Putin Wants

Putin is trying to change the historical narrative of the last hundred years to make the world conform to his own version of history, write Fiona Hill and Angela Stent.

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/russian-federation/world-putin-wants-fiona-hill-angela-st...>

Despite calls by some for a negotiated settlement that would involve Ukrainian territorial concessions, Putin seems uninterested in a compromise that would leave Ukraine as a sovereign, independent state—whatever its borders. According to multiple former senior U.S. officials we spoke with, in April 2022, Russian and Ukrainian negotiators appeared to have tentatively agreed on the outlines of a negotiated interim settlement: Russia would withdraw to its position on February 23, when it controlled part of the Donbas region and all of Crimea, and in exchange, Ukraine would promise not to seek NATO membership and instead receive security guarantees from a number of countries. But as Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated in a July interview with his country's state media, this compromise is no longer an option. Even giving Russia all of the Donbas is not enough. "Now the geography is different," Lavrov asserted, in describing Russia's short-term military aims. "It's also Kherson and the Zaporizhzhya regions and a number of other territories." The goal is not negotiation, but Ukrainian capitulation.

When the news broke, tankie world entered full-blown meltdown: "See? NATO is forcing an unwilling Ukraine to slaughter its own people for the sake of its evil proxy war on Russia!!!"



Aaron Maté
@aaronjmate

The last time Zelensky was open to serious negotiations, Boris Johnson was dispatched to order him to keep sacrificing his people on US-UK's behalf. Is Biden finally ready to stop fighting Russia to the last Ukrainian? pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2022/...

But put yourself in Zelensky's shoes in April 2022. The horrific Bucha revelations just broke. Russia's in retreat. Ukraine is *winning* and has a chance to press the advantage. Yet Germany's over here withholding crucial weaponry and insisting on peace negotiations.

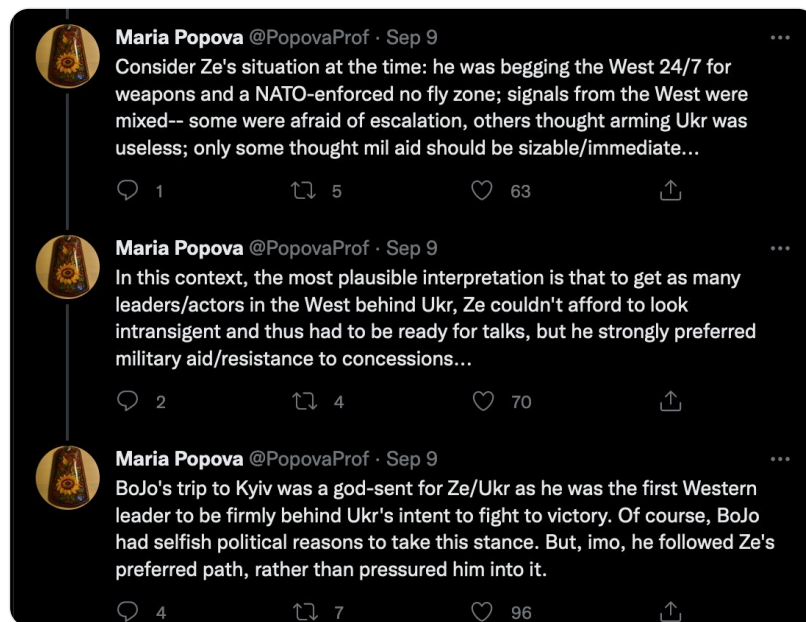
If you're Zelensky, your top priority is to keep the Western world united behind you, and if that means demonstrating to Germany your willingness to negotiate in good faith, then so be it.

At the same time, Zelensky knows from experience how worthless Russia's word is, and it's perfectly obvious an embattled Russia merely regarded the interim peace deal as a chance to regroup before resuming its campaign to conquer and dismember his country.

So either (1) a deeply credulous Zelensky really did intend to sign this agreement, thus aiding Russia at Ukraine's expense; or (2) He desperately wanted out of it while not alienating Germany in the process, and Boris Johnson's intervention saved his ass.

Either/or. Pick one.

But Maria Popova, the Jean Monnet Chair in Europe & the Rule of Law at McGill and an expert on Russian and Ukrainian politics, spells it out better than I ever could. Take it away, [@PopovaProf](#):



So there you have it. When tankies talk about Minsk, they're gaslighting people into believing Ukraine is at least as guilty as Russia for the current war, and the arguments they invoke to do so are about as silly as their other propagandistic musings. /End

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