

How the chance was lost for a Peace settlement of the Ukraine war

The West wanted to continue the war instead

A detailed reconstruction by General (ret.) Harald Kujat and Professor Hajo Funke***

Preliminary remark

*by Michael von der Schulenburg****



Michael von
der Schulenburg.
(Photo ma)

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 7 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 reasons 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.

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Detailed reconstruction¹

A detailed reconstruction by General (ret.) Harald Kujat and Professor Hajo Funke***



Harald Kujat.
(Photo ma)

(Berlin, 12 October 2023) In March 2022, direct peace negotiations between Ukrainian and Russian delegations 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 appeared to have wanted, he ultimately bowed to pressures from some Western powers to abandon a negotiated solution. (This was before the discovery of a massacre in Bucha.)

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.

Naftali Bennett had undertaken mediation efforts beginning in the first week of March 2022. In a video interview with Israeli journalist *Hanoch Daum*² 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.”

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, Bennett said, Putin 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 [...]. 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.”



Hajo Funke.
(Photo ma)

Bennett explained further: “I had the impression at the time that both sides were very interested in a ceasefire [...]. 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.”

When asked whether the Western allies had ultimately blocked the initiative, Bennett replied: “Basically, yes. They blocked it, and I thought they were wrong.” His conclusion: “I maintain that there was a good chance of a ceasefire if they hadn’t blocked it. He could not judge whether the West’s decision to end the negotiation process was right in the long term.”³

Bennett’s statements raise some fundamental questions. Why were the negotiations on an end to the war blocked? What position did the German government take? And is the West possibly partly to blame for the subsequent escalation of the war? Back then, in March 2022, several thousand people had died in the war. Since then, several hundred thousand have died. Perhaps this could have been prevented.

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 Bennett, 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.”

Peace negotiations between Ukrainian and Russian negotiators 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.”⁴

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:⁵

Proposal 1: Ukraine proclaims itself a neutral state, promising to remain nonaligned with any blocs and refrain from developing nuclear weapons – in exchange for international legal guarantees. Possible guarantor states include Russia, Great Britain, China, the United States, France, Turkey, Germany, Canada, Italy, Poland, and Israel, and 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 of the Donbas. The parties to the agreement would need to define the boundaries of these regions or agree that each party understands these boundaries differently.

Proposal 3: Ukraine vows not to join any military coalitions or host any foreign military bases or troop contingents. Any international military ex-

ercises would be possible only with the consent of the guarantor-states. For their part, these guarantors 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, any armed attack against Ukraine, or any military operation against Ukraine) each of the guarantor-states, after urgent and immediate mutual consultations (which must be held within three days) on the exercise of the right to individual or collective self-defense (as recognized by Article 51 of the UN Charter) will provide (in response to and on the basis of an official appeal by Ukraine) assistance to Ukraine, as a permanently neutral state under attack. This aid will be facilitated through the immediate implementation of such individual or joint actions as may be necessary, including the closure of Ukraine’s airspace, the provision of necessary weapons, the use of armed force with the goal of restoring and then maintaining Ukraine’s security as a permanently neutral state.

Proposal 5: Any such armed attack (any military operation at all) and all measures taken as a result will be reported immediately to the UN Security Council. Such measures will cease when the UNSC takes the measures needed to restore and maintain international peace and security.

Proposal 6: Implementing protections against possible provocations, the agreement will regulate the mechanism for fulfilling Ukraine’s security guarantees based on the results of consultations between Ukraine and the guarantor-states.

Proposal 7: The treaty provisionally applies from the date it is signed by Ukraine and all or most guarantor-states. The treaty enters force after (1) Ukraine’s permanently neutral status is approved in a nationwide referendum, (2) the introduction of the appropriate amendments in Ukraine’s Constitution, and (3) ratification in the parliaments of Ukraine and the guarantor-states.

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

Proposal 9: The parties shall continue consultations (with the involvement of other guarantor-states) to prepare and agree on the provisions of a Treaty on Security Guarantees for Ukraine, ceasefire modalities, the withdrawal of troops and other paramilitary formations, and the opening and ensuring of safe-functioning humanitarian corridors on an ongoing basis, as well as the exchange of dead bodies and the 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 for the purpose of signing a treaty and/or adopting political decisions regarding other remaining 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.⁶

NATO special summit of March 24, 2022 in Brussels

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)".⁷ 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.

Zelensky contradicts

"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."⁸

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."⁹

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.

Rejecting Zelensky and Putin

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 [...]."¹⁰

The "Washington Post" reported April 5 that in NATO, continuing the war is preferred to a ceasefire 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 on 9 April 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, 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 Zelensky'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.¹¹

The "Neue Zürcher 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.¹² 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 de-

clared the military victory of Ukraine as a strategic goal.¹³

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

Timeline 2022

24 February	Attack on Ukraine by the Russian armed forces
28 February/ 3 + 7 March	Ukrainian-Russian negotiations in Gomel/Belarus
4 March	Scholz and Putin talk on the phone
5 March	Bennett meets Putin in Moscow
6 March	Bennett and Scholz meet in Berlin
7 March	The USA, UK, France and Germany discuss the issue in a video conference
8 March	Macron and Scholz talk on the phone
10 March	Kuleba and Lavrov in Ankara
12 March	Scholz and Zelensky, Scholz and Macron talk on the phone
14 March	Scholz and Erdogan in Ankara
14 – 19 March	Outline of a peace agreement
24 March	Special NATO summit in Brussels: de facto cancellation of Ukrainian-Russian negotiations on condition that all Russian troops are withdrawn first
27 March	Zelensky defends the outcome of the negotiations in front of Russian journalists
28 March	Putin declares: Russia withdraws troops from the Kharkov and Kiev regions as a sign of goodwill
29 March	Ukrainian and Russian delegations negotiate in Istanbul: The Istanbul Communiqué
29 March	Scholz, Biden, Draghi, Macron and Johnson talk on the phone. The end of the Ukrainian-Russian negotiations
31 March 9 April	The crimes of Butscha become known In Kiev, Boris Johnson demands that the Ukrainian-Russian agreement not be concluded and declares that the "collective West" is not prepared to end the war
12 April	"Neue Zürcher Zeitung" informs about the continuation of the war
25 April 26 April	US Secretary of Defence Austin in Kiev Austin in Ramstein: He demands victory for Ukraine
21 September	Putin declares that a peaceful solution does not suit the West

on the outlines of a negotiated interim solution in March 2022,” write *Fiona Hill* and *Angela Stent*.

“Russia would retreat to its February 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 Zelensky 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?”¹⁴

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.”¹⁵

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

Conclusion: A 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 ex-

pressed 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.¹⁶

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.

Source: <https://braveneweuropa.com/michael-von-der-schulenburg-hajo-funke-harald-kujat-peace-for-ukraine>, 10 November 2023

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¹ Including conversations with Michael von der Schulenburg and Hilde Schramm. The full version will soon be available at <https://hajofunke.wordpress.com/>

² <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qK9tLDeWBzs>; see also ARD of 17 February 2023 and *Tagesspiegel* of 10 February 2023)

³ *Berliner Zeitung* from 6 February 2023

⁴ Cf. Michael von der Schulenburg. UN Charter: Negotiations! In: *Emma*, March 6, 2023

⁵ <https://faridaily.substack.com/p/ukraines-10-point-plan>

⁶ Cf. Petra Erler. Review March 2022: Who did not want a quick end to the war in Ukraine, in: “News of a Lighthouse Keeper”, Sept. 1, 2023

⁷ Cf. Michael von der Schulenburg. UN Charter: Negotiations! In: *Emma*, March 6, 2023

⁸ <https://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2022-03/selenskyj-interview-medienaufsicht-warnung>

⁹ Cf. <https://chasfreeman.net/the-many-lessons-of-the-ukraine-war/>

¹⁰ Cf. Petra Erler. Review March 2022: Who did not want a quick end to the war in Ukraine, in: "News of a Lighthouse Keeper", Sept. 1, 2023

¹¹ Cf. *Ukrainska Pravda* of 5 May 2022: From Zelensky's "surrender" to Putin's surrender: how the negotiations with Russia are going. <https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/articles/2022/05/5/7344096/>

¹² Cf. "Tagesschau SRF" of 25 April 2022: "Austin believes Ukraine's victory is possible. According to Austin, Ukraine can even defeat the Russian armed forces with sufficient military support. 'They can win if they have the right equipment and the right support', said Austin. The first step to victory is the belief that they can win, the US Secretary of Defence continued."

¹³ *New York Times* of 25 April 2022: "Behind Austin's Call for a 'Weakened' Russia, Hints of a Shift. The United States is edging toward a dynamic that pits Washington more directly against Moscow, and one that U.S. officials see as likely to play out for years." "Emboldened by Ukraine's Grit, U.S. Wants to See Russia Weakened. Hours after the American secretaries of defense and state met with Ukraine's president in Kyiv, Russia hit at least five Ukrainian railway stations in rocket attacks."

¹⁴ <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/09/02/diplomacy-watch-why-did-the-west-stop-a-peace-deal-in-ukraine/>

¹⁵ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/69390>

¹⁶ Ending the war with a negotiated peace: https://zeitgeschehen-im-fokus.ch/en/newspaper-ausgabe-en/article-translated-in-english.html#article_1565