CISA

PUBLICATION

October 2026

Ukraine’s War at a Turning Point: Military Pressure, Uncertain Diplomacy and the Search for Peace



Introduction

The war between Russia and Ukraine has become a major test of international security, diplomatic cooperation and the credibility of agreements between states. Developments reported in October 2026 have raised fresh concerns about Ukraine's ability to defend itself, the sustainability of Russia's war effort and the prospects for a negotiated settlement. Ukraine's reported shortage of critical air-defence missiles, disagreements between Presidents Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Donald Trump, and uncertainty surrounding a proposed ceasefire on energy infrastructure illustrate the difficulties of ending a war in which the parties continue to pursue competing objectives. These developments also raise a broader question: under what conditions can negotiations produce a lasting peace rather than a temporary interruption in hostilities? Addressing this question requires examining military pressures, domestic political conditions in Russia, the changing position of the United States and the wider implications for international security.

Military pressure and Ukraine's vulnerability

Ukraine's ability to defend its territory depends partly on continued military assistance from its allies. Reports in October 2026 indicated that Ukraine had run out of Patriot interceptor missiles, which are used to defend against ballistic missile attacks (Rio, 2026). A source familiar with the situation reportedly attributed the failure to intercept several missiles during a recent Russian strike to the shortage of interceptors (see Popilnichenko, 2026). The reported shortage highlights a central challenge facing Ukraine. Modern air defence requires a continuous supply of expensive and technically sophisticated weapons. When supplies become insufficient, the government must make difficult decisions about which cities, military facilities and critical infrastructure to protect. Russian attacks on energy facilities are particularly consequential because damage to electricity and heating systems can disrupt daily life, undermine economic activity and expose civilians to further hardship.

Ukraine's military position is also connected to the political decisions of its allies. President Zelenskyy had repeatedly warned that the country would face shortages if additional supplies were not delivered (see BBC, 2026). The reported depletion of Patriot missiles therefore raises questions about the reliability of military assistance and the extent to which Ukraine can sustain its defence against continued Russian attacks. Military pressure, however, does not necessarily bring a conflict closer to resolution. When either side believes that further operations could improve its position, it may have an incentive to continue fighting rather than compromise. The result can be a prolonged conflict in which military gains are uncertain while the human and economic costs continue to accumulate.

US diplomacy and the difficulty of securing a ceasefire

The relationship between Washington and Kyiv has become an important factor in determining the prospects for peace. In October 2026, President Donald Trump reportedly announced an energy ceasefire intended to halt attacks on energy infrastructure. However, subsequent reports indicated that Russian attacks had continued, leading Zelenskyy to question the value of restraining Ukrainian operations against Russian energy facilities (see International Business Times, 2026). The disagreement reflects the difficulty of establishing a ceasefire when the parties do not share a clear understanding of their obligations or believe that those obligations are being applied equally. Ukraine's position is that restraint on its part should not leave Russian attacks unanswered. From Kyiv's perspective, an agreement that limits its capacity to strike targets supporting Russia's war effort while failing to protect Ukrainian infrastructure would create an imbalance rather than a credible path to peace.

Trump's reported criticism of Ukraine's attacks on Russian oil refineries also illustrates the competing interests involved in negotiations. The US administration has expressed concern about the effects of energy prices, while Ukraine has argued that Russia's energy revenues help sustain its military campaign. These positions reflect different priorities: limiting economic disruption and bringing the war to an end on one hand, and weakening the financial and military capacity of the invading state on the other. A ceasefire requires more than a public announcement. It needs clearly defined terms, reciprocal commitments, a means of monitoring compliance and an agreed response to violations. Without these conditions, a ceasefire may become another source of disagreement and mistrust. Diplomatic initiatives are important, but their effectiveness depends on whether the parties consider the proposed arrangements credible and acceptable.

Russia's domestic pressures and the uncertainty of political change

Developments within Russia also shape the wider context of the war. Alexandra Prokopenko, a former journalist who left Russia after the invasion of Ukraine began in 2022, has described growing public dissatisfaction, attempts to avoid military conscription and economic pressures associated with the conflict (see Green, 2026). Her assessment suggests that the war has created strains for ordinary Russians as well as for parts of the political and economic elite. The reported economic difficulties include damage to energy infrastructure and other facilities following Ukrainian strikes on Russian territory. Prokopenko has used the metaphor of a mountaineer entering a "death zone" to describe an economy approaching a point at which it struggles to sustain itself. She suggests that continued pressure could contribute to the gradual weakening of the Russian political system or produce a more abrupt crisis. These assessments raise important questions about the long-term sustainability of Russia's war effort, but they should be interpreted

cautiously. Reports of dissatisfaction do not establish that most Russians oppose the war, while economic pressure does not necessarily lead to the collapse of an authoritarian government. Public opinion is particularly difficult to assess where open dissent may carry serious consequences.

The suggestion that Putin's age or apparent health might create an opportunity for political change is similarly uncertain. Leadership transitions can alter political conditions, but their timing and consequences cannot be reliably predicted from public appearances or individual observations alone. Russia's internal pressures may influence its decisions, but it would be premature to assume that they will compel the government to withdraw or bring the war to an end. The broader implication is that the international community must assess Russia's capacity and intentions without relying on predictions of imminent regime collapse. A peace strategy based on the expectation that domestic pressures will soon remove Putin or force a fundamental change in Russian policy may prove unreliable.

International security and the credibility of agreements

The war has also renewed debate about the meaning of international security assurances. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Ukraine inherited a substantial nuclear arsenal and subsequently agreed to relinquish it. The 1994 Budapest Memorandum, signed by Ukraine, Russia, the United States and the United Kingdom, contained assurances concerning Ukraine's sovereignty and existing borders (Yost, 2015). Russia's subsequent invasion has raised questions about the value of such assurances when a state violates commitments relating to another country's security. In an open letter to Trump, former Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko argues that Ukraine's experience has implications for how other countries assess international agreements and the risks of surrendering nuclear weapons.

Yushchenko's argument reflects a concern that extends beyond Ukraine: if states cannot rely on international commitments to protect their sovereignty, they may become less willing to pursue disarmament or depend on diplomatic assurances. Governments observing the war may question whether agreements with more powerful states offer sufficient protection when their interests change. Even with this qualification, the war has placed the credibility of international commitments under considerable strain. The challenge is to establish security arrangements that are sufficiently credible to discourage renewed aggression without increasing the risk of a wider military confrontation. This requires more than declarations of support; it calls for clear commitments, effective monitoring and a realistic understanding of how violations will be addressed.

Conclusion

Developments in October 2026 illustrate the complex pressures shaping the war in Ukraine. Reported shortages of Patriot missiles have raised concerns about Ukraine's air defences, disagreements over the proposed energy ceasefire have exposed tensions between Kyiv and Washington, and reports of economic and social pressures in Russia have prompted questions about the long-term sustainability of the war. Meanwhile, the dispute over international security assurances has reinforced the wider significance of the conflict for relations between states.

These developments do not establish that Russia is approaching political collapse or that a wider war is inevitable. They do, however, demonstrate the uncertainty surrounding military outcomes, diplomatic initiatives and the future of European security.

The central challenge is to achieve a settlement that does more than temporarily suspend hostilities. Peace will require credible commitments, attention to Ukraine's security, mechanisms for monitoring compliance and a serious effort to address the conditions that could produce renewed conflict. An agreement reached quickly but lacking these foundations may offer temporary relief without lasting stability.

Ultimately, the success of diplomacy should be judged not simply by whether the fighting stops, but by whether the resulting arrangements make a return to war less likely.

Reference

BBC (2026).*Zelensky says Ukraine's air defence supplies 'insufficient'*. www.bbc.co.uk. October 16, 2026. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj3vl3ezznno

Bio, D (2026). *Zelenskyy said he feels 'betrayed' by Trump. Ukraine has now reportedly run out of key missiles*. www.msn.com. https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/other/zelenskyy-said-he-feels-betrayed-by-trump-ukraine-has-now-reportedly-run-out-of-key-missiles/ar-AA2ej8HE?uxmode=ruby&cvid=6ad13f1201754e37a6c8b360d6ed481a&ocid=edgntpruby&pc=U531&cvpid=6ad13f45c61240febeee366ea1848680&ei=45

Green, S (2026). *WW3 fears erupt as Russians fear 'nuts' Putin will spark nuclear war*. www.msn.com. https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/other/ww3-fears-erupt-as-russians-fear-nuts-putin-will-spark-nuclear-war/ar-AA2ehKD7?uxmode=ruby&ctsrc=dgst&ocid=edgntpruby&pc=U531&cvid=6ad13f1201754e37a6c8b360d6ed481a&ei=33

International Business Times (2026).*Ukraine's Zelenskyy Said Russia Never Respected the Energy Ceasefire. Kyiv is Attacking Refineries Again*. www.ibtimes.com. October 16,

2026. https://www.ibtimes.com/ukraines-zelenskyy-said-russia-never-respected-energy-ceasefire-kyiv-attacking-refineries-again-3808604

Popilnichenko, K (2026). *Ukraine Has Completely Run Out of Patriot Interceptors, CNN Reports*. united24media.com. October 16, 2026. https://united24media.com/war-in-ukraine/ukraine-has-completely-run-out-of-patriot-interceptors-cnn-reports-23481

Yost, D. S. (2015). The Budapest Memorandum and Russia's intervention in Ukraine. *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, *91*(3), 505–538. http://www.jstor.org/stable/24539145