

Key Takeaways:

- The Istanbul Protocol draft agreement would have left Ukraine helpless in the face of future Russian threats or aggression. It imposed no limitations on the size of the Russian military and no obligations on Russia other than those noted below.
- The draft agreement would have prohibited the continued Western military assistance and support that US officials have repeatedly urged European states to offer, as well as bilateral security agreements, which US officials have also encouraged European countries to make.¹
- It is thus entirely incompatible with the current stated US policy and cannot be the basis or guidepost for negotiations that amount to anything other than capitulation to Russia's pre-war demands.

US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff referred on February 23 to the draft Istanbul Protocol crafted in 2022 as a "guidepost" for future negotiations between Ukraine and Russia.²

Russia's demands in the draft agreement were made in the first and second months of the war when Russian troops were advancing on Kyiv City and throughout northeastern, eastern, and southern Ukraine and before Ukrainian forces conducted successful counteroffensives that liberated significant swaths of territory in Kharkiv and Kherson oblasts.³ The draft agreement does not reflect the situation today in which Ukraine has liberated 50 percent of the territory Russian forces have seized since 2022 and largely forced a year-long Russian offensive to a standstill. The Istanbul draft agreement surrenders Ukraine's sovereignty and prohibits any efforts by Ukraine or any other state to maintain Ukrainian armed forces adequate to deter or defend against, a future Russian attack. It also explicitly ruled out many actions Trump Administration officials have identified as parts of a peace agreement acceptable to the US.

The draft agreement was never completed, and published versions contain Russian demands and Ukrainian counterproposals. The conditions below reflect the Russian demands, which stipulated that:⁴

- Russia be treated as a neutral security "guarantor state" of Ukraine along with the other permanent members of the UN Security Council, repeating the premise of the Minsk II Accords that did not treat Russia as a belligerent in the war.
- Ukraine be forbidden to invite partner forces to conduct military exercises in Ukrainian territory, airspace, territorial waters, and exclusive economic zone without the consent of China and Russia.
- China and Russia have a veto over the mechanism for responding to future armed conflict in Ukraine by making China and Russia Ukraine's security guarantors and granting the United Nations Security Council the authority to take "measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security." China and Russia are permanent members of the UNSC and can use their veto power to block responses to future Russian aggression under these conditions.

- Ukraine amend its constitution to make Russian an official state language in Ukraine on an equal footing with the Ukrainian language and change a number of its internal laws, including Ukraine’s decommunization laws.
- Ukraine lift all Ukrainian sanctions against Russia imposed since 2014 and withdraw criminal cases against Russia in the International Criminal Court for war crimes against Ukraine.
- Ukraine amend its constitution to remove the provision committing Ukraine to NATO membership and to add a neutrality provision that would ban Ukraine from joining any military alliances, concluding military agreements, or hosting foreign military personnel, trainers, or weapon systems in Ukraine. Ukraine disarm almost completely and commit never to fielding a military capable of defending the country. The draft agreement specifically imposed the following caps on the Ukrainian Armed Forces.¹

Personnel/Weapon Systems	Istanbul Demands	Pre-War Ukraine
Active-Duty Personnel	<85,000	196,600
National Guard Personnel	<15,000	60,000
Tanks	<342	858
Armored Combat Vehicles	<1,029	2,381
Artillery Pieces	<519	1,818
Multiple Launch Rocket Systems	<96	354
Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (w/ max range of 75 km)	<190	>322
Aircraft	<102 (50 combat, 52 auxiliary)	>124
Helicopters	<35 (10 attack, 25 auxiliary)	>59 (35 attack, 24 auxiliary)
Missile Systems w/ Range of >280 km	0	N/A*
Anti-Tank Guns	<96	N/A
Mortar Systems	<147	N/A
Anti-Tank Missile Systems	<333	N/A
Anti-Aircraft Guns	<119	N/A
MANPADS	<608	N/A
Reconnaissance UAVs	<138	N/A
Warships	<12 (<2 displacing <3,200 tons; <10 combat boats; <10 auxiliary vessels)	N/A

* Indicates that no numbers for such systems were available in the IISS report cited, not that there were no such systems, with the exception of Ukraine's Navy.

[1] <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/02/20/us/politics/rubio-russia-europe.html>;
<https://www.defense.gov/News/Speeches/Speech/Article/4064113/opening-remarks-by-secretary-of-defense-pete-hegseth-at-ukraine-defense-contact/>; <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2025/02/16/keir-starmer-ready-to-put-british-troops-in-ukraine/>; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H5baM3hMUSQ&ab_channel=ITVNews;
<https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/4064571/hegseth-calls-on-nato-allies-to-lead-europes-security-rules-out-support-for-ukr/>; <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/us-will-push-european-allies-buy-more-arms-ukraine-say-sources-2025-02-11/>

[2] <https://www.cnn.com/2025/02/23/politics/video/steve-witkoff-russia-ukraine-war-provoked-sotu-digvid>

[3] <https://static01.nyt.com/newsgraphics/documenttools/a456d6dd8e27e830/e279a252-full.pdf>

[4] "The Military Balance 2022". International Institute for Strategic Studies, February 14, 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/publications/the-military-balance/the-military-balance-2022/>