Peace through war won't work - Increasing pressure on Russia will not end the Ukraine war - page 3

The Drone Revolution - The rise of AI-assisted drone swarms is transforming war - page 4

The Most Dangerous Place in the World - Tension in the Baltic - page 6

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WILL EUROPE TALK TO RUSSIA?

Discussions about EU-Russia negotiations over the Ukraine war have been persistent. But while Europe deliberates, the war goes on

Europe has been talking a great deal about peace negotiations with Russia in recent weeks, but the gap between its rhetoric and its actual capacity remains vast. European leaders repeatedly signal openness to talks while deepening their material commitment to Kiev's defense. This duality is not clever diplomacy; it is structural confusion that weakens both Europe's credibility and its leverage.

The core problem is simple: Europe wants to influence the endgame of a conflict in which it is heavily invested, yet it lacks the institutional unity, shared strategic vision, and decisive voice to shape outcomes. Brussels and national capitals insist they will not let Russia dictate Europe's representatives or terms. At the same time, the EU and key member states have poured billions into weapons, training, sanctions enforcement, and reconstruction planning. This is co-belligerence in all but name. A party so deeply aligned with one side cannot credibly present itself as a neutral broker. History shows that effective mediation requires distance or overwhelming power—Europe possesses neither.

US-led trilateral talks involving Washington, Kiev, and Moscow have produced limited progress on prisoner swaps and humanitarian issues but repeatedly stalled on the fundamentals: territory and security guarantees. Russia continues to demand recognition of its territorial gains, full control over contested parts of Donbas, Ukrainian neutrality, and sanctions relief. Ukraine, backed by much of Europe, rejects ceding sovereign land as the price of peace. European officials have pushed back against any deal that rewards aggression and emphasized that Europe must have a central role in any settlement.

European unity on this file is more aspirational than real. France and elements in Germany have historically shown greater openness to eventual diplomatic off-ramps. Eastern and Northern states view premature talks as legitimizing Russian conquest and a direct threat to their own security. The result is a lowest-common-denominator approach: rhetorical support for "peace" combined with intensified military aid and sanctions. A "coalition of the willing" involving France, Britain, Poland, and others has emerged to coordinate support for Ukraine and prepare potential security guarantees, including possible troop deployments for enforcement. Yet even this initiative highlights the fragmentation; broader EU consensus remains elusive. Russia, by contrast, maintains strategic clarity, however brutal. Moscow treats battlefield realities as the foundation for any deal. It has shown little willingness to accept ceasefires without political concessions that lock in its gains.

Europe's deeper weakness is institutional. There is still no single authorized negotiator, no agreed war-termination strategy, and no consensus on what minimum outcomes—frozen lines, demilitarized zones, sanctions relief mechanisms, security pacts—would be acceptable or enforceable. Discussions about appointing a European envoy continue, but they repeatedly run into the prior question: what exactly would that envoy be authorized to offer or accept?

This ambiguity serves short-term political needs. It keeps the door formally open, avoids domestic fights over "betraying Ukraine," and allows leaders to wait for shifts on the battlefield or in Washington. But deferral has costs. It leaves Europe reactive to US initiatives under the Trump administration, which has pursued deals more favorable to ending the conflict quickly, sometimes at Ukraine's expense.

The uncomfortable reality is that wars end when the parties conclude that continued fighting is worse than the available compromise. At the moment Europe is not ready to talk to Russia in any meaningful sense. More critically, it has yet to define what readiness would require. Until that internal work is done, pronouncements about negotiations will remain more about managing European anxieties than advancing a viable peace for Ukraine and the whole of the European continent.

NARRATIVE WARS

Why is it so Important for Western Media to Cast Doubts on Kiev's Bombing of a Russian Pedagogical School Dormitory.

By Vladimir Golstein

Twenty one young lives were taken away. Eighteen of whom were young women, who wanted to become primary school teachers.

Russians might demand UN hearings, they might invite western journalists to visit the sight (*some Western journalists later visited the place, editor's note*), they might denounce CNN and BBC for refusing to see it, but to no avail.

The propaganda machine refuses to recognize this butchery. As it refuses to recognize the burning people in Odessa in 2014, or regular destruction of civilians in the pro-Russian parts of Ukraine.

You see, Russians cannot be victims. As simple as that. They can be aggressors, victimizes, brutal invaders, Kremlin stooges, but not human bodies that can be tortured and killed. As opposed to the heroic Ukrainians forever threatened by the barbarians from the East.

We can say anything we want about that type of narrative. That it is simplistic, that it is misguiding, that it is myopic. But the key thing to say, is that it is a linchpin, which holds together all the recent Russophobic hysteria, also known as Cold War II.

Russians go out of their way to talk about twenty seven million people killed in WWII. To no avail. They complain about their persecution by all sorts of domestic and foreign thugs. To no avail. They march with the pictures of their relatives killed by Nazis. To no avail.

BBC dutifully reports on "brutal and massive Russian attack" that claimes the lives of two. But not of Ukrainians who set buildings on fire with people locked inside, or bombing the dorms, where hundreds of students are sleeping.

First I thought it is just a game. A way to construct an accessible, clean-cut narrative. But then I realize things are much more insidious.

There is simply no other emotionally effective narrative available in the west. It is no longer politically correct and acceptable to discuss religious or economic oppression, class struggle or the invisible hand of the establishment. These issues are too complex, confusing, or controversial to utilize. Their discussion can easily backfire.

But what you can always resort to, is the story of victims and victimizers. As long as you present the group A are perennial victims, and group B are perennial victimizers. And as long as group A are presented as victims, there is no way to acknowledge the victimhood of group B. Whites can't be victims. Males can't be victims. Russians can't be victims. And in today's world, Jews can't be victims.

That's the only narrative that the venal and myopic mass media had perfected, and that's the only narrative that the public is brainwashed into acceptance.

During the real cold war, the west wasn't really able to get away with such fairy tale narrative. The so-called "Third world" was not ready to accept the colonial west as victims, and Soviets as victimizers. They knew better.

But with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its socialist experiment, the history — according to Fukuyama and western ideologues — has ended. Which means, we are back to the fairy tales. We got the first taste of it under the Democrats — these bullshitters- extraordinaires — and Clinton's war on Serbia. Out of the blue, the traditional Balkan conflict, with all its historical, religious, social, and political complexities, had been reduced to victimizers-Serbs, and their victims, Kossovars, Bosniaks, Croats and so on.

A lot of sane people could not believe their eyes, witnessing the success of this demeaning, demonizing, and despicable propaganda campaign. But it took. It succeeded. I remember clashing with some extra liberal Yale professor back at Yale, when we debated the issue. I spoke about Serbian kids floating in the Danube, after Americans bombed the bridge with the passenger train on it, but the professor mocked my sentimentality and began screaming about barbarian Serbs destroying Dubrovnik and other historical treasures. There cannot be two victims. Only one!

I am sure Clinton and his clique couldn't believe the ease with which they won this campaign. But they did. And people draw their conclusions. From then on, the skillful bullshitters from Yale and Oxford only added a few more colorful details here and there, and the story was ready.

And we are still in it, unfortunately. But what goes around, comes around. It happened before. Many times. The invention returns to plague the inventor. Look at Israel, for example. The country that perfected casting itself as a victim, had become a victimizer par excellence. Pure and simple. And no one wants to listen to them now, as they didn't want to listen to others before.

And sadly, humanity is not learning anything, because it is too busy shedding tears over current victims, and shaking its fists at current victimizers.

STRIKES ON RUSSIA WON'T END THE WAR

Europe and Ukraine think more pressure on Russia will force it to the negotiating table. This won't work

The belief that increasing strikes on Russian territory could shorten the war in Ukraine has become one of the central assumptions in parts of European and Ukrainian strategic thinking. The logic appears straightforward: if Russia is made vulnerable deep inside its own borders—if refineries burn, airbases are hit, logistics disrupted at scale—then political pressure inside Moscow will eventually force a recalculation and open the path to negotiations.

It is a coherent theory. It is also, so far, not supported by how the war has actually developed. What Ukrainian long-range strikes have demonstrated is not a collapse of Russian resilience, but a shift in the character of modern warfare. Cheap, mass-produced drones and long-range systems can now reach targets that were once considered safely beyond the battlefield. Russia's vast territory, traditionally an element of strategic depth, has become more porous. This has real operational consequences: air defences are stretched, infrastructure must be dispersed, and energy facilities require constant protection. The psychological effect is also undeniable, as the war increasingly reaches areas far from the front line.

But there is a growing gap between tactical visibility and strategic effect. Strikes that dominate news cycles do not automatically translate into changes in the balance of power. The assumption that cumulative pressure inside Russia will eventually produce political rupture rests on a linear model of escalation that does not match the structure of the war.

Russia is not a system dependent on a small number of fragile points whose disruption would trigger broader collapse. It is a large, redundant military-industrial structure that has been progressively adapted to wartime conditions. Damage to individual facilities tends to be absorbed, rerouted, or compensated elsewhere. Even sustained attacks on energy infrastructure—while costly and disruptive—have not produced systemic paralysis of the Russian war effort. More importantly, the political effect of these strikes inside Russia does not point in the direction often assumed in Western debates. Rather than encouraging compromise, attacks on Russian territory are increasingly integrated into a domestic narrative of escalation with the West. The war is framed not primarily as a conflict with Ukraine alone, but as a broader confrontation in which Russia is already engaged with NATO-linked capabilities. In such a framing, pressure does not weaken resolve; it reinforces the perception that retreat would carry existential consequences.

The absence of immediate Russian "breakthrough responses" to earlier stages of escalation—such as expanded Western weapons deliveries or previous deep strikes—has often been interpreted as proof that further escalation will also remain contained. But restraint in one phase of a conflict is not a guarantee of restraint in the next. It may instead reflect calibration, not limitation.

At the same time, internal military assessments from the United States and NATO circles suggest that the broader balance of forces remains structurally stable. Despite tactical successes achieved by Ukraine—often enabled by Western intelligence and precision systems—Russia continues to retain advantages in mass, production capacity, and sustained firepower. Ukraine's ability to conduct targeted operations does not remove the underlying asymmetry in attritional warfare.

This produces a contradiction at the heart of current strategy. On the surface, the war appears increasingly dynamic, shaped by dramatic long-range strikes and rapid technological adaptation. Underneath, however, the structural balance has proven remarkably resistant to change. Russia continues to conduct large-scale missile and drone campaigns, maintain pressure along the front, and sustain its military production. Ukraine continues to innovate and inflict damage, but without achieving the kind of breakthrough that would force a political settlement.

Industrial capacity is central to this dynamic. Russia has significantly expanded domestic production of artillery, drones, and missiles, adapting its economy to wartime demands despite sanctions. This does not mean sanctions are irrelevant, but it does mean they have not produced the kind of rapid systemic weakening that some early projections assumed. Meanwhile, Ukraine's military effectiveness increasingly depends on external supply chains and technological integration, which—while highly sophisticated—cannot fully compensate for disparities in scale.

In this context, the idea that escalation inside Russia will produce a linear diplomatic outcome becomes increasingly difficult to sustain. The assumption is that pressure accumulates until a threshold is crossed and negotiation becomes the rational choice. But wars of attrition between large states rarely behave in such a way. Instead, pressure is often absorbed, adapted to, and incorporated into the logic of continued conflict.

There is also a deeper strategic risk embedded in this model. When strikes are interpreted primarily as signals rather than as tactical operations, escalation itself becomes semi-automated. Each new action is measured not only in military terms, but in its perceived political meaning. This creates a feedback loop in which visibility drives escalation logic more than material effect. In such an environment, restraint becomes harder to sustain, because absence of escalation is no longer neutral—it is interpreted as weakness or hesitation. Meanwhile, expectations of systemic collapse—whether economic, political, or military—have repeatedly failed to materialize on either side. Russia has not broken under sanctions or battlefield losses. Ukraine has not collapsed under sustained pressure or resource constraints. Instead, both have adapted into prolonged war economies in which endurance matters more than shock effects.

THE DRONE REVOLUTION

The rise of AI-assisted drone swarms, mass industrial production, and electronic warfare is transforming military strategy faster than most governments can adapt.

The war in Ukraine has done more than redraw military front lines. It has exposed the collapse of entire assumptions about modern warfare. For decades, European defense planning revolved around expensive aircraft, precision missiles, armored brigades, and the idea that technological superiority belonged almost automatically to NATO. But the Ukrainian battlefield has demonstrated something deeply uncomfortable for Europe's military establishments: the future may belong not to the most sophisticated weapons, but to the side capable of producing vast quantities of cheap autonomous systems faster than its opponent can destroy them.

A recent NATO simulation reportedly examined a hypothetical Russian attack on Lithuania. In one scenario, Russian forces advanced rapidly through Belarus and Kaliningrad while pressure was applied simultaneously from eastern Latvia. Analysts concluded that Lithuanian defenses could be overwhelmed within days, potentially leaving Lithuania nearly isolated. In a second simulation, however, NATO forces were equipped with thousands of AI-assisted drones capable of operating under electronic warfare conditions and autonomously identifying targets. In that version of the war game, the Russian offensive slowed dramatically and losses became severe from the opening days.

The conclusion sounds reassuring for Europe. But while drone warfare may indeed transform the battlefield, Europe today remains behind in the industrial realities of mass drone production.

The central lesson of Ukraine is no longer simply that drones matter. Everyone already understands that. The deeper lesson is that modern war increasingly resembles industrialized algorithmic attrition. Victory may depend less on isolated technological marvels: instead, quantity becomes quality.

Ukraine and Russia have become laboratories of this transformation. FPV drones costing a few hundred dollars now routinely destroy tanks worth millions. Reconnaissance drones hover permanently above trenches, making concealment almost impossible. Naval drones have reshaped the balance in the Black Sea. Long-range strike drones regularly hit infrastructure hundreds of kilometers behind the front lines. Most importantly, both sides are adapting at extraordinary speed. Tactics that worked six months ago can become obsolete within weeks.

Russia in particular has accelerated production with surprising effectiveness. Western analysts initially portrayed Russian drone capabilities as heavily dependent on Iranian technology, especially the Shahed systems later rebranded as the Geran series. That was only partially true. Moscow used imported designs as a foundation, but the Russian defense industry has since expanded and modified production substantially. Newer variants reportedly incorporate improved guidance systems, enhanced resistance to electronic warfare, and increasingly autonomous targeting features.

At the same time, Russia's military-industrial model has adjusted to wartime conditions in ways Europe has not. Russian factories operate with fewer procurement constraints, lower labor costs, centralized state coordination, and far less political resistance to militarization. The result is not necessarily technological elegance, but quantity combined with rapid iteration.

Europe, by contrast, still behaves as if it were preparing for the defense debates of the 1990s. Production remains fragmented between national industries jealously guarding contracts and prestige projects. Procurement cycles move slowly. Defense manufacturing emphasizes high-end systems that are impressive on paper but difficult to scale quickly.

Even senior European officials have started acknowledging the problem. EU Defense Commissioner Andrius Kubilius recently criticized Europe's tendency to produce what he described as "haute couture" weaponry instead of cheap mass-producible systems. Europe still produces world-class missiles, submarines, radar systems, and combat aircraft.

Russia is believed by many analysts to be producing drones on a scale Europe currently cannot match. Exact numbers remain disputed and wartime estimates are notoriously unreliable, but even conservative assessments suggest that Russian output has increased dramatically since 2022.

Meanwhile, Europe remains dependent on imported drone components, especially from Asia. Chinese dominance in commercial drone manufacturing presents another strategic vulnerability. Companies linked to DJI still dominate large sections of the civilian and dual-use drone market worldwide.

China's role in this technological shift may ultimately prove even more important than Russia's. Chinese defense research has moved aggressively into swarm warfare, artificial intelligence integration, and autonomous battlefield coordination. Chinese state media recently showcased large coordinated drone formations controlled by minimal personnel, illustrating a model of warfare based on saturation, networking, and machine-assisted decision-making. Whether such demonstrations fully reflect operational capability is debatable, but the direction is unmistakable.

The uncomfortable implication is that NATO's eastern flank cannot rely indefinitely on Cold War assumptions about deterrence. The Baltic states are geographically exposed. Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia possess limited strategic depth. Reinforcement corridors remain vulnerable. In a future conflict, drone saturation could complicate troop movements, logistics, communications, and air defense in ways that existing military planning only partially anticipates.

None of this means a Russian invasion of the Baltics is imminent. Nor does it mean Russia possesses unstoppable military superiority. The Russian army itself has suffered huge losses in Ukraine and repeatedly demonstrated operational failures, corruption, and logistical weakness.

The psychological dimension is also crucial. Drone warfare creates a form of permanent exposure. Soldiers can be tracked continuously. Rear positions become vulnerable. Civilians see war livestreamed through thermal cameras and FPV feeds. The battlefield becomes transparent, persistent, and algorithmically mediated. For Europe, adapting to this reality will require more than increased defense spending headlines.

Ukrainian drone innovation has evolved under existential pressure. Ukrainian engineers and operators have improvised solutions at extraordinary speed, often with limited resources. The country has effectively become one of the world's leading laboratories for drone warfare adaptation. The age of the drone swarm is no longer theoretical. It is already here.

This Week in History: June 1–June 12

On 1 June 1967, **Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band** by The Beatles was released, becoming one of the most influential albums in modern music history..

On 5 June 1967, the **Six-Day War** erupted between Israel and neighboring Arab states, dramatically transforming the political geography of the Middle East.

On 5 June 1981, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control published the **first official report** on what would later become known as **AIDS**.

On 6 June 1944, Allied forces landed in Normandy during **D-Day**, opening the Western Front against Nazi Germany.

On 7 June 1494, Spain and Portugal signed the **Treaty of Tordesillas**, dividing newly discovered lands outside Europe between the two empires.

On 7 June 1981, Israel launched **Operation Opera,** destroying Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor near Baghdad.

On 8 June 632, the **Prophet Muhammad died** in Medina, marking the beginning of the caliphate era and the political expansion of Islam.

On 8 June 1949, George Orwell's **novel Nineteen Eighty-Four** was first published.

On 9 June 1999, Yugoslavia and NATO signed the **Kumanovo Agreement**, effectively ending the Kosovo War after months of bombing.

On 10 June 1940, **Fascist Italy** under Benito Mussolini entered the **Second World War** on the side of Nazi Germany.

On 11 June 1963, Vietnamese Buddhist monk **Thích Quảng Đức** immolated himself in Saigon in protest against the South Vietnamese government.

On 12 June 1898, the **Philippines declared independence** from Spain after more than three centuries of colonial rule.

On 12 June 1987, Ronald Reagan delivered his famous **"Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"** speech in West Berlin.

Pope's Encyclical confronts AI and technological domination

There was a time when papal encyclicals arrived like distant thunder: solemn documents read mainly by theologians, diplomats and aging professors. Pope Leo XIV's "Magnifica Humanitas" feels different. It lands in a world already nervous about artificial intelligence, algorithmic control and the strange sensation that technology is beginning to shape human beings faster than human beings can shape technology.

The document is not anti-technology. In fact, Leo XIV repeatedly acknowledges that AI can improve medicine, education, communication and scientific progress. What worries him is something deeper: the possibility that human beings slowly start adapting themselves to machines instead of the other way around.

Throughout the text, the Pope returns to one central idea: human dignity cannot be reduced to efficiency, data or productivity. In an age obsessed with optimization, this sounds almost rebellious. The encyclical warns against a world where people are valued mainly according to performance, where emotions are simulated by software, and where political and economic power becomes concentrated in the hands of those who control digital systems. The language is religious, but the anxiety is widely shared far beyond the Church.

What makes the Pope's "Magnifica Humanitas" interesting is that it does not read like science fiction panic. Leo XIV is less concerned with killer robots than with ordinary habits already becoming normal: permanent surveillance, algorithmic manipulation, the commercialization of attention, the replacement of human judgment by automated systems. He argues that societies risk becoming technically advanced while spiritually and emotionally hollow.

The encyclical also takes aim at the culture surrounding technological power. Silicon Valley's more extreme fantasies — transhumanism, digital immortality, the dream of overcoming the limits of the human body — are treated with visible suspicion. For Leo XIV, human limitation is not a software bug waiting to be fixed. Vulnerability, aging, dependence and even suffering are presented as part of what makes human relationships meaningful in the first place.

Some of the strongest passages concern war. The Pope condemns the normalization of permanent conflict and warns about the integration of AI into military systems. In one of the document's most controversial moves, he distances himself from the traditional "just war" doctrine that for centuries allowed Catholic thinkers to morally justify certain conflicts. Instead, he insists that diplomacy, restraint and dialogue are no longer naïve ideals but practical necessities in a world armed with autonomous technologies.

Not everyone will agree with the theological framework. Yet even secular readers may recognize something important in its tone. Unlike politicians or tech executives, the Vatican is not promising disruption, growth curves or innovation. It is asking a simpler question: what kind of human being is this new technological civilization producing? That question may end up mattering more than any software update.

“The Baltic states have become the most dangerous place in the world”, says Jeffrey Sachs

In a recent interview with Norwegian professor Glenn Diesen, US economist Jeffrey Sachs argued that Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have become the most dangerous place in the world

On the surface, the three Baltic countries of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia may look like small, peripheral states on the edge of Europe, far from the traditional centres of global power. Yet since 2022, their strategic relevance has increased sharply. Their geography places them directly on NATO’s external border with Russia, and the war in Ukraine has transformed their political and military significance into something far greater than their size would suggest.

In Baltic capitals, however, the focus is less on geopolitical labels and more on a growing pattern of concrete security incidents. Over the past weeks and months, there have been increasing drone incursions into airspace, electronic interference affecting navigation systems, and repeated disruptions linked to the broader war in Ukraine.

A central point of tension has been the movement of Ukrainian drones used in long-range strikes against Russian infrastructure. Baltic governments have reported that drones linked to these operations have entered their airspace with increasing frequency. While officials stress that their territory is not being used to launch attacks on Russia, the physical overlap of air routes and electronic warfare environments has made the situation difficult to separate cleanly into national compartments.

The foreign ministers of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia addressed the issue directly in a joint statement, saying they “strongly condemned Russia’s threats to use force against Latvia and other countries in the region and stressed that incidents involving drones entering NATO airspace are a direct consequence of Russia’s illegal war of aggression against Ukraine.” They added explicitly that they “have not permitted their airspace or territory to be used for attacks against targets in Russia.”The statement continued by rejecting Moscow’s narrative framing of the incidents, arguing that Russia is “attempting to divert attention away from its war against Ukraine and intimidate NATO Allies,” and insisted that such efforts “will fail.” The ministers reaffirmed continued political, military and financial support for Ukraine “in order to achieve a just and lasting peace in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter.”

Drone incursions, airspace violations, and electronic disturbances are increasingly interpreted through competing political narratives, making even technically traceable incidents part of a broader information and security contest.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, speaking during a visit to Vilnius, placed these developments in a wider societal frame. She said: “People in the Baltic countries have been experiencing what many believed belonged to another era – air raid alerts, families sheltering, schools closing, transport interrupted. This is the reality on Europe's eastern border in 2026. Today it is here. Tomorrow it will be elsewhere along the eastern border.” She described the situation as part of a “deliberate strategy” to destabilise European societies, while also praising what she called Baltic resilience and reaffirming European unity and solidarity with Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Authorities in Lithuania and neighbouring states have reported sustained GPS disruptions believed to originate from systems operating in the wider Russian military space, particularly around Kaliningrad.

These disruptions have affected aviation routes, maritime navigation, and civilian transport systems. In practice, this means that pilots and ship captains in parts of the Baltic region have occasionally been forced to switch from satellite navigation to backup systems, including inertial navigation or manual procedures. While such incidents have not led to major accidents, they have increased operational complexity in an already densely trafficked airspace and sea corridor.

Aircraft operating in or near Baltic air corridors have repeatedly reported temporary loss or degradation of GPS signals. While aviation authorities have been able to manage these events through redundancy systems, the frequency of interference has raised broader questions about long-term reliability in the region’s digital navigation infrastructure.

At sea, similar patterns have been documented. Commercial vessels navigating the Baltic Sea have experienced GPS jamming and spoofing, forcing crews in some cases to rely on traditional navigation techniques. Even short disruptions can have consequences that extend beyond the immediate incident, affecting scheduling, safety margins, and coordination.

Alongside these technical factors, the legal and political environment has also evolved. Russia has expanded the formal legal grounds under which it may authorise military action abroad, including provisions related to the protection of Russian citizens outside its borders. While such legislation does not automatically translate into military action, it does broaden the official framework that could be used in a crisis scenario.

Militarily, the Baltic Sea region has become one of the most closely monitored areas in Europe. Following the accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO, the Baltic Sea is now largely surrounded by NATO territory, with the exception of Russia’s Kaliningrad exclave and the Saint Petersburg region.

Russian forces regularly conduct exercises in Kaliningrad and surrounding regions, involving coastal missile systems, naval deployments, and electronic warfare simulations. At the same time, the situation does not resemble active warfare. Instead, it is a condition of sustained tension within a deterrence framework that still holds.

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Indonesia's Sovereignty at Risk:

The Consequences of the ART Agreement with the United States

By Airlangga Pribadi Kusman and Peiman Salehi

More than sixty years ago, Indonesia's first president, Sukarno, warned that political independence meant little without economic sovereignty. In his famous Trisakti doctrine, announced during the 1964 Independence Day speech, Sukarno argued that a truly independent nation must achieve three things: political sovereignty, economic self-reliance, and cultural dignity. He believed that former colonial powers would continue to dominate newly independent countries through economic dependency and political pressure, even after formal colonialism had ended.

Today, many Indonesian scholars and activists believe those warnings are becoming reality once again through the newly signed Agreement on Reciprocal Trade (ART) between Indonesia and the United States. Negotiated throughout 2025 and finalized in Washington, D.C. in February 2026, the agreement is scheduled to take effect in May 2026. Supporters present ART as a modern trade agreement designed to reduce tariffs and improve economic cooperation. Critics, however, argue that it represents a deeper restructuring of Indonesia's political and economic sovereignty in favor of U.S. strategic interests.

At the center of the debate is a simple question: does ART create an equal partnership, or does it reinforce an unequal relationship in which Indonesia is expected to adapt to the priorities of a more powerful state?

An Unequal Partnership

On paper, ART covers familiar elements of contemporary trade agreements: tariffs, digital trade, export rules, investment regulations, security coordination, and implementation mechanisms. Yet the deeper concern raised by critics is that the agreement is not genuinely reciprocal. Instead, it establishes a framework in which Indonesia must align many of its economic and geopolitical policies with those of Washington, while the United States assumes few comparable obligations.

One of the most controversial provisions reportedly requires Indonesia to coordinate aspects of its foreign policy and trade practices with U.S. sanctions regimes and export-control systems. Indonesia would also be expected to consult Washington before entering certain trade arrangements with third countries if those agreements could affect U.S. interests. Critics argue that such clauses effectively extend American strategic influence into Indonesian policymaking.

For many observers in the Global South, this reflects a familiar historical pattern. Powerful countries often use trade agreements not only to facilitate commerce but also to shape the political and economic behavior of weaker states. The language of 'cooperation' and 'good faith' may appear neutral, but the balance of power embedded within such agreements can produce relationships of dependency rather than partnership.

This concern resonates strongly in Indonesia because the country has long sought to maintain an independent foreign policy. Since the Bandung Conference of 1955, Indonesia has portrayed itself as part of a broader movement of postcolonial nations seeking autonomy from great-power domination. ART, critics argue, risks undermining that legacy.

The Human Cost for Indonesia's Working Classes

The social consequences of ART may be felt most sharply by ordinary Indonesians — especially workers, peasants, fishers, and small entrepreneurs.

For farmers, the agreement is expected to increase imports of heavily subsidized U.S. agricultural products, particularly soybeans. Indonesia would reportedly import millions of tons of American soybeans annually, creating intense competition for local producers. Similar pressures could affect horticultural sectors such as fruit farming. Small farmers, who already struggle with volatile prices and rising production costs, may find it increasingly difficult to survive against large-scale industrial agriculture from abroad.

Fishers face similar challenges. Although ART includes regulations concerning sustainable fisheries and illegal fishing practices, critics argue that the removal of tariffs on U.S. seafood imports could flood Indonesian markets with foreign products. Small-scale fishing communities — already vulnerable to climate change, fuel costs, and declining fish stocks — may struggle to compete.

Industrial workers are also likely to feel the impact. One provision reportedly weakens Indonesia's Local Content Requirements (known domestically as TKDN), which were designed to encourage foreign companies to manufacture products locally and support domestic industries. Without such requirements, multinational corporations could increasingly export finished products directly into Indonesia without building factories or creating substantial local employment. This could accelerate deindustrialization and contribute to job losses in manufacturing sectors.

The digital economy presents another area of concern. ART reportedly protects corporate algorithms from government disclosure requirements. For ride-hailing drivers, delivery workers, and other gig-economy laborers, this could limit the Indonesian state's ability to regulate platform companies and protect workers from algorithmic exploitation. Around the world, digital platforms increasingly control wages, working hours, and labor conditions through opaque systems that workers themselves cannot fully understand or challenge. Critics fear ART could strengthen these asymmetries of power.

Taken together, these pressures could ripple through Indonesia's broader social fabric. Small traders, neighborhood businesses, and informal workers often depend on the spending power of farmers, factory workers, and fishers. When those groups suffer economic decline, entire local economies can weaken.

Indonesia's Place in the Global Economy

Beyond its immediate social effects, ART may reshape Indonesia's long-term development strategy.

Indonesia possesses some of the world's most important reserves of critical minerals, particularly nickel, which is essential for electric vehicle batteries and the global energy transition. In recent years, Jakarta has attempted to use these resources to promote downstream industrialization — encouraging domestic processing and manufacturing rather than simply exporting raw materials.

Critics argue that ART could weaken this strategy by granting greater access to U.S. corporations while easing restrictions designed to ensure local value-added production. If Indonesia becomes primarily a supplier of raw materials while importing higher-value manufactured goods, the country could remain trapped in a dependent position within the global economy. *Continues on page 8*

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This reflects a broader historical problem faced by many developing nations. Colonial economies were often structured around the export of raw materials and the import of industrial products from richer countries. Postcolonial governments have long tried to escape this pattern through industrialization and economic planning. ART, opponents argue, risks reproducing those same unequal structures under the language of free trade.
The agreement also carries significant geopolitical implications. Indonesia has deep economic ties with China, which is one of its largest trading partners and a major investor in infrastructure and industrial projects. Some provisions of ART reportedly pressure Indonesia to align more closely with U.S. definitions of 'market economies,' potentially limiting cooperation with China in sectors such as shipping, ports, and industrial technology. For Indonesia, this creates a difficult dilemma. The country has traditionally sought to avoid becoming subordinate to any major power bloc. Yet ART may constrain Jakarta's ability to balance relationships between competing global powers.

A Changing Global Order

The debate over ART also unfolds against the backdrop of major changes in the global balance of power.
The United States remains the world's dominant military and financial power, but its global position is increasingly contested. Economic inequality within the U.S. has grown sharply, its industrial base has weakened in some sectors, and prolonged military interventions have strained its resources. At the same time, emerging powers — particularly within the BRICS bloc — are gaining influence in global trade, finance, and infrastructure development.
For critics of ART, this shifting landscape makes the agreement especially troubling. They argue that Indonesia should diversify its partnerships and strengthen regional and Global South cooperation rather than binding itself too closely to U.S. strategic priorities.
The broader issue is not simply trade policy. It is the question of whether developing nations can maintain meaningful sovereignty in a world still shaped by unequal power relations. Sukarno's vision of political and economic independence was rooted in the belief that formerly colonized peoples could collectively resist domination and build alternative paths of development. Today, many Indonesians see ART as a test of whether that aspiration can survive in the twenty-first century.
The outcome will not affect Indonesia alone. Across the Global South, countries are confronting similar pressures as they navigate competition between major powers, global supply chains, and the demands of international capital. Indonesia's experience with ART may therefore serve as an important example of the difficult choices facing postcolonial nations in a rapidly changing world.

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Reviving the Spirit of Helsinki

The West and the USSR achieved detente. That should be today's goal too

The tragedy of Europe is not only that war returned to the continent, but that the political imagination capable of preventing war disappeared. For years, European diplomacy operated inside a moral and strategic simplification that reduced security to loyalty, compromise to weakness, and geopolitical realism to appeasement. The language of "values" slowly replaced the language of equilibrium. The spirit of the Helsinki Accords of 1975 was never built on sentimental trust. It was built precisely on distrust — on the recognition that ideological enemies armed with nuclear arsenals still had to construct rules of coexistence. The statesmen of the 1970s understood something contemporary Europe has forgotten: stability is not created by moral superiority, but by the painful management of conflicting interests. The Helsinki process did not emerge because the Soviet Union and the West suddenly respected each other's political systems. It emerged because both sides understood that permanent escalation between nuclear powers was suicidal. Today's Europe, by contrast, increasingly behaves as if geopolitical contradictions can simply be abolished through declarations, sanctions packages and rhetorical ostracism.
The war in Ukraine is not merely a local conflict over territory, nor only a struggle between democracy and authoritarianism, as it is so often presented in Western political discourse. It is also the violent collapse of the post-Cold War security architecture created after 1991. For three decades, Europe expanded institutions without building a parallel mechanism capable of integrating Russian security concerns into a stable continental framework. Whether one considers those concerns legitimate, exaggerated or imperialistic is ultimately secondary. Great powers do not disappear because others morally disapprove of them. They react, pressure, destabilise and, in the worst cases, wage war. The refusal to recognise this elementary principle of international politics produced a Europe that spoke endlessly about peace while structurally preparing for confrontation. Moscow interpreted NATO enlargement not as a defensive administrative process, but as a strategic encirclement. Western capitals interpreted Russian objections as proof of neo-imperial paranoia.
Today Europe is rearming at a pace unseen in decades. Russia has transformed its economy and society around long-term confrontation with the West. Ukraine has become both battlefield and symbol, simultaneously defended as a sovereign nation and instrumentalised as a geopolitical frontier. Meanwhile, the old vocabulary of pan-European security has vanished almost completely from mainstream political debate. Few leaders now speak seriously about a future security order that includes both Europe and Russia. The dominant logic has become one of endurance: endure sanctions, endure militarisation, endure attrition, endure permanent hostility.
Rediscovering the spirit of Helsinki does not mean returning nostalgically to the 1970s, nor accepting spheres of influence. It means recovering the lost art of strategic coexistence. Europe urgently needs a diplomatic philosophy capable of acknowledging contradictory security perceptions simultaneously. That requires abandoning the increasingly theatrical language of absolute good and absolute evil. States are not redeemed through moral declarations. The original Helsinki process succeeded because it recognised that security is relational: one state's attempt to maximise its safety can easily become another state's perception of existential threat. Ignoring this dynamic does not eliminate it; it merely postpones the explosion.
The longer the war continues, the more Europe risks producing the exact opposite of what the post-Cold War order originally promised: not a unified and peaceful continent, but a heavily militarised Eurasian fracture line stretching from the Baltic to the Black Sea. Without diplomacy, Europe will enter a future defined by managed hostility.