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OPINION

Canada's opportunity to restore peace in Europe

We have a chance to convert Ukraine's dream of peace into reality. Let's seize this opportunity, writes Paul Grod.



A Canadian military training instructor demonstrates a magazine loading technique to Ukrainian soldiers during Operation Unifier in Starychi, Ukraine in February.

Photograph courtesy of the Department of National Defence

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In September, Russian President Putin made what seemed to many a concession. He indicated possible Russian support for a UN peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine, where Russia has waged a war of aggression against Ukraine for three years.

As we see often with the former KGB agent who rules Russia, this "concession" comes with a poison pill. Putin proposed that UN peacekeepers should be deployed only to the frontline that separates free Ukraine from the Russian-occupied parts of its eastern Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. All this was simply an attempt by Putin to consolidate Russia's occupation and leave a frozen conflict in Ukraine's east—as he has done in other

regions of Russia's near abroad—Transdnistria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

Western governments easily saw through this attempt—and backed Ukraine's position, initially presented in 2015 on UN peacekeepers. Namely—the mission must be deployed to the Ukraine–Russia border and cover the entirety of the territory of Donetsk and Luhansk currently occupied by Russia, following a withdrawal of Russian armies, weapons and materiel. Of course, Russia, as the aggressor state in the war, cannot take part in any such UN peacekeeping mission.

Surprising nobody, Russia rejected Ukraine's proposal. But in so doing, having lied about its involvement in the war for three years, Russia betrayed the fact that it is a party to it.

The Russians also inadvertently revealed that Western sanctions and a much stronger and more effective Ukrainian military (the result, in part, of Western training and assistance), are having a serious effect on the Russian economy and Russia's ability to wage war against Ukraine. By proposing his "concession," Putin has shown his hand—a battle-tested Ukrainian army and the West's deterrence strategy are forcing him to look for an off-ramp.

A UN peacekeeping mission as proposed by Ukraine will bring an end to the almost daily bloodshed and restore peace to the Russian-occupied territories in eastern Ukraine. By deploying the mission across the occupied territories, the 1.5 million internally displaced people will be able to return to their war-ravaged homes and begin rebuilding their lives.

Peace in Eastern Ukraine will only be possible once the hundreds of Russian tanks and tens of thousands of Russian soldiers and mercenaries are compelled to leave. By controlling the border, the UN peacekeepers will ensure they do not return. Only then can Ukraine restore peace and the rule of law to these occupied territories.

Last week, when speaking about these issues to the House Defence Committee, it was clear to me that there is increasing awareness and significant interest amongst Canada's policymakers on the possibility of a UN peacekeeping mission to Ukraine.

However, there was concern as to how Canada and its allies can compel Russia not to veto such a mission at the UN Security Council. To do so, Canada and its Western allies must strengthen Ukraine's hand through increased military support and put significant pressure on Russia by escalating sanctions until they accept the Ukrainian proposal for peacekeepers.

Providing Ukraine with kinetic defensive weapons will enable Ukraine to better defend itself against daily artillery attacks and raise the cost of any further land-grab offensives by Russia. Together with further pressure through increased sanctions on the Russian economy, will help ensure Russia agrees to this peace plan. If the price of war is higher to Russia than the price of peace, Ukraine will have peace.

Here, Canada has an opportunity to be a geopolitical leader. It was a Canadian Prime Minister, Lester B. Pearson, who earned a Nobel Peace Prize sixty years ago for his role in establishing the first UN peacekeeping force, sent to the Suez. Since then, Canada has participated in a myriad UN missions, and has a well-earned reputation as a leader in international efforts to end conflicts around the world.

We should leverage this credibility and experience by proposing to the international community that Canada is ready, in the nearest possible time, to lead such a mission. Canada must move quickly to identify the needs, scope, size and required resources for a fulsome and effective UN peacekeeping mission in eastern Ukraine. With the second largest and arguably the most capable military presence in Ukraine, Canada is well positioned to start on this immediately.

On November 14-15, Canada will host the UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial. Over 70 countries will be participating. This is an excellent venue for Canada to announce its interest to take the lead on a UN mission that will finally bring peace to Ukraine.

A few days later, at the Halifax International Security Forum on November 17-18, Canada will play host to key democratic leaders as they examine strategies to strengthen global security and prosperity. By championing a UN peacekeeping in Ukraine at these fora, Canada will position itself as a leader in reestablishing peace and security in Europe.

Sixty years ago, accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, Pearson said, "Of all our dreams today there is none more important—or so hard to realize—than that of peace in the world. May we never lose our faith in it or our resolve to do everything that can be done to convert it one day into reality."

We have a chance to convert Ukraine's dream of peace into reality. Let's seize this opportunity.

Paul Grod is national president of the Ukrainian Canadian Congress and vice-president of the Ukrainian World Congress.

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