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# Third-party Support for Ceasefire Mediation in Ukraine

The chances of achieving a sustainable ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine would be enhanced by the two sides establishing a joint military coordination mechanism. However, trust between the warring parties is low. Third parties could play a valuable role in supporting such a mechanism, either through a strong supervisory function, by providing low-threshold technical support or in an advisory capacity.

**Dr Walter Kemp**

Senior Strategy Advisor,  
 Geneva Centre for Security Policy

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The sheer volume of issues that will have to be discussed through military-to-military contacts and the vast size of the territory across which violence will have to be reduced point to the need for Ukraine and Russia to establish some kind of coordination mechanism to manage and reduce violence and prepare, implement, and monitor a ceasefire.

Ideally, this should be a bilateral body. But since the conflict parties do not trust each other and might not even want to communicate with each other, it may be prudent to involve third parties in such a mechanism. At least three options could be considered: high-level military officials acting in a strategically important supervisory role, low-level technical support, and/or a body of third-party experts acting in an impartial advisory role.

## International supervisory board

One option would be to include senior military personnel (with at least the rank of general) from third-party countries to carry out a supervisory role on the model of the [Military Armistice Commission](#) that was created pursuant to the 1953 [Korean Armistice Agreement](#). Each party could nominate at least one country (with a maximum of three) to second a senior military official from a third party. Both sides could also decide on the appointment of a general from a country that is agreeable to both. Another option would be to have just one country play the role of a third party. The functions of such an international supervisory board could include:

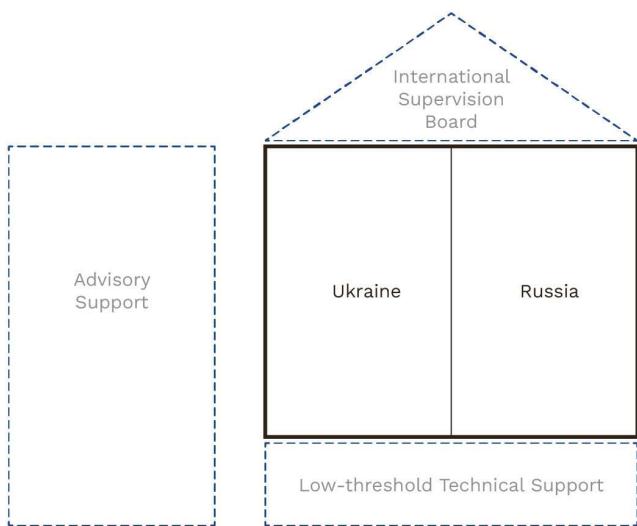
- working with the parties to ensure the overall effective implementation of a ceasefire agreement;

- serving as an intermediary between the commanders of the opposing sides;
- enhancing transparency and accountability;
- assisting with the evaluation and reporting of data provided by the conflict parties;
- supporting the coordination of verification and inspection visits;
- assisting with investigations into alleged violations, helping to distinguish between violations and incidents, and helping to resolve disputes concerning technical military issues; and
- working with the parties to increase the likelihood of compliance with the ceasefire and putting in place measures to reduce the risk of future violations.

Two of the most important functions of such a supervisory board would be to ensure a degree of accountability for implementing a ceasefire agreement and to follow up on any violations. Therefore, while comprising senior military officials, it would need to be able to escalate to the political level.

However, there is a strong probability that the parties may not want to internationalise a bilateral mechanism and may consider it too intrusive. There is also the risk that a strong third-party role could enable the parties to defer some of their responsibilities to the international supervisory board and blame it for any failures.

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## Low-threshold technical support

Another option – either instead of, or in addition to, a high-powered international supervisory board – is to institute a bilateral mechanism with low-threshold third-party support. “Low threshold” implies that the process of calling on international expertise would be easily accessible, informal, low risk and low profile. The goal would be to quickly, easily, and discreetly connect the parties to experts who could rapidly and flexibly help to address specific technical issues related to the preparation and implementation of ceasefire-related instruments. In other words, while an international supervisory board would play a strategic role, low-threshold support would be more technical.

A possible model is the rather loose coordination framework established in Istanbul to monitor the implementation of the Black Sea Grain Initiative. This [Joint Coordination Centre](#) involved representatives from Russia, Türkiye, Ukraine and the United Nations (UN), while the UN acted as the secretariat. Another possible example is the way in which the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine provided ad hoc support to the [Joint Control and Coordination Commission](#) that operated in Ukraine between 2014 and 2017.

Low-threshold third-party support could help the parties, in a discreet and unintrusive way, to:

- draw on international precedents and good practices in ceasefire preparation and negotiation;
- prepare draft language for bilateral and technical agreements;

- standardise reporting formats;
- help maintain lines of communication, facilitate the exchange of information, and organise meetings;
- assist with information management; and
- upon request, advise on technical matters arising from the implementation of a future agreement.

Support would be strictly demand driven and non-binding. If the parties see the advantages of low-threshold technical support, they may wish to scale it up to a more operational level.

The low-threshold support team could comprise a pool of ceasefire experts on the model of the Standby Team of Mediation Experts that supports the UN Mediation Support Unit or be drawn from a roster of experts with relevant regional and thematic expertise. Costs could be covered by seconding states or organisations, as well as by voluntary contributions.

## Advisory support

A third option, perhaps in combination with either or both of the above, is to have a parallel body of third-party experts to provide impartial advisory support to a joint military commission. For example, in addition to the Military Armistice Commission mentioned above, the 1953 [Korean Armistice Agreement](#) also created a [Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission](#), which is an independent and impartial body that performs and develops Armistice Agreement requirements in the interest of all parties involved. Another example, albeit from an intra-state conflict, can be found in the Philippines, where, as a result of the 2019 Bangsamoro peace process, a [national monitoring and verification mechanism](#) operated alongside, but separate from, an international oversight body.

Such a body could provide:

- impartial and unbiased analysis of ceasefire-related information;
- expert support to the parties and the international supervisory board;
- advice on drafting and monitoring a code of conduct to strengthen compliance with a ceasefire agreement;
- advice and expertise on demining;

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- advice on interim security arrangements, e.g. if a demilitarised zone is established (in which case it would also be advisable to have a senior police advisor in the team); and
- training and outreach, e.g. as part of the process of creating a joint military commission and briefing new members during rotations.

Upon request, the advisory team could also take on operational functions, such as taking part in investigations and verification tasks.

If an international monitoring and verification mission were to be deployed, the advisory team could play a useful role as a link between the mission and the joint military commission, and work with the parties in some of their outreach functions, e.g. with civilians and humanitarian actors.

## **The need to start somewhere**

Ultimately, Ukraine and Russia will have to find ways to manage their relations more peacefully. Mil-to-mil contacts will be vital, even in the absence of a formal ceasefire. There is no need to wait for the establishment of a formal ceasefire monitoring mechanism to explore ways of reducing violence and managing relations on the battlefield. Indeed, exchanges of prisoners and war dead demonstrate that the parties can cooperate when they want to. Such bilateral contacts need to be strengthened and eventually institutionalised to deal with a vast range of technical issues associated with a ceasefire. Due to the lack of trust between the warring parties, third parties could help to support this process. If and when a ceasefire is agreed, experience shows that third parties can play a key role in making an agreement more sustainable – ideally as part of a strong supervisory function, or at least through low-threshold or independent expert support.