

# The CFE Treaty Is Dead. Could It Still Inspire a Ceasefire in Ukraine?

**T**here are many factors that could contribute to the end of Russia's war on Ukraine in 2025: the military escalation by the combatant parties, the weariness of their populations, the strategic stalemate, and President Donald Trump's promise to resolve the conflict within "24 hours" of taking office.

At their first meeting on February 18 in Saudi Arabia, U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov agreed to each appoint high-level teams to work on ending the conflict in Ukraine in a way that is enduring, sustainable, and acceptable to all sides.<sup>1</sup> Although Ukraine now has everything to fear from a hasty deal between the two powers, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy declared that he would "do everything to end this war next year through diplomatic means"<sup>2</sup> and would be ready to start negotiations under certain conditions.<sup>3</sup> Fifty-two percent of Ukrainians would like to see their country negotiate an end to the hostilities as soon as possible.<sup>4</sup>

Kyiv's current priority is to conclude the war on favorable terms and gain

maximum leverage over Russia. Over the longer term, a sustainable conflict resolution and a stabilized post-conflict environment will need to include specific arms control measures. The defunct Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty sets out definitions, provisions, procedures, and categories for armament limitation that could one day inspire a comprehensive ceasefire in Ukraine, including monitoring and verification provisions.

## Post-Cold War Origins

Signed in Paris November 19, 1990, the CFE Treaty was history's largest and most complex conventional arms control agreement. It aimed to eliminate disparities between the conventional

military potential of the Warsaw Pact and NATO and their capabilities to launch large-scale offensive operations in Europe or regional surprise attacks. The treaty also established numerical ceilings for collective holdings of five categories of armaments (battle tanks, armored combat vehicles, artillery systems, combat aircraft, and attack helicopters) within four different zones stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Ural Mountains.

A separate stability zone with equal subceilings for the European flank in Northern Europe, the eastern Balkans, and the Caucasus region, including Turkey, was created to prevent new subregional force accumulations as well as the possibility of an encircling maneuver. Compliance was assured through a comprehensive set of intrusive verification measures emphasizing on-site inspections.

After 20 years of implementation, the treaty has contributed to the elimination of more than 72,000 pieces of military equipment, enabled more than 5,500 on-site inspections and facilitated the detailed exchange of data. Its value was not only in its effect on force levels, but also on preventative diplomacy, transparency, and exchange of information. Overall, the treaty helped overcome the Cold War division

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In the March 2025 issue of *Arms Control Today*.  
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