

POLICY PAPER



Lessons from Finland: A Path to Peace for Ukraine?

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Executive Summary

The ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia has reignited discussions on conflict resolution strategies that balance sovereignty, security, and regional stability. This policy paper examines the Finnish model of neutrality—commonly referred to as “Finlandisation”—as a potential framework for Ukraine.

By comparing this approach to alternative historical models, including the East-West German division, the North-South Korean armistice, and the unresolved Russia-Japan territorial dispute, the study highlights the relative merits and limitations of each. While other models risk entrenching division or prolonging instability, the Finnish model offers a pragmatic middle ground, emphasising political autonomy, economic resilience, and diplomatic

accommodation without full alignment with military alliances. However, applying this model to Ukraine requires adaptation to contemporary geopolitical realities, particularly in light of Ukraine’s aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration, ongoing hostilities, and the shifting global security environment.

The author argues that a phased approach to neutrality, coupled with strong defence capabilities and international guarantees, could provide a pathway to de-escalation while preserving Ukraine’s long-term strategic flexibility. Ultimately, while no single historical model fully aligns with Ukraine’s unique circumstances, selective adoption of Finland’s strategic balancing may offer the most viable route towards a sustainable and just resolution to the conflict.



(Ukraine Presidency/Mykola Lararenko - Anadolu Agency)

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of historical conflict resolution models and their applicability to Ukraine, this paper presents the following key recommendations:

■ **Adopt a Pragmatic Approach to Neutrality:** While Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic integration objectives persist as a strategic goal, adopting a transitional posture of neutrality could potentially reduce regional tensions. This framework would require multilateral mechanisms and reciprocal security assurances from involved parties to mitigate risks of destabilising actions.

■ **Secure Comprehensive Security Assurances:** Any neutrality arrangement must be backed by credible security commitments from international actors, including the European Union, NATO member states, and regional powers such as Türkiye. Unlike Finland's Cold War-era position, Ukraine would require formal guarantees, potentially modelled on the 1994 Budapest Memorandum but with enforceable real mechanisms to deter violations.

■ **Strengthen National Defence Capabilities:** A neutral Ukraine does not mean being militarily vulnerable. Drawing from Finland's example, Ukraine must maintain a well-equipped and modernised defence force capable of deterring future aggression. This move should involve integrating advanced military technology, enhanced training programmes, and next-generation combat systems into defence strategies and infrastructure, leveraging insights gained from three years of conflict.

■ **Leverage Economic Resilience as a Pillar of Stability:** Economic stability will be critical to Ukraine's success in any post-war settlement. The Finnish model demonstrated how economic diversification and trade flexibility can reinforce national resilience. Ukraine should prioritise rebuilding key industries, enhancing agricultural exports,

and fostering investment partnerships with both Western and regional markets, including Türkiye.

■ **Pursue a Phased Diplomatic Resolution:** Given the complexities of the conflict, Ukraine should advocate for a step-by-step diplomatic process. This should begin with internationally mediated ceasefire negotiations, followed by phased de-escalation measures, humanitarian reconstruction efforts, and, eventually, political dialogue on contested territories. This incremental approach would help avoid the pitfalls of frozen conflicts seen in Korea and the Kuril Islands dispute.

■ **Maintain Long-Term Flexibility in Foreign Policy:** Finland's strategic approach was distinguished by its ability to evolve from neutrality to full NATO and EU membership as geopolitical circumstances shifted. For Ukraine, maintaining a similar degree of flexibility could ensure that neutrality, if adopted, remains a pragmatic measure rather than a permanent stance, allowing for future engagement with Euro-Atlantic structures should conditions become conducive.

■ **Enhance National Cohesion and Cultural Identity:** A strong national identity is essential for withstanding external pressures. Ukraine should continue investing in civic engagement, education, and independent media to consolidate democratic values and prevent internal fragmentation. This will be particularly important in reintegrating occupied regions should a settlement be reached.

By incorporating these recommendations, Ukraine can navigate its complex geopolitical landscape with greater strategic autonomy, ensuring that any negotiated settlement aligns with its long-term sovereignty, security, and development goals.

Introduction

The ongoing war between Ukraine and Russia has highlighted the urgent need for innovative and pragmatic conflict resolution strategies. While military, economic, and diplomatic efforts continue, the search for a sustainable resolution has revived interest in historical conflict management models. Among these, the Finnish model of

"Finlandization" stands out as a unique case of balancing sovereignty and neutrality in the face of a powerful neighbour. This paper explores the Finnish model in depth, comparing it with alternative approaches, and argues why it offers the most viable framework for Ukraine, albeit with necessary adaptations to contemporary realities.

1. The Finnish Model: Origins and Characteristics

The Finnish model emerged as a pragmatic response to Finland's precarious geopolitical position during the mid-20th century. Following the Winter War (1939–1940) and the Continuation War (1941–1944) against the Soviet Union, Finland faced significant territorial losses and a looming existential threat (Meinander, 2020). To preserve its sovereignty and democratic governance, Finland adopted a policy of neutrality and non-alignment, which became the foundation of what is now referred to as "Finlandization" (Singleton, 1981).

This model balanced maintaining independence with addressing the security concerns of the Soviet Union. It incorporated key elements such as:

- **Political and Economic Independence:** Despite Soviet influence, Finland retained full control over its domestic affairs and democratic institutions. Economically, Finland fostered trade relationships with the Eastern and Western blocs, ensuring stability and growth while avoiding overdependence on either side.

- **Neutrality:** Finland focused on avoiding alliances that could provoke the Soviet Union. Avoiding military partnerships, particularly with NATO, minimised the risk of confrontation.

- **Strategic Concessions:** Finland accepted certain limitations on its foreign policy, including refraining from criticising Soviet actions publicly and allowing limited Soviet influence in its external relations. Finnish leaders saw these concessions as necessary compromises to secure autonomy.

This approach enabled Finland to thrive during an era dominated by superpower rivalry. By prioritising economic resilience and national cohesion, Finland demonstrated how smaller states could effectively navigate the pressures of a bipolar world order. Its ability to maintain neutrality while fostering internal strength made it a compelling model for other nations.

A key aspect of the Finnish model was its focus on economic and social development as foundational pillars of national resilience. Finland invested significantly in education, technological innovation, and social welfare, transforming the country into a prosperous and stable

society. Finland's neutral stance further bolstered this economic success, allowing it to trade freely with both Eastern and Western markets, ensuring diverse economic partnerships and reducing dependency on any single bloc.

However, while some analysts praise Finland's pragmatic approach, it faced significant challenges. Critics argue that Finland compromised part of its sovereignty through its concessions to the Soviet Union. For example, Finland avoided overt alignment with Western powers and occasionally self-censored its foreign policy statements to prevent antagonising Moscow (Browning, 2008). Furthermore, its non-alignment during the Cold War delayed opportunities for deeper integration with Western institutions, limiting its involvement in broader Western alliances until much later.

Despite these limitations, Finland succeeded in preserving its core democratic values and avoided becoming a satellite state. This delicate balancing act, though imperfect, ensured Finland's survival and prosperity in a complex geopolitical environment, illustrating the effectiveness of its nuanced strategy.



(Jakob Johannsen - Anadolu Agency)

2. Comparative Models

The Finnish model is not the only historical framework relevant to understanding the dynamics of conflict resolution. While other models offer valuable insights in different contexts, they demonstrate significant limitations when applied to Ukraine's distinct geopolitical landscape. This section examines three prominent models: the East-West German model, the North-South Korean model, and the Russian-Japanese model.

2.1 East-West German Model

The division of Germany into East and West during the Cold War provides important lessons on ideological and territorial separation. West Germany, known as the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), aligned with NATO, while East Germany, the German Democratic Republic (GDR), was part of the Warsaw Pact. These two distinct entities represented competing political and economic systems, with stark differences that persisted until reunification in 1990 after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Germany's reunification underscores how ideological competition can drive systemic change, but this process was neither immediate nor straightforward. For decades, East Germany lagged West Germany economically and politically, leading to significant disparities between the regions. Applying this model to Ukraine would suggest accepting a prolonged period of division, which may not align with Ukraine's urgent need for unity and stability as a war-torn nation.

Furthermore, the Cold War conditions that facilitated Germany's division and eventual reunification—such as mutual superpower deterrence—are absent in Ukraine's current geopolitical context. The division of Germany during the Cold War provides valuable lessons but also highlights significant risks when considering its application to Ukraine. While Germany's reunification demonstrated how ideological competition can foster systemic change, it also revealed challenges that could worsen in Ukraine's context. These risks are:

■ **Prolonged Division and Disparities:** A divided Germany endured decades of economic and political inequality between East and West. East Germany lagged behind its Western counterpart, creating long-term disparities that persisted even after reunification (Maseland, 2014). For Ukraine, a similar division could entrench economic stagnation in Russian-occupied territories while straining resources in government-controlled areas, delaying recovery and unity.

■ **Erosion of Western Support:** The German reunification model relied heavily on sustained Western support. However, a prolonged war in Ukraine could strain European solidarity and public support, especially as economic hardships mount across EU nations. Alternative European political movements may exploit these grievances to push for reduced aid to Ukraine or appeasement strategies with Russia.

■ **Energy Security Challenges:** As seen in Germany's reliance on Russian energy during the Cold War and beyond, energy dependency can be weaponised in geopolitical conflicts (Lee & Connolly, 2016). Ukraine faces similar vulnerabilities as a transit country for energy supplies to Europe. A divided Ukraine would exacerbate these risks, leaving both Ukraine and Europe exposed to Russian energy manipulation.

■ **Internal Fragmentation:** Ukraine has historically been perceived as divided along linguistic, cultural, and regional lines (Riabchuk, 2014). While recent Russian aggression has united much of Ukrainian society, a prolonged division risks reigniting these internal fractures, undermining national cohesion and resilience.

While the East-West German model offers insights into managing ideological divisions, its application to Ukraine entails significant risks. Any attempt to replicate this model must account for these challenges while prioritising robust security guarantees and sustained international support.

2.2 North-South Korean Model

The Korean Peninsula remained divided following the Korean War (1950–1953), which ended with an armistice rather than a peace treaty. The heavily militarised border—the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ)—is a stark reminder of unresolved tensions. South Korea has developed into a vibrant democracy and global economic powerhouse, while North Korea remains isolated under an authoritarian regime. Adopting a Korean-style division as a framework for resolving the Russia-Ukraine conflict could serve as a “temporary solution” to halt active hostilities, but it is far from an ultimate resolution. While such an approach might establish a demilitarised zone and freeze the conflict along current frontlines, it would institutionalise division without addressing the core issues driving the war. This carries several significant risks:

■ **Entrenched Hostilities:** The Korean Peninsula offers a cautionary example of how unresolved tensions can perpetuate hostility. Decades after the Korean War, North Korea remains hostile toward South Korea, demonstrating that a frozen conflict does not equate to lasting peace. From Ukraine’s perspective, the Korean example highlights the danger that a frozen conflict could entrench hostility and leave the nation perpetually vulnerable to Russian aggression.

■ **Militarized Borders and Economic Disparities:** A divided Ukraine would result in a heavily militarised border, like the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). This could entrench political and economic disparities between regions under Kyiv’s control and those occupied by Russia, making reintegration more difficult over time.

■ **Encouraging Further Aggression:** Freezing the conflict without resolving underlying disputes might embolden future aggression. For instance, Russia could use such an arrangement to consolidate its territorial gains while continuing to undermine Ukraine’s sovereignty through other means, like how North Korea has challenged South Korea and the broader region despite the absence of active warfare. Examples include using cyberattacks, such as North Korea’s hacking of South Korean banks and media outlets in 2013; launching propaganda campaigns to influence domestic public opinion in the South; infiltrating operatives to conduct espionage or sabotage; and exploiting economic and political leverage, such as threatening trade and security agreements to sow division among allies. These actions illustrate how unresolved

tensions can lead to ongoing, destabilising behaviour short of open war.

■ **Limited International Integration:** Just as South Korea’s division delayed its integration into global institutions, such as joining the UN, Ukraine might face challenges in joining NATO or the EU due to unresolved territorial disputes and security risks.

While a Korean-style armistice may provide immediate relief by halting violence and creating space for rebuilding efforts, it cannot substitute for a comprehensive resolution that addresses sovereignty, security, and justice. Without tackling these root causes, such a solution risks becoming a protracted stalemate rather than a pathway to lasting peace.

2.3 Russian-Japanese Model

The territorial dispute between Russia and Japan over the Kuril Islands, stemming from World War II, serves as a cautionary example of the challenges posed by unresolved conflicts. Despite decades of negotiations, the absence of a peace treaty has left both nations in a state of diplomatic stalemate. Russia maintains sovereignty over the islands, which it views as rightful spoils of war, while Japan claims them as stolen territories (Hara, 2006). This unresolved dispute underscores significant challenges for Ukraine if it adopts a similar model. The Kuril Islands dispute has persisted for over 70 years without resolution. Efforts at compromise, such as the 1956 Joint Declaration offering Japan two of the four disputed islands, have repeatedly failed due to geopolitical tensions and nationalistic sentiments on both sides. For Ukraine, adopting a similar model could mean accepting indefinite territorial disputes over Crimea and Donbas, resulting in prolonged instability. The Kuril Islands’ strategic importance has driven Russia to militarise the region, further complicating negotiations. Unresolved disputes in Ukraine could similarly lead to increased militarisation in contested areas, escalating tensions with Russia and potentially destabilising the broader region. The Kuril Islands are economically significant due to their rich natural resources and strategic location. However, Russia’s control has limited Japan’s access to these resources and hindered economic cooperation. In Ukraine’s case, unresolved disputes could similarly restrict economic development in contested regions and impose ongoing security costs. However, this model also carries risks if applied to Ukraine, such as:



A ship wreckage is seen on the beach in South Kuril Islands located in Kamchatka region, Russia on March 16, 2022. The South Kuril Islands, stretching approximately 1,300 km northeast from Hokkaido in Japan to Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia separating the Sea of Okhotsk from the north Pacific Ocean, are interesting tourism spots in the country. (Natalia Zakharova - Anadolu Agency)

■ **The entrenchment of Conflict:** The Kuril Islands dispute demonstrates how prolonged stalemates can entrench positions and make resolution increasingly difficult. For Ukraine, this could result in the normalisation of Russian control over Crimea and parts of Donbas, undermining its territorial integrity.

■ **Escalation Risks:** Like Russia's militarisation of the Kuril Islands, unresolved disputes in Ukraine could lead to further military buildups by both sides. This increases the risk of renewed conflict or even escalation into broader regional instability.

■ **Erosion of International Support:** Prolonged disputes risk diminishing international attention and support. Over time, global priorities may shift away from Ukraine's territorial issues, leaving it isolated in its struggle against Russian aggression.

■ **Impact on National Cohesion:** Unresolved territorial disputes can exacerbate internal divisions within a country. For Ukraine, this could weaken national unity and create long-term political challenges.

The Russian-Japanese model highlights the difficulties of achieving lasting resolution without addressing core grievances. While it provides a framework for managing prolonged disputes without immediate resolution, applying this model to Ukraine carries significant risks. Adopting this model must carefully weigh these risks against potential benefits while prioritising robust international engagement and security guarantees.

Insights and Limitations

Each model provides valuable insights into managing protracted conflicts, yet none offers a fully satisfactory solution for Ukraine. The East-West German model's emphasis on eventual reunification requires conditions of ideological competition and economic disparity that do not parallel Ukraine's reality. The Korean model's institutionalisation of division risks perpetuating hostilities and inequalities, while the Russian-Japanese model's diplomatic deadlock highlights the dangers of unresolved territorial disputes.

By contrast, the Finnish model's focus on balancing neutrality and sovereignty offers a more pragmatic framework for Ukraine. Unlike these comparative models, Finlandization emphasises economic and political stability while avoiding the pitfalls of permanent division or prolonged deadlock. However, applying the Finnish model to Ukraine necessitates adapting its principles to contemporary geopolitical realities and Ukraine's aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration.

3. Advantages of the Finnish Model for Ukraine

The Finnish model offers a compelling blueprint for addressing Ukraine's complex challenges by focusing on neutrality and balancing relations with major powers. While no solution is without flaws, the Finnish approach presents several advantages for Ukraine:

■ Preservation of Sovereignty and Independence

At the heart of the Finnish model lies the principle of maintaining domestic control and independence from external domination. For Ukraine, adopting neutrality could safeguard sovereignty while alleviating the immediate threat of further Russian aggression. Finland's experience during the Cold War demonstrates that smaller states can protect their autonomy by avoiding entanglement in broader military alliances that provoke larger neighbours (Forsberg, 2013). Similarly, Ukraine could pursue a neutral stance to preserve its statehood amid significant geopolitical pressures.

■ Addressing Russian Security Concerns

A key driver of the Ukraine-Russia conflict has been Moscow's objection to NATO's eastward expansion. By declaring military neutrality, Ukraine could potentially address one of Russia's primary security concerns without compromising its aspirations for economic and political alignment with the West. This approach does not require Ukraine to abandon its sovereignty or broader integration into European markets but provides a pathway to reduce immediate tensions with Russia.

■ Economic Flexibility and Recovery

Neutrality under the Finnish model would allow Ukraine to foster economic ties with both Western and Eastern partners, avoiding overdependence on any single bloc. Finland's success in leveraging its neutral status to establish robust trade relations with both NATO-aligned countries and the Soviet Union offers a valuable precedent (Kirby, 2006). For Ukraine, such an approach could prove essential in rebuilding its economy, which has been devastated by years of conflict. By engaging with both Western and Eastern markets, Ukraine could attract diverse investments and reduce its reliance on politically sensitive

trade routes. This dual economic strategy would enable Ukraine to focus on long-term growth while maintaining a pragmatic stance in its foreign policy.

■ Regional Stability Through Strategic Neutrality

Adopting a neutral stance could position Ukraine as a stabilising force in Eastern Europe, reducing the risk of future escalations. Neutrality could transform Ukraine into a buffer state that bridges East and West, facilitating dialogue and cooperation rather than confrontation. Finland's Cold War-era success in promoting regional stability through its neutral policies offers a blueprint for Ukraine to achieve similar outcomes. Ukraine's neutrality could also help resolve the Transnistria problem by fostering dialogue between Moldova and Transnistria.

■ Preserving National Identity and Democratic Institutions

The Finnish model underscores the importance of maintaining a keen sense of national identity and robust democratic governance, even while making strategic concessions. For Ukraine, adopting neutrality does not mean compromising core values but prioritising sovereignty and security. Finland's ability to preserve its cultural independence while navigating complex geopolitical pressures is a powerful example for Ukraine.

■ Potential Pathway to Future Integration

While neutrality may seem like a step away from Euro-Atlantic integration, it could provide Ukraine with a temporary reprieve to consolidate its statehood and recover from the ongoing conflict. Over time, as geopolitical tensions ease, Ukraine could leverage its stability and economic progress to pursue closer ties with the European Union or NATO, mirroring Finland's eventual integration into these institutions after the Cold War.

Adapting the Finnish Model to Ukraine's Realities

The Finnish model of neutrality offers several advantages, but its application to Ukraine requires significant adaptation to address the unique circumstances of the ongoing conflict. Key areas for consideration include:

■ **Acknowledging Active Conflict:** Unlike Finland, which adopted neutrality after its wars with the Soviet Union, Ukraine remains embroiled in active conflict. Implementing a Finnish-style neutrality policy would necessitate a comprehensive ceasefire and robust international guarantees to ensure compliance from all parties involved.

■ **Incorporating International Support:** Ukraine's geopolitical significance demands the involvement of international stakeholders, including the United States, the European Union, and the United Nations. These actors must provide economic aid, security assurances, and diplomatic backing to ensure Ukraine's successful transition to neutrality.

■ **Balancing Domestic and International Pressures:** Ukrainian public opinion strongly favours integration with the West, making neutrality a politically sensitive issue (Ostiller, 2023). Ukraine must frame any move toward neutrality as a strategic compromise rather than a capitulation to Russian demands. Clear communication and public engagement will be crucial to garnering domestic support.

■ **Ensuring Robust Defence Capabilities:** Neutrality should not equate to military vulnerability. Ukraine must maintain a strong and modernised military to deter potential aggression, like Finland's emphasis on national defence. As Pakkasvirta and Tuominen (2024, p. 37) note, Finland's strategy involves "participation in various forms of international military cooperation and crisis management tasks," which enhances its defence posture while maintaining its neutral stance.

■ **Promoting Regional Cooperation:** Ukraine could couple its neutrality with efforts to strengthen regional cooperation frameworks, such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). These frameworks could enhance dialogue on key issues such as

border security, arms control, and economic development, which is vital in fostering regional integration and stability (Wolff, 2024, p. 135).

Challenges and Limitations

While the Finnish model offers valuable insights, its application to Ukraine faces significant challenges stemming from historical differences and contemporary geopolitical dynamics. These challenges underscore the complexity of adopting a neutrality-based approach in a conflict as multifaceted as the Ukraine-Russia war.

■ Geopolitical Differences Between Finland and Ukraine:

One of the most significant barriers to implementing the Finnish model in Ukraine lies in the stark differences between the geopolitical contexts of Finland during the Cold War and Ukraine today. Finland's neutrality emerged in a bipolar world dominated by the United States and the Soviet Union, where smaller states could leverage the competition between superpowers to maintain a degree of autonomy. In contrast, Ukraine operates in a multipolar world with more diffuse power centres and a heightened risk of asymmetric warfare. Furthermore, Finland's geographic isolation from NATO territories made its neutrality less provocative, whereas Ukraine's proximity to NATO member states amplifies Russian security concerns, complicating the adoption of a neutral stance.

However, the evolving international political landscape, particularly with the potential return of figures like Donald Trump to the U.S. presidency, could create an environment more conducive to Ukrainian neutrality. A Trump-led administration might prioritise a transactional and less interventionist foreign policy, potentially mirroring the conditions of 1940s Finland, where geopolitical pragmatism allowed for a form of neutrality.

While offering opportunities, this shifting dynamic also underscores the importance of a tailored approach for Ukraine, one that accounts for its unique geopolitical realities while learning from Finland's historical experiences.

■ Ongoing Conflict and Lack of Post-War Conditions:

Unlike Finland, which negotiated its neutrality after active hostilities had ceased, Ukraine remains amid an intense and unresolved conflict. The presence of active

hostilities, territorial occupation, and ongoing military aggression by Russia makes it difficult to negotiate the terms of neutrality. For neutrality to be viable, there must first be a comprehensive ceasefire and a mutually agreed framework for peace. Without such conditions, Ukrainians may perceive any attempt at Finlandization as capitulating to Russian demands rather than achieving a strategic compromise.

However, it is essential to recognise that short-term solutions are unlikely to yield a definitive resolution. As a long-term strategy, following Finland's example could offer a pathway out of the impasse created by the limitations of alternative models. By planning for neutrality within a broader, sustained framework, Ukraine could potentially lay the groundwork for a stable and enduring solution.

■ **Divergent Public Opinion and Political Realities:**

Public opinion in Ukraine overwhelmingly favours closer integration with Western institutions such as the European Union and NATO. Surveys indicate that most Ukrainians view Euro-Atlantic integration as essential for the country's security and development. This sentiment is a product of both historical grievances against Russian imperialism and the belief that alignment with the West offers a pathway to prosperity and stability. Implementing a neutrality-based policy would require significant public engagement and political will to overcome domestic resistance, particularly from pro-Western factions and civil society groups.

Additionally, Ukrainian leaders have consistently framed NATO membership as a strategic objective, making a pivot to neutrality politically contentious. For Finland, neutrality was a pragmatic decision embraced by its leadership and accepted by the public as a necessary compromise. In Ukraine's case, achieving such consensus would be far more challenging, given the deep polarisation of its political landscape.

Public opinion is not static and can evolve. While the Ukrainian public supports EU and NATO integration, survey results may not fully capture the impact of shifting attitudes caused by the prolonged conflict. Just as public support for the war effort has fluctuated, growing fatigue with the war could influence perceptions of neutrality. In such a context, credible guarantees from the EU and NATO might help ease domestic concerns and create a more conducive environment for exploring neutrality as a potential path forward.

■ **Territorial Integrity and Occupied Regions:**

The Finnish model required Finland to cede certain territories, such as Karelia, to the Soviet Union as part of its peace agreement. Applying this aspect of the model to Ukraine raises profound ethical and practical dilemmas. Ukraine's leadership and citizens have consistently rejected the idea of formalising Russia's annexation of Crimea or granting autonomy to the occupied regions of Donbas. Any agreement perceived as legitimising territorial losses would face widespread domestic and international opposition, further complicating the implementation of a neutrality framework.

Moreover, Ukraine's territorial disputes are not merely geopolitical but also deeply tied to national identity, culture, and history. Unlike Finland, which preserved its cultural and political cohesion despite territorial concessions, Ukraine faces the risk of long-term fragmentation if it concedes key regions to Russia.

■ **Incompatibility with Euro-Atlantic Aspirations:**

Ukraine's aspirations for Euro-Atlantic integration represent another major obstacle to adopting the Finnish model. While neutrality might address immediate security concerns, it contradicts Ukraine's short-term goal of becoming a fully integrated member of the European Union and NATO. These aspirations are not only strategic but also symbolic, representing a break from the legacy of Soviet domination and a commitment to democratic values.

For Finland, neutrality was a stepping stone to eventual integration with Western institutions after the Cold War. However, observers would view Ukraine's neutrality as a permanent condition rather than a temporary measure. This creates a tension between short-term conflict resolution and long-term strategic objectives, making it difficult to reconcile the two.

■ **Economic and Security Vulnerabilities:**

Neutrality would require Ukraine to navigate a complex web of economic and security challenges. On the economic front, neutrality might limit Ukraine's access to financial and military support from Western allies, which has been critical to its resilience during the conflict. On the security front, neutrality would necessitate the development of a robust national defence system capable of deterring future aggression without relying on NATO guarantees.

Finland's Cold War experience highlights the importance of maintaining a strong military to complement its

neutral status. However, replicating this model in Ukraine would require significant investments in defence modernisation and capacity-building, which could strain the country's fragile economy. Additionally, the ongoing presence of Russian forces in occupied territories would pose a continuous threat to Ukraine's security, further complicating efforts to establish a stable and sustainable neutrality framework.

While the Finnish model offers valuable lessons for managing relations with powerful neighbours, its

application to Ukraine faces significant challenges. The ongoing conflict, divergent public opinion, and Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations all create barriers to adopting a neutrality-based approach. Addressing these challenges would require a tailored and flexible strategy incorporating elements of the Finnish model while accounting for Ukraine's unique geopolitical realities. Such a strategy must prioritise Ukraine's sovereignty, security, and long-term integration goals while seeking to de-escalate tensions with Russia through pragmatic and innovative diplomacy.

4. Critical Analysis of Alternatives

4.1. The East-West German Model

Since the war began in 2022, the West German model has been one of the most widely debated approaches to integrating Ukraine into NATO. However, this model presents significant challenges in its implementation and broader implications.

■ **Stabilisation Through Division:** The East-West German model resulted in a stable, though divided, geopolitical order in Central Europe. The division established a clear demarcation line, reducing the likelihood of direct military conflict between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces. For Ukraine, this model could stabilise current frontlines to avoid further escalation. However, such an approach risks entrenching divisions and legitimising Russia's occupation of Ukrainian territories, which is politically unacceptable for Kyiv.

■ **Economic Disparities and Ideological Competition:** A defining feature of the East-West German model was the stark economic and ideological disparity between the two states. West Germany, supported by the Marshall Plan and its integration into NATO and the European Economic Community, became a prosperous democracy.

Conversely, East Germany remained economically stagnant and politically repressive under Soviet influence. This disparity contributed to Germany's reunification in 1990 as East Germans sought political freedoms and economic opportunities in the West. Applying this aspect of the model to Ukraine presents significant challenges. While Ukraine could aim to use economic and political success in government-controlled regions to undermine the legitimacy of Russian-occupied territories, achieving such success is uncertain due to ongoing war and infrastructure destruction. Additionally, Russia's control over information in occupied territories would limit the effectiveness of such efforts.

■ **Reunification as a Long-Term Goal:** Germany's reunification is an example of overcoming divisions imposed by geopolitical rivalries. However, the conditions that enabled German reunification—such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, withdrawal of Soviet troops, and Western support—are absent in Ukraine's case. Reunification required decades of Cold War competition, significant economic investment, and resolution of ideological conflict. These conditions remain distant for Ukraine, making the East-West German model more aspirational than immediately applicable.

Lessons and Limitations

While the East-West German model offers lessons about managing division and pursuing reunification, its limitations in Ukraine's context are clear. Unlike Germany's ideological division with superpower backing on both sides, Ukraine's conflict centres on territorial integrity, national identity, and historical grievances. The model also relied on strong state structures on both sides of the divide—a condition not fully present in Ukraine's fragmented territories.

Furthermore, the geopolitical landscape has shifted since the Cold War. The absence of a bipolar order and the rise of asymmetric warfare complicate applying this model directly to Ukraine. Any attempt to formalise division within Ukraine would face significant domestic and international opposition, undermining efforts for sustainable resolution.

Implications for Ukraine

The East-West German model underscores patience, economic resilience, and ideological clarity in resolving protracted conflicts. For Ukraine, these lessons emphasise strengthening state institutions, rebuilding its economy, and fostering national unity. However, relying on division as a stabilising mechanism does not align with Ukraine's aspirations to preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity. Instead, Ukraine must seek a tailored framework that addresses immediate conflict realities while keeping open possibilities for long-term reintegration of occupied territories.

In conclusion, while the East-West German model offers historical insights into managing division and pursuing reunification, contextual differences limit its applicability to Ukraine. Resolving Ukraine's conflict will require a customised approach that prioritises sovereignty, addresses the root causes of conflict, and leverages international support to build long-term stability.

4.2. The North-South Korean Model

The North-South Korean model exemplifies another prominent case of managing a protracted conflict through division. The Korean War (1950–1953) resulted in the division of the Korean Peninsula along the 38th parallel, creating two distinct states: the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea). The armistice agreement that ended the war did not result in a peace treaty, leaving the two Koreas in a technical state of war to this day. This conflict resolution model has maintained fragile stability but offers limited lessons for Ukraine due to its entrenched division and lack of resolution.

■ **Institutionalised Division:** A defining characteristic of the North-South Korean model is its institutionalised division. The heavily fortified Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) serves as both a physical and symbolic boundary between the two states. This arrangement has prevented large-scale military confrontations since the end of the Korean War but has also entrenched a permanent state of hostility (Westing, 2010, pp. 4-6). For Ukraine, replicating such a model would mean accepting the current frontlines as de facto borders, effectively legitimising Russia's territorial gains. Such an outcome would be politically unacceptable for Kyiv and could undermine its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

■ **Economic and Political Disparities:** The economic and political trajectories of North and South Korea illustrate the stark consequences of prolonged division. South Korea has developed into a thriving democracy and one of the world's largest economies, while North Korea remains isolated, authoritarian, and economically impoverished. For Ukraine, a similar division could exacerbate disparities between government-controlled areas and Russian-occupied territories. These disparities could deepen existing grievances and complicate future reintegration efforts. Moreover, decades of propaganda and hostility have solidified the divide between the two Koreas, creating a generational legacy of conflict. For Ukraine, allowing a similar dynamic to develop would risk perpetuating division and hostility for decades to come.

For 72 years, Korean War seeks elusive peace deal

The Korean War, which started on June 25, 1950 and ended on July 27, 1953, technically never concluded, as a peace treaty has not been signed, despite many attempts

- **1910**
Japan invades the Korean Peninsula
- **1945**
Japanese troops withdraw from Korea
- **1945-1950**
After World War II, the peninsula is split in two as a result of polarization between the US and Soviet Union
- **June 25, 1950**
The Korean War starts when North Korea invades South Korea
- **1953**
Hot conflict ends with a cease-fire signed on July 27



NO. OF SOLDIERS IN THE WAR FROM VARIOUS COUNTRIES

US		1.79 MILLION
UK		56,000
CANADA		26,791
TÜRKIYE		21,212

FALLEN SOLDIERS

- | 178,569 (including 40,670 UN forces) by South Korea
- | In the war, the US lost 36,940 soldiers, more than any other country outside Korea
- | 508,797 from North Korean side



2018 ATTEMPT FOR PERMANENT PEACE FAILED

Negotiations between North Korea and South Korea started in January 2018 and continued for 2 years, with 3 summits and many technical meetings, but without any result

■ **Militarization and Security Risks:** The North-South Korean conflict has resulted in one of the most heavily militarised borders in the world. Both sides maintain significant military forces along the DMZ, creating a constant risk of escalation (Kim & Lee, 2024). For Ukraine, adopting this model would necessitate deploying substantial military resources to secure its borders with Russian-occupied territories. Such militarisation would strain Ukraine's economy and limit its ability to focus on post-war reconstruction and development. Additionally, the constant threat of renewed conflict would undermine efforts to achieve long-term stability.

■ **Limited Prospects for Resolution:** One significant limitation of the North-South Korean model is its inability to resolve the conflict comprehensively. Despite numerous attempts at dialogue and reconciliation, the two Koreas remain deeply divided, with little progress toward unification or a formal peace treaty (Vaddi, 2023). Adopting a model that institutionalises division without addressing root causes would result in a similar stalemate for Ukraine. This would leave Ukraine in perpetual instability with no clear pathway to resolving its territorial disputes or achieving national unity.

Implications for Ukraine

The North-South Korean model underscores the challenges of managing protracted conflicts through division. While it has prevented large-scale military confrontations, it has also perpetuated hostility and entrenched division. This model offers limited applicability for Ukraine as it conflicts with aspirations for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and reintegration of occupied territories. Instead, Ukraine must seek a resolution framework that addresses root causes while providing pathways to long-term stability and unity.

In conclusion, while the North-South Korean model demonstrates that division can maintain stability, its long-term consequences render it unsuitable for Ukraine. The model's entrenched hostility, economic disparities, and lack of resolution highlight the need for a more comprehensive approach to conflict resolution—prioritising sovereignty, dialogue, and reintegration over division and militarisation.

4.3. The Russia-Japan Model

The Russia-Japan model offers another example of a protracted territorial conflict that has persisted without resolution. Since the end of World War II, Russia and Japan have locked themselves in a dispute over the sovereignty of the Kuril Islands. Despite numerous diplomatic efforts, including the 1956 Joint Declaration, this territorial disagreement remains unresolved, preventing the signing of a formal peace treaty between Russia and Japan (Kaczynski, 2007). This model highlights the complexities of managing long-standing disputes and offers limited lessons for Ukraine due to its entrenched status quo and lack of comprehensive resolution.

■ **Institutionalised Stalemate:** A defining feature of the Russia-Japan model is its institutionalised stalemate. The dispute over the Kuril Islands has persisted for decades, with both nations maintaining their claims while avoiding direct military confrontation. This status quo has been reinforced by historical grievances and nationalistic sentiments on both sides (Vassiliouk, 2014, p. 14). For Ukraine, adopting a similar approach would mean accepting frozen conflict lines without addressing underlying grievances, which could perpetuate instability and hinder efforts toward reintegration or reconciliation.

■ **Economic and Diplomatic Implications:** The unresolved territorial dispute has had significant economic and diplomatic consequences for both Russia and Japan. While economic cooperation between the two nations has occurred in areas such as energy and trade, the lack of a peace treaty remains a major obstacle to deeper collaboration (Kimura, 2008, p. 144). For Ukraine, a similar scenario could result in limited international partnerships in contested regions and exacerbate economic disparities between government-controlled areas and Russian-occupied territories. Such disparities could further entrench divisions and complicate future reintegration efforts.

■ **National Identity and Public Opinion:** The Russia-Japan dispute underscores the role of national identity and public opinion in prolonging conflicts. Both Russian and Japanese populations view the Kuril Islands as integral to their national sovereignty, making compromise politically challenging (Özev & Kulaklı, 2021, p. 2). For Ukraine, allowing contested territories to remain under ambiguous sovereignty could fuel nationalist sentiments on both sides,

deepening societal divides and making reconciliation more difficult over time.

■ **Militarization and Security Concerns:** Although the Kuril Islands dispute has not resulted in direct military confrontation, it has contributed to regional security tensions. Both nations have occasionally increased their military presence in the region, particularly as geopolitical dynamics shift in Northeast Asia (Kapur, 2012). For Ukraine, adopting a similar model could necessitate significant military resources to secure contested borders with Russian-occupied territories. This militarisation would strain Ukraine's economy and undermine efforts toward post-war reconstruction.

■ **Limited Prospects for Resolution:** One of the most significant limitations of the Russia-Japan model is its inability to achieve a comprehensive resolution despite decades of negotiations. The failure to resolve this dispute highlights the challenges of addressing deeply rooted territorial conflicts without mutual trust or political will. For Ukraine, pursuing a similar approach could institutionalise division without addressing core issues such as sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Implications for Ukraine

The Russia-Japan model illustrates the difficulties of managing protracted conflicts through frozen disputes. While it has prevented large-scale confrontations, it has also perpetuated tensions and hindered long-term cooperation. This model offers limited applicability for Ukraine as it conflicts with aspirations for sovereignty and reintegration. Instead, Ukraine must pursue a resolution framework that addresses root causes while fostering pathways to stability and unity.

In conclusion, while the Russia-Japan model demonstrates how nations can manage conflicts without active warfare, its inability to achieve resolution renders it an unsuitable framework for Ukraine. The entrenched division, economic consequences, and lack of progress associated with this model highlight the need for a more proactive approach prioritising dialogue, reconciliation, and reintegration over prolonged stalemates.

4.4. The Finnish Model's Superiority

Among the various conflict resolution models, the Finnish model of neutrality and strategic accommodation stands out as the most pragmatic and adaptable framework for Ukraine. Unlike the East-West German and North-South Korean models, which institutionalise division and perpetuate hostilities, the Finnish approach prioritises sovereignty, stability, and economic resilience while navigating the complex dynamics of a powerful neighbour. This section explores why the Finnish model uniquely addresses Ukraine's challenges and how it can be adapted to meet the country's contemporary needs.

■ Balancing Sovereignty and Neutrality:

The Finnish model's emphasis on neutrality to preserve sovereignty offers a compelling blueprint for Ukraine. During the Cold War, Finland maintained its independence and democratic governance despite its proximity to the Soviet Union. By avoiding entanglement in military alliances, Finland reduced the risk of provoking its powerful neighbour while securing internal stability. Adopting a similar stance for Ukraine could de-escalate tensions with Russia without compromising its autonomy.

For neutrality to be a realistic option, Ukraine will require strong international guarantees and a conflict resolution framework grounded in the military realities on the ground, including the withdrawal of Russian forces from at least some occupied territories. In this context, the Kursk region could significantly influence potential territorial exchanges. Furthermore, Ukraine's aspirations for European integration must be carefully balanced with its commitment to neutrality, adopting a tailored, dynamic and multilayered approach that reflects both domestic priorities and regional dynamics (Wolczuk & Žeruolis, 2018, p. 30).

■ Economic Integration as a Stabilising Factor:

One of the Finnish model's most notable successes was fostering economic ties with both Eastern and Western blocs, leveraging its neutral status to attract trade and investment. This strategy strengthened Finland's resilience while reducing external interference by demonstrating the mutual benefits of stability. Pursuing a similar strategy for Ukraine could play a pivotal role in post-war reconstruction and economic recovery.

Ukraine's geographic position as a bridge between Europe and Eurasia uniquely positions it to benefit from economic

partnerships with both the European Union and regional actors such as Türkiye and Russia. By establishing itself as a neutral economic hub, Ukraine could attract diverse investments and facilitate trade, contributing to long-term growth and stability. However, implementing this strategy requires significant infrastructure development, transparent governance, and robust legal frameworks to create an environment conducive to international investment.

■ **Security Through Deterrence and Diplomacy:**

A critical component of the Finnish model was its emphasis on maintaining a strong national defence to deter potential aggression. Despite its neutrality, Finland invested heavily in military capabilities to resist any attempts to undermine its sovereignty (Häkkinen & Kaarkoski, 2024). For Ukraine, a similar approach would involve modernising its armed forces and developing a comprehensive defence strategy that includes territorial defence, cybersecurity measures, and resilience against hybrid threats.

In addition to strengthening its military capabilities, Ukraine must engage in proactive diplomacy to secure international guarantees for its neutrality. Multilateral agreements involving key stakeholders—such as the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and major powers—could provide the framework for sustainable security arrangements. These agreements must include mechanisms for monitoring compliance by all parties involved, particularly the UK, the U.S., Russia, and Türkiye (Motyl, 2016).

■ **Cultural Cohesion and National Identity:**

The Finnish model highlights the critical role of cultural cohesion and national identity in fostering stability and resilience. During the Cold War, despite making strategic concessions to the Soviet Union, Finland maintained a keen sense of unity by preserving its language, traditions, and democratic institutions. For Ukraine, reinforcing national identity is equally vital to counteract divisive narratives promoted by external actors.

To achieve this, Ukraine should strengthen its educational system, support independent media, and advance civil society initiatives that emphasise its sovereignty and democratic values. By fostering a shared national identity, Ukraine can bolster its resilience against external interference while securing public support for policies aligned with neutrality.

The war that began in 2022 has significantly advanced Ukraine's cultural and linguistic independence. Sustaining

this progress and passing it on to future generations will be instrumental in shaping a resilient and unified national identity for the years to come.

■ **Flexibility and Long-Term Adaptation:**

One of the Finnish model's key strengths lies in its adaptability. Over time, Finland transitioned from strict neutrality to full membership in both the European Union (EU) and NATO—reflecting changes in geopolitical realities. This flexibility allowed Finland to balance immediate security concerns with long-term strategic interests.

Adopting a phased neutrality approach could provide a similar pathway for Ukraine. In the short term, neutrality could serve to de-escalate conflict and rebuild national infrastructure. As geopolitical tensions ease, Ukraine could pursue deeper integration with European institutions in the long term by leveraging its stability and economic success.

■ **Addressing Challenges and Criticisms:**

While the Finnish model offers significant advantages for conflict resolution in Ukraine's context, it is not without challenges. Critics argue that neutrality may be perceived as a capitulation to Russian aggression—undermining Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. To address these concerns effectively, Ukraine must frame its neutrality policy as a strategic choice rather than an act of concession. Clear communication with domestic audiences and international partners will be essential in building consensus around this approach.

Moreover, successful implementation depends on international actors' willingness to support this framework. Western powers must provide economic aid alongside security guarantees while ensuring diplomatic backing so that neutrality does not leave Ukraine vulnerable. Russia must also demonstrate genuine commitment to respecting Ukrainian sovereignty—a condition that remains uncertain given its historical track record.

The Finnish model offers a pragmatic and adaptable framework for addressing the Ukraine-Russia conflict. By balancing neutrality with sovereignty, economic integration, and robust defence capabilities, Ukraine can navigate the complex dynamics of its geopolitical environment while pursuing long-term stability and prosperity. However, the success of this approach hinges on careful adaptation, strong leadership, and sustained international support. With these elements in place, the Finnish model could provide a viable pathway to a just and sustainable resolution of the conflict.



Junior high school students ring the last bell during graduation at one of the underground schools in Kharkiv, Ukraine on May 31, 2024. (Stringer- Anadolu Agency)

5. Lessons for Ukraine

Finland's integration into Western institutions offers critical lessons for Ukraine on how neutrality can evolve to meet shifting security and economic needs. Initially, neutrality might serve as a mechanism for de-escalating tensions with Russia, but it need not foreclose the possibility of future integration with the European Union (EU) or NATO. Instead, Ukraine can approach neutrality as a phased strategy—prioritising immediate conflict stabilisation while keeping long-term geopolitical options open.

However, to replicate Finland's trajectory, nations must engage in strategic planning and invest in state capacity. Finland's success stemmed from its strong democratic institutions, robust economy, and commitment to transparency and governance—key factors facilitating its integration into Western frameworks. Similarly, Ukraine must strengthen its domestic institutions to ensure neutrality becomes a stepping stone to future integration rather than a barrier.

Finland's decision to join NATO in 2023 and deepen its EU integration underscores the importance of adaptability in foreign policy. These actions reflected Finland's

acknowledgement of evolving security threats, particularly Russia's aggression, including the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the full-scale invasion attempt of Ukraine in 2022. For Ukraine, Finland's experience highlights the value of strategic flexibility in advancing national interests amid dynamic geopolitical conditions.

Finland's NATO accession marked a definitive shift from its policy of neutrality, driven by growing concerns over Russia's increasingly aggressive posture. By joining NATO, Finland secured the collective defence guarantees of Article 5, significantly enhancing its national security. This demonstrates the importance of aligning security policies with evolving threats for Ukraine. While Ukraine may adopt a neutral stance in the short term to stabilise the ongoing conflict, it must remain prepared to reassess its position as circumstances evolve. This requires investing in strong defence capabilities, fostering alliances, and maintaining active engagement with international partners to ensure neutrality does not result in isolation or vulnerability.

Finland's EU integration has also been a cornerstone of its foreign policy, providing economic stability, political

influence, and a collective framework for addressing regional challenges. For Ukraine, EU membership represents a long-term goal aligned with its democratic values and economic aspirations. While neutrality may temporarily delay NATO ambitions, it does not preclude continued progress toward EU integration.

Ukraine can learn from Finland's ability to balance a neutral stance with active participation in European affairs. By prioritising governance reforms, combating corruption, and modernising its economy, Ukraine can strengthen its candidacy for EU membership while maintaining a neutral foreign policy. This dual-track approach would enable Ukraine to deepen its ties with Europe without directly provoking Russia.

The overarching lesson from Finland's experience is the importance of adaptability in responding to shifting geopolitical landscapes. Finland's willingness to reassess its neutrality, considering new security challenges, reflects a pragmatic approach that prioritises national interests over rigid ideological commitments. This translates into adopting a flexible strategy that balances immediate stability with long-term aspirations for Ukraine.

Strategic adaptability also involves leveraging international partnerships to build resilience and deter

aggression. Finland's participation in NATO exercises and close cooperation with EU member states prior to full membership illustrates how non-aligned countries can enhance their security through proactive engagement. Ukraine can similarly strengthen its ties with Western institutions while remaining officially neutral, positioning itself for deeper integration when circumstances permit.

Finland's trajectory provides a roadmap for Ukraine to navigate the complexities of neutrality while pursuing its long-term goals. Ukraine can lay the groundwork for future integration into Western frameworks by focusing on conflict resolution and stabilisation in the immediate term. However, this requires sustained efforts in defence modernisation, economic reform, and diplomatic engagement to ensure that neutrality is a platform for growth rather than a limitation.

Finland's experience demonstrates that neutrality is not a static policy but a dynamic strategy that can evolve with changing circumstances. For Ukraine, adopting a similar approach offers a pathway to balance immediate security needs with long-term aspirations, leveraging the Finnish model to achieve a sustainable and just resolution to the ongoing conflict.

Conclusion

The Ukraine-Russia conflict demands a resolution framework that goes beyond addressing immediate wartime challenges, ensuring Ukraine's long-term sovereignty, stability, and democratic development. While historical models like the East-West German division, the North-South Korean separation, or the Russian-Japanese stalemate offer lessons, they fall short for Ukraine. These models often formalise divisions, perpetuate hostility, or leave territorial disputes unresolved—outcomes incompatible with Ukraine's aspirations for unity and democratic progress.

In contrast, the Finnish neutrality model provides a compelling alternative. Finland's ability to maintain sovereignty and democracy under the shadow of a powerful neighbour demonstrates that neutrality can serve as a proactive strategy rather than a passive concession. Unlike frameworks institutionalising division, the Finnish approach prioritises de-escalation without compromising territorial integrity, focusing on economic resilience, cultural cohesion, and adaptability.

Importantly, Finland's eventual integration into the EU and NATO underscores the flexibility of its model. Neutrality is not a fixed condition but a tool that can evolve with shifting geopolitical realities. For Ukraine, this adaptability offers a critical balance between addressing immediate security concerns and pursuing long-term integration into European and transatlantic structures. By tailoring the principles of Finlandization to its unique context, Ukraine can forge a path toward a stable, sovereign, and resilient future.

Ultimately, no single model can address the complexities of Ukraine's situation. Rather than replicating any existing framework, Ukraine should craft a bespoke security strategy, drawing selectively from proven approaches like the Finnish model while aligning with its distinct needs and ambitions. This pragmatic yet ambitious path avoids the pitfalls of division and hostility, paving the way for reconciliation, reconstruction, and reintegration. In the face of an enduring and multifaceted conflict, Ukraine's post-war policy must be as dynamic and forward-looking as the challenges it seeks to overcome.

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