

Nonsense about Ukraine peace talks

Thursday 24 November 2022, by [DENHAM Jim](#) (Date first published: 16 November 2022).

***Morning Star* writer Ian Sinclair [reckons](#) he's uncovered "the top under-reported story of 2022 ... the news the British government worked to prevent a negotiated settlement to the Ukraine war in March-April 2022" (12-13 November).**

In fact, this story has been circulating for months and the *Morning Star* previously referred to it (in a front page story on 11 October) as "widely reported", claiming: "The deal was ditched after then British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, at the behest of the Biden administration, pressed President Zelenskyy to break off negotiations."

Sinclair cites various sources (including Russia specialist in the Bush and Obama administrations, Susan Hill, and ex-US intelligence officer Angela Stent, writing in *Foreign Affairs* magazine) as though they give credence to his claim that a deal was scuppered by Britain, acting for the US. In fact, these sources make no such claim, but merely state that in April (to quote Stent), "Russian and Ukrainian negotiators appeared to have tentatively agreed on the outlines of a negotiated settlement." Note the words "appeared", "tentatively" and "outlines".

It turns out that the only credible source for the version of events being promoted by Sinclair is the Ukrainian online newspaper *Ukrainska Pravda*, citing "sources close to Zelenskyy" stating that Johnson "appeared in the capital [Kiev] almost without warning" on 9 April, and said "even if Ukraine is ready to sign some agreements on guarantees with Putin, they [the UK and US] are not."

The researchers Voldymyr Artiukh and Taras Fedirko, noting that this article is routinely cited as "proof of nefarious western interference", spoke to its author, the political journalist Roman Romaniuk, and wrote up what he said. This can be read in full at [Novara Media](#) (17 October: "No, the West Didn't Halt Ukraine's Peace Talks With Russia"), but the crucial points are:

- Johnson didn't "order" termination of the peace deal: this was "advice at best, and ... his scepticism wasn't unique."
- There were already "strong concerns within Zelenskyy's closest entourage that the Kremlin wouldn't stick to an agreement for any longer than it suited its interests."
- Zelenskyy and his negotiators' main worry was that "Ukrainian society might not accept such a deal" (82% of Ukrainians surveyed in mid-May said that "under no circumstances should Ukraine give up any of its territory even if it leads to the continuation of the war and threatens its independence").
- "Russian terror in towns and villages in Northern Ukraine compounded the Ukrainian sides's scepticism about the viability of the deal."

In fact, Sinclair seems to partially recognise at least some of these facts, and (perhaps aware that the version of events he's promoting reflects Putin's propaganda), writes that "we should be highly sceptical of public statements from Putin and Lavrov, especially about their willingness to seriously pursue a negotiated settlement. And it should also be noted that the *Ukrainska Pravda* also reported that Russian atrocities in Bucha and other locations in Ukraine negatively affected the peace talks."

But this admission does not prevent Sinclair from ploughing on with his thesis, that the “British government ...torpedo[ed] the peace talks”. It all comes down to the claim of ex Obama CIA boss Leon Panetta, that the conflict is “a proxy war with Russia” — a claim that might make some sense from his geo-political standpoint but is clearly at odds with the Ukrainian people’s evident determination to defend their territory with militant intransigence, regardless of what Britain, the US or Europe want.

Sinclair’s “proxy war” view of the conflict, regarding the Ukrainians as mere pawns in a geo-political game, also ignores the recent (5 November) *Washington Post* report that the Biden administration “is privately encouraging Ukraine’s leaders to signal an openness to negotiate with Russia” and that Zelenskyy has said Ukraine is only prepared to negotiate when all Russian troops have withdrawn from all parts of the country, including Crimea.

The idea of Ukrainian agency simply doesn’t fit with the *Morning Star*’s view of the conflict.

So people like Sinclair continue to claim that peace talks were sabotaged by the west and that there’s a “mainstream media” conspiracy to suppress this “fact”: the truth is that if any publication is misleading its readers about Ukraine, it’s the *Morning Star*.

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