



1120 S. Harrison
East Lansing, Michigan 48823
517.515.5634
peaceedcenter@gmail.com
www.peaceedcenter.org

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THERE ARE DIPLOMATIC SOLUTIONS TO THE CURRENT CONFLICT OVER THE UKRAINE IF REASONABLE MINDS PREVAIL

The Peace Education Center of Greater Lansing (PEC) has long worked to find peaceful diplomatic solutions to America's international conflicts rather than foolish resorts to war. While some may think that peace activists are naïve idealists, groups like the PEC have more often, with hard-headed foresight, opposed disastrous US wars than have the foreign-policy "realists" who have started them. For example, the PEC originally opposed the Vietnam War, and then the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan after 9/11 from the beginning both for moral and practical reasons. We don't need more disastrous wars like these.

Now our country is in the midst of a war scare about Russia and Ukraine. The framework for peacefully resolving this conflict resides in plain sight if the Biden administration acts constructively. While in Russia's domestic affairs Putin remains a dictator, this does not mean that every action and demand he has made over Ukraine are unreasonable and unrealistic given Russia's legitimate national interests. There are three components to the Ukraine conflict that diplomacy must address.

The first emerges as Putin's concern about having a NATO member on Russia's border. And make no mistake about it: NATO's reason for existing was to oppose the USSR, now Russia, even though some representations were made to Gorbachev that NATO would not expand towards Russia's border as the USSR and its satellites collapsed. In this circumstance, a rational political leader could be worried about a hostile power on its border. Also, remember the Monroe Doctrine and how President Kennedy almost went to nuclear war over Russian missiles virtually on our border in Cuba. Moreover, since Ukraine is not now a NATO member, the Biden administration should work to ensure whether formally or informally that Ukraine remains outside of NATO. This does not preclude support for an independent Ukraine not directly aligned with Russia or the West. Look to the examples of neutral Austria and Finland after World War II for possible models of how this arrangement might function.

The second component stands as the status of the Russian minority living in Ukraine that has moved to marginalize this minority with sometimes extreme

Ukrainian nationalism. The largest Russian-influenced presence is in the breakaway eastern province of Donbass, which is approximately 80 percent Russian, where separatists supported by Russia are seeking autonomy within a federated Ukraine. This proposal was advanced already as part of the earlier 2014 and 2015 Minsk Agreements that controlled a ceasefire after Russian intervention in 2014. But this constitutional reform was never implemented by Ukraine. A federated Ukraine could be a more stable political arrangement than the current centralized Ukrainian political structure.

The last component arises from the need to start and to continue arms control over nuclear weapons, and over other military agreements that define the balance of power in Europe so that all sides have some degree of certainty that their interests are protected from surprise military actions. In this context, it is important to remember that notions that Russia has military forces that can project major military power outside of its immediate border regions are fanciful. The days of Cold War hysteria over Russian tanks rolling into Western Europe should have been over for decades.

While the PEC believes that the danger of Russia's aggressive actions about Ukraine create a potential for serious armed conflict, the PEC does not believe that Russia is actively looking for such conflict; however, the longer the current tensions remain unresolved, the greater the danger that either side may push the other too hard looms large. While it is clear that President Biden will not go to war if Russia invades Ukraine – or conducts an incursion – the longer this conflict simmers the greater the danger someone will make a dangerous mistake. President Biden must move rapidly to negotiate a diplomatic solution along the lines the PEC and groups like the Quincy Institute have proposed. The Minsk Agreements would be a good starting point, as French President Macron has suggested.

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