



Peace Education Center's Statement:

There must be a diplomatic solution to the current conflict over the Ukraine if reasonable minds prevail.



For fifty years, from Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan, the Lansing Area Peace Education Center (PEC) has opposed America's needless and foolish wars and has urged peaceful diplomatic solutions to America's and the world's international conflicts. We are now outraged that President Putin has unleashed an immoral and brutal war of terror on the Ukrainian people. We must stand with the Ukrainian people. But Putin's invasion has challenged peace activists to support a path to peace that balances our desire to find an immediate peaceful diplomatic solution measured against the reality that Russian brutality makes it difficult to oppose sending some level of military support so Ukraine can fight to some tolerable settlement. While some

peace activists stress the United States' role in expanding NATO as the cause for Putin's actions, this explanation, while worthy of discussion, cannot justify Putin's immoral aggression. But more importantly, it distracts from the immediate critical question before the world: How can this war be ended as quickly as possible with a realistic diplomatic settlement, even if it is not ideal for Russia, the United States, NATO or Ukraine.

Unfortunately, while the United Nations General Assembly has condemned the Russian invasion, the Russian veto in the Security Council limits its role in settling this conflict to seeking humanitarian relief. Thus, the United States must pursue a path towards a diplomatic resolution that stops the fighting and that protects Ukraine sovereignty, but that also prevents a dramatic escalation of the war and that stops any expansion of this conflict to neighboring countries and to the United States. Above all, whatever path the United States, NATO and Ukraine follow to resolve this conflict must not be so drastic as to force a breach of the taboo against using nuclear weapons. Given the justifiable moral outrage over Russian atrocities, finding this path will not be easy. But clear-headed thinking about ending this war with a diplomatic settlement and without starting a more dangerous wider war must ultimately prevail.

Given the wall-to-wall media coverage of Russian atrocities, the pressure on President Biden and NATO to continually increase the level of their military support to Ukraine beyond certain likely Russian red lines keeps growing. So far, however, Biden and NATO have pursued a calibrated policy of indirectly supporting Ukraine by providing mostly defensive weapons, by instituting sanctions against Russia and by mobilizing world support; however, they have wisely resisted a more direct military confrontation with Russia by not providing Ukraine some offensive weapons, like tanks and airplanes, and by rejecting calls for a NATO-enforced no-fly zone. So far, this strategy has proved successful in thwarting Russia's attack on Kyiv. But now the focus of the war will shift to Eastern Ukraine and areas around the Black Sea. How the war develops there and the nature of diplomatic outreaches seeking a settlement will determine if and, hopefully, how this war can now be stopped.

Currently, the media is full of optimistic talk about Ukraine winning the war. Based on the balance of military forces, however, the Ukrainian Army will have a harder time achieving any major offensive military success in the East. Even with more offensive weapons Ukraine has sought, the Ukrainian Army, while it may stop Russian advances, probably cannot drive Russian forces out of all the territory it has seized since 2014. In spite of Russia's military ineptitude around Kyiv, its forces in the East are just too strong. But while Putin remains ruthless, the PEC sees signs he is not crazy, as shown by his withdrawal of troops from Kyiv in the face of defeat. The best most-likely outcome of this new war phase would be a stalemate where Putin holds enough territory in the East that he can use as a face-saving justification for claiming victory, which would allow him to negotiate a settlement with Ukraine that all parties may not like but can live with for the time being. If Putin wants more or if Ukraine seeks to fight until it drives

Russia out of all its pre-2014 territory, this will be a long war with even greater dangers of escalation and expansion – and the use of nuclear weapons.

The outline of the major provisions of a negotiated settlement are apparent, if all the parties -- looking to the 2015 never-implemented Minsk II agreements between Russia and Ukraine -- realize that even an imperfect settlement is better than a just war that continues the destruction and slaughter indefinitely without either side ever gaining a complete victory: First, Ukraine will have to agree not to apply for NATO membership, which was not even likely before the war. Second, Crimea will probably remain in Russian hands possibly with some type of land bridge. Third, the Donbas region will unlikely be returned to direct Ukrainian control; it will either become part of Russia or assume some limbo status for the time being. Fourth, Ukraine will have some type of security guarantee connected to its neutrality, even if it joins the European Union.

While a settlement along these lines will meet resistance from those who have elevated this war to a moral crusade of absolute good versus pure evil, Western and Ukrainian leaders -- and Putin too -- will have to decide whether to continue a disruptive, dangerous war where neither side can prevail completely or, hopefully, to find a face-saving “off ramp” for everyone.

While ending the fighting remains the immediate priority, other less-discussed major issues must be addressed:

- The United States must provide assistance and support for sheltering and resettling Ukrainian refugees;
- The United States must provide economic assistance to rebuild Ukraine’s war damages;
- All nations, including the United States and Russia – both of which have not accepted jurisdiction -- should now submit to the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court (ICC) where charges of war crimes and genocide should be tried. This is one way to bring international pressure to limit warfare once it starts, if not to work to end all wars;
- Even with possible charges of genocide and war crimes being investigated against Putin, part of any diplomatic settlement should include an American and NATO strategy about how Russia can be re-integrated into the world political and economic systems, with or without Putin in charge. Because of public outrage, this will require a careful but controversial deescalation of Russian sanctions and discussions about a possible new more stable security architecture for all of Europe. In essence, no one needs a Cold War II with Russia as some Warhawks now seek. Moreover, fears that Russia has the strength to militarily threaten NATO’s former Soviet satellites have been refuted by Russia’s military ineptitude around Kyiv and by its declining economic and diplomatic fortunes. In a globalized world, a Cold War II will traumatize many countries’ economic and political stability, especially in poorer countries.;
- Moreover, the possible use of nuclear weapons has catapulted the issue of these civilization-destroying American and Russian arsenals back into public awareness. Both

sides need to confront the danger these weapons pose and reinvigorate efforts to regulate and ultimately to abolish them as part of a postwar effort to negotiate a more secure security architecture for all of Europe;

- Political leaders, both Democratic and Republican, must not exploit the current war fever by turning unnecessary increases in military spending into a bidding frenzy to prove their toughness. The focus must be on a diplomatic settlement;
- Lastly, even as war fever rises, there must be an unfettered public discussion about possible diplomatic failures that led to this war and about how to avoid such mistakes in the future. Part of this discussion must include finding roles for such international institutions as the United Nations in resolving future disputes.

The war in Ukraine presents the United States and the world with dangers not confronted since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis: it creates the possibility that two nuclear-armed powers may be involved not in a Cold War II, but in a catastrophic Hot World War III where one party pushed against the wall might use nuclear weapons. Dismissing this danger, some supporters of Ukraine are pushing President Biden to move beyond this calibrated policy towards a more direct confrontation with Russia to defeat and “weaken it.” As much as peace activists sympathize with their moral outrage, the dangers of the current situation compel caution and careful judgment as all parties try to chart a prudent path out of this challenging maze of dead ends and dangers without courting a wider war or nuclear disaster.

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