

## Key Tools for the Ukraine Crisis: Diplomacy, Deescalation & Aid

### **Bold & Sustained Negotiation is Urgently Needed to Save Ukrainian Lives**

Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and gross human rights violations are causing immense human suffering. There is no viable military solution and most military analysts believe that Russia could eventually prevail militarily as the conflict grinds on, despite the bravery and unity displayed by the Ukrainian people. Diplomacy must not stop during battle – in fact, it becomes even more urgent to stop the bloodshed and save lives.

While it's unclear whether Russia is yet willing to negotiate diplomatic off-ramps, the U.S. must seek to prevent the unthinkable alternative. The best way to save lives is to find a way to craft a settlement that would encourage Russia to withdraw all its forces. As one European diplomat [said recently](#)<sup>1</sup>: "It's like the Sun Tzu thing of giving your enemy a golden bridge to retreat across. How do you get him to go in a different direction?". Both Putin and Zelensky have broached neutrality and a solution should be explored that would respect Ukraine's sovereignty while maintaining neutrality – akin to precedents with Finland or Austria. Arms control measures about nuclear weapons and missiles could also be part of a possible off-ramp.

Another complementary diplomatic move could involve sanctions. RAND's [Samuel Charap](#), [writes](#)<sup>2</sup> that lifting some sanctions could "push Putin to abandon his core war aim of decapitating the Ukrainian government and installing a pro-Russian puppet. Using relief of the central bank sanctions, for example, to compel a cease-fire and a negotiated settlement would not only minimize human suffering in Ukraine, but it could also signal the limits of Western intentions, making clear the sanctions are not about overthrowing Putin's regime."

### **Mission Critical: Build a Firewall Against Escalation**

Congress Members should speak out publicly and tamp down escalation to prevent a potentially catastrophic world war. They can reinforce Congressional war powers, making it clear that they do not support sending U.S. troops or pilots into the battle and opposing escalatory tactics like a "No Fly Zone." A "No Fly Zone", and other direct U.S. interventions, are euphemisms for a shooting war between the world's two biggest nuclear powers.

Loose militaristic talk about "[bloodying Putin's nose](#)"<sup>3</sup> should not be reinforced by policymakers. The U.S. should be working to protect Ukrainian lives, not treating the people as a vehicle to confront the Russian autocrat. Instead, Congress can promote "deconfliction" and deescalation measures, by "[avoiding new](#)"<sup>4</sup> and destabilizing military deployments, dangerous encounters between Russian and NATO forces, and the introduction of new types of conventional or nuclear weapons that undermine shared security interests."

### **Centering Civilian Protection: Humanitarian Aid & Refugee Assistance**

Congress should increase humanitarian and economic aid and assistance for displaced Ukrainians at a more generous level that meets this challenge. Diplomatic pressure should be brought to bear to support the Ukrainian effort on humanitarian corridors. U.S. support to Ukraine over the last year has had a lopsided military emphasis. Now, with a million refugees and counting, we need to increase resources for humanitarian aid, refugee assistance and resettlement. Globally, we are facing the worst refugee crisis since WWII. The U.S. refugee cap should be significantly increased [to protect at least 250,000](#)<sup>5</sup> people. Congress should support refugee programs reflecting racial equity and on a scale sufficient to meet the challenge.

Centering civilian protection means ensuring that sanctions with economy-wide impacts don't lead to humanitarian harm. Holding the Russian government and the oligarchs backing it responsible is critical right now. But Congress must perform oversight to make sure the U.S. is not engaging in "[collective punishment](#)."<sup>6</sup> Sanctions' economic impact can cause dire public health consequences, including [malnutrition and increased infant mortality](#).<sup>7</sup> It would be ironic indeed if sanctions were to punish the ordinary Russians who have shown such extraordinary courage in openly opposing their leaders' brutality. More broadly, sanctions have become a

“tool of first resort” for the U.S. – their use has gone up by 933% over the last two decades. Congress must [enact reforms](#)<sup>8</sup> to evaluate the impact of sanctions and remove those that are harming civilians.

## The Ukraine Crisis Doesn't Justify Increased Pentagon Budget Growth

Congress should oppose Pentagon requests for increased funding related to the crisis in Ukraine. The Biden administration is [planning to request](#)<sup>9</sup> \$10 billion for Ukraine. Disturbingly, roughly half of that, \$4.8 billion, is for the Department of Defense despite the fact that Pentagon spending is at historic highs. While generous humanitarian aid and refugee assistance should be approved, Congress must resist the arms lobby's efforts to turn the crisis into an excuse for further unnecessary growth of the already bloated Pentagon budget.

Since the start of the war in Afghanistan, Pentagon spending had totaled roughly [\\$14 trillion dollars](#)<sup>10</sup> with one-third to one-half of the total going to military contractors. **Increased spending was sold as needed to “deter Putin” and “defeat the Taliban”. It didn't work.** Congress must ask that the Pentagon make whatever adjustments necessary, [without what analyst Bill Hartung warns might lead to](#)<sup>11</sup> “an open-ended commitment that would boost U.S. military involvement in Europe back towards Cold War levels, or create a loosely regulated slush fund like the account that was used to finance the Iraq and Afghan wars.”

## This Crisis Underlines the Need for a US Foreign Policy Reset

This war should be a wakeup call that it is time to invest in peace and human security and redouble efforts to *prevent* political violence. At the same time, non-military challenges are proving to be our nation's gravest threats. One million people have died of COVID in the U.S., yet we have underfunded our healthcare systems and done far less than we should to ensure global vaccine equity. Damaging severe weather events caused by climate change are ravaging our communities. Yet the defense budget continues to grow.

When it comes to conflict prevention, diplomacy is an underpublicized, underutilized and underfunded tool. The Pentagon budget is [13 times larger than](#)<sup>12</sup> the combined budgets of the State Department and USAID. Many top U.S. [diplomats and analysts warned](#)<sup>13</sup> of the risks of increased tensions or war that NATO expansion posed and the need for a [sustainable peace and security architecture for Europe](#).<sup>14</sup> While Russia is 100% responsible for its unconscionable invasion, critical opportunities were missed to work harder and smarter to avoid this war.

The U.S. also must ensure that our own policies do not fuel conflict and instability through military intervention and weapons sales to oppressive governments. Greater moral consistency, a U.S. that opposes the bombing of Kyiv and ends support for the Saudi bombing of Sana'a in Yemen, would be a powerful foreign policy tool.

## Steps Members of Congress Can Take

- **Focus emergency funding for Ukraine on civilian protection** including humanitarian aid and refugee assistance and resettlement.
- **Speak out against and vote to oppose** military contractors and the Pentagon using this crisis to grow the already bloated military budget.
- **Hold Russia's leadership accountable for their aggression** by going after hidden assets and through targeted penalties that do not punish the entire Russian public for the crimes of their leaders.
- **Oppose open-ended, broad-based sanctions** that cause serious humanitarian damage to Russian civilians.
- **Lift refugee caps** to make more generous room for refugees from Ukraine. This must be done in an equitable way that includes equally deserving refugees from Afghanistan, Syria etc.
- **Members of the House should cosponsor H. Res. 877** – the Foreign Policy for 21st Century Act.

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