

What Can the United States Bring to the Peace Table for Ukraine?

By Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J.S. Davies

So far, the debate has revolved around what Ukraine and Russia can do to end the war and restore peace. However, given this war is not just between Russia and Ukraine, NATO, and the United States must consider what they can bring to the table to end it. The geopolitical crisis that set the stage for the war in Ukraine began with NATO's broken promises not to expand into Eastern Europe, and was exacerbated by its declaration in 2008 that Ukraine would eventually join this primarily anti-Russian military alliance.

Then, in 2014, a U.S.-backed coup against Ukraine's elected government caused the disintegration of Ukraine. Only 51% of Ukrainians surveyed recognized the legitimacy of the post-coup government, and large majorities in Crimea and in Donetsk and Luhansk provinces voted to secede from Ukraine. Crimea rejoined Russia, and the new Ukrainian government launched a civil war against the self-declared "People's Republics" of Donetsk and Luhansk.

The civil war killed an estimated 14,000 people, but the Minsk II accord in 2015 established a ceasefire and ... casualties declined substantially. But the Ukrainian government never resolved the political crisis by granting Donetsk and Luhansk the autonomous status promised in the Minsk II agreement. Now former German Chancellor Angela Merkel and former French President François Hollande have admitted that Western leaders only agreed to Minsk II to buy time to build up Ukraine's armed forces to recover Donetsk and Luhansk by force. Russia and Ukraine drew up a 15-point "neutrality agreement," which President Volodymyr Zelenskyy publicly presented on March 27th, 2022. Russia agreed to withdraw from the territories it occupied since the invasion in exchange for a Ukrainian commitment not to join NATO or host foreign military bases.



A sign at the Rage Against the War Machine Rally in Washington D.C. on Feb. 19. — rageagainstwar.com. Organized by the People's Party and the Libertarian Party, endorsed by anti-war groups, the rally featured prominent speakers demanding: stop funding the Ukraine war, negotiate peace, disband NATO, de-escalate nuclear war, slash the Pentagon budget, abolish war and empire, and restore civil liberties. Rather than strive toward these mutual and necessary goals for humanity, news outlets denounced protestors as Russian sympathizers or far-right conspiracists, and some in the anti-war community shied away, split over the politics of certain organizers.

Blustery New START Suspension Familiar for U.S.

By Lindsay Potter

President Putin announced in his national address on February 20 that he is suspending Russian participation in the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty. The treaty was signed in 2010 and given a five year extension in 2021. It binds Russia and the U.S., who together boast over 90% of the world's nuclear weapons, to limit their arsenals and permit up to 18 inspections a year to verify compliance. New START allows up to 1,550 nuclear warheads and 700 deployed intercontinental ballistic missiles, submarine-launched ballistic missiles, and nuclear-equipped bombers — an arsenal large enough to cause massive human suffering and environmental apocalypse which begs the usefulness of any treaty that does not require elimination of all nuclear weapons. Set to expire in 2026, See *New START*, page 4

That framework included proposals for resolving the future of Crimea and Donbas.

But in April ... Western allies ... persuaded Ukraine to abandon its negotiations with Russia. U.S. and British officials said they saw a chance to "press" and "weaken" Russia, resulting in a prolonged and devastating conflict with hundreds of thousands of casualties. U.S. and NATO leaders now claim to support a return to the negotiating table ... with the same goals. They implicitly recognize that nine more months of unnecessary and bloody war failed to greatly improve Ukraine's negotiating position.

Instead of sending more weapons to fuel a war that cannot be won, Western leaders have a grave responsibility to restart negotiations and ensure that they succeed. Instead of risking nuclear annihilation, the U.S. could open up a new era of disarmament treaties.

For years, President Putin has complained about the large military footprint in Eastern and Central Europe. But in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. actually beefed up its European military presence. It increased the total deployments of American troops in Europe from 80,000 before February 2022 to roughly 100,000. It sent warships to Spain, fighter jet squadrons to the U.K., troops to Romania and the Baltics, and air defense systems to Germany and Italy. Even before the Russian invasion, the U.S. began expanding its presence at a missile base in Romania that Russia objected to since 2016. The U.S. also

built "a highly sensitive military installation" in Poland, just 100 miles from Russian territory. These bases have sophisticated radars ... and interceptor missiles. The Russians worry these can be re-purposed to fire offensive or even nuclear missiles, exactly what the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty between the U.S. and the Soviet Union prohibited, until President Bush withdrew from it in 2002.

While the Pentagon describes the two sites as defensive and pretends they are not directed at Russia, Putin has insisted the bases are evidence of the threat posed by NATO's eastward expansion.

Here are some steps the U.S. could put on the table to start de-escalating the rising tensions and improve chances for a lasting ceasefire and peace agreement:

—The U.S. and other Western countries could support Ukrainian neutrality with the security guarantees Ukraine and Russia agreed to last March.

—The U.S. and NATO could lift sanctions against Russia as part of a comprehensive peace agreement.

—The U.S. could significantly reduce the 100,000 troops it now has in Europe, and remove its missiles from Romania and Poland, handing over those bases to their respective nations.

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Death of the Iran Nuclear Deal

Editorial

By Naveen Borojerdi

Over the last six years, Washington's attitude and policy toward Iran have changed for the worse. The exit of the Obama Administration heralded the end of the Democrats' soft, liberal imperialism and ushered in a new, more hawkish foreign policy under the Trump Administration. The U.S. Ruling Class picks and chooses which of its enemies to sabre rattle with depending on whether their elected official in the oval office is a Democrat or a Republican. Under the Trump Administration, we saw the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, colloquially known as the "Iran Deal," ripped up and sanctions placed back on the country. The agreement, which Tehran followed thoroughly, was the first attempt at peace between both nations despite being based on a lie that Iran is working towards obtaining a nuclear weapon.

At the time of the deal's inception, I supported the Obama Administration, just like many Iranians among the diaspora, as it felt like a step towards a better future for all of us. But the deal was not built to last and the U.S. moved from peace towards escalation. Shortly after destroying the deal, the Trump Administration placed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps on the terrorist list and ended its term with the assassination of General Qassem Soleimani, leader of the Quds Forces and one of the most powerful figures in Iran, while he was on a peace mission between Iran and Saudi Arabia [the IRGC and Quds Force are branches of the Iranian Armed Forces]. During the presidential debates leading up to the 2020 Election, most candidates for the presidency said they would return to the 2015 Deal, but make adjustments to it such as incorporating Iran's Ballistic Missile program — incongruous policy promises, considering most of them did not stop the Trump Administration from placing sanctions back on Iran in 2017, thus ending the path towards diplomacy. Even the most progressive lawmakers among the candidates, such as Bernie Sanders, claimed they "Could not allow Iran to obtain a nuclear weapon," a false, provocative smokescreen for hidden U.S. agendas considering Ayatollah Khamenei issued a Fatwa, or a religious order, against obtaining nuclear weapons back in 2003.

Leading up to the election, the Liberal members of the Iranian diaspora urged us to vote for current President Joe Biden because he would return to the

deal, which I had predicted would be dead on arrival following four years under the Trump Administration. Fast forward three years later: still no return to the deal and the Biden Administration is making more demands for Iran to follow despite the U.S. having originally pulled out. Biden's cheerleaders among the Iranian Liberal analyst class are painting both Iran and U.S. officials as being unreasonable, which we know is clearly not the case. Regardless of how you feel about the Islamic Republic, you cannot deny the fact they played by all the rules set out by Washington as part of the original deal. However, due to the decline in U.S. power with the rise of China on the world stage, the U.S. is losing bargaining power as the world moves towards an alternative to U.S. Hegemony. Washington is still trying to keep Iran under its thumb, but it can't, simply because of the strengthening of relations between Tehran, Moscow, and Beijing. This is why the talks in Vienna have been unsuccessful.

In January, Israel's new administration under Netanyahu carried out a drone strike on a military facility in Isfahan. This is a continuation of the previous administration's policy, in the wake of a full-on assault on Iran's sovereignty by sinister forces such as Trump Administration official John Bolton. Bolton, a long-time supporter of Maryam Rajavi and the Mojahedin-e-Khalq, boasted on BBC Persian that Washington arms separatist groups along the Iraq/Iran border in Kurdistan. The January attack comes in the midst of protests across Iran in the wake of the death of Mahsa Zhina Amini, a Kurdish woman. We've also seen, in the last few months, the Daesh carry out a successful terrorist attack in Shiraz, Iran, killing children, the elderly, and those in between. Iran's enemies have been ramping up aggression, using the civil unrest as cover to carry out attacks, as Iran strengthens ties with its allies in the East, resulting in the weakening of the dollar. As we move closer to a multi-polar world, Washington and its satellites in Tel Aviv and Riyadh, are lashing out and doing anything they can to prevent the strengthening of the Iranian economy while continuing the same maximum pressure policy of the Trump Administration in administering more sanctions on Iran. This is the very reason why, the proof, that peace between both nations was nothing more than a pipe dream we all bought into. President Biden is clearly not interested in peace but rather escalation and we must oppose the continuation of these policies at all costs.

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