

March 29, 2022

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Biden,

We, the undersigned thirteen organizations, are writing to urge you to maximize your efforts to achieve a diplomatic solution to the war in Ukraine. As Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky recently stated in an address to the people of Ukraine “Any war ends in an agreement.” The State Department has asserted that “Diplomacy is the only responsible way to resolve this crisis.” Even as we rally the world to oppose Russia’s outrageous and illegal invasion of Ukraine, and provide needed assistance to help the Ukrainian people, it is not too early to lay the groundwork for U.S. contributions to a negotiated peace.

We understand that the government of Ukraine must play the leading role in any such negotiations, and that the success of negotiations depends on Russian willingness to accept meaningful sovereignty for the people of Ukraine. Yet the United States will also play a critical role in the success of any negotiated peace. For example, the United States leads the global coalition to oppose Russian aggression and controls the sanctions currently devastating the Russian economy. Tying the easing of some of these sanctions to the success of diplomacy would provide an important incentive for Russian concessions.

In addition, any negotiated settlement will involve establishing future Ukrainian and European security arrangements in which the United States will play a key role. There are actions the U.S. can take in these areas, and assurances the U.S. can give, which no other party anywhere in the world can match. While Ukraine and Russia are the main parties to any negotiation, both will certainly look to the U.S. to agree to and commit to support any new security arrangements resulting from diplomacy.

If there is no successful diplomatic resolution, the implications for the Ukrainian people and the world are dire. You have, correctly in our view, rejected a direct U.S. military defense of Ukraine using American troops or planes. Such a direct clash between the U.S. and Russia would irresponsibly risk massive and potentially nuclear escalation of the war. But without external forces and without a diplomatic settlement, Ukraine is isolated against a much larger opponent and the civilian death toll will only increase as Russia’s assault continues. An extended war in Ukraine would carry enormous costs for the Ukrainian people. If we wish to truly support the Ukrainian people, we must be willing to support a negotiated settlement.

An extended war also carries enormous risks to human and environmental wellbeing around the world. An expansion of the war to include NATO allies neighboring Ukraine risks direct U.S.-Russia war and potential nuclear escalation. There are also severe economic consequences to an extended war. The IMF recently stated that the conflict was a “major blow” to the world

economy and that an extended conflict would drastically increase food insecurity and political instability around the world. The economic fallout will also impact Americans here at home.

Today, it does not appear that a peace deal fully acceptable to the Ukrainian government is yet on the table. But already, the devastating human, military, and economic costs of war are pushing the Russian government to become more realistic in their negotiating demands. Compromise is difficult given Russia's actions, but compromise is necessary to diplomacy and will save lives. We believe that the potential emerging outlines of an agreement, involving neutrality for Ukraine, security guarantees, and a settlement of issues involving Crimea and the Donbas, could be compatible with meaningful Ukrainian sovereignty and continued cultural and economic openness to the West.

Some concrete ways that you can support a diplomatic settlement include the following:

- Continue to reject steps which would lead to a direct clash between Russia and the U.S. and NATO militaries, such as a no-fly zone. Escalation between nuclear armed powers is extremely dangerous and will make resolution of the war far more difficult.
- Signal that the U.S. is willing to significantly ease or lift sanctions in exchange for a diplomatic solution acceptable to Ukraine. Toward this end, sanctions should not be placed in statute where they are difficult to ease in response to successful diplomacy.
- Reject maximalist war aims such as regime change in Russia that do not allow for a compromise solution to emerge, and which would involve a multi-year extended war to achieve a total Russian defeat. Such an effort would greatly increase the risk of nuclear escalation, and by extending the war would be even more destructive to Ukraine.
- Be prepared to open direct talks with Russia that complement negotiations conducted by the Ukrainian government and our own continued close coordination with Ukraine.
- Be open to a range of new security arrangements that could emerge from peace talks, including those agreeable to Ukraine that involve sustainable neutrality arrangements while preserving Ukrainian sovereignty.
- Commit the United States to play a leading role in the economic reconstruction of Ukraine after a settlement – something that other countries, including Russia as the aggressor, should also contribute to.

Thank you for your willingness to both oppose Russian aggression, and to work toward a meaningful and sustainable peace agreement in order to do everything possible to protect the Ukrainian people and the world from the drastic consequences of an extended war.

If you have questions or wish to further discuss the issues raised in this letter, please contact Quincy Institute Advocacy Director Marcus Stanley at marcus@quincyinst.org.

Sincerely,

American Friends Service Committee
Church of the Brethren Office of Peacebuilding
Demand Progress Education Fund
Indivisible
Just Foreign Policy
MoveOn
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Progressive Democrats of America
Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
RootsAction
United Church of Christ Justice and Local Church Ministries
Veterans for Peace
Win Without War

Cc: The Honorable Anthony J. Blinken, Secretary of State
The Honorable Nancy D. Pelosi, Speaker of the House
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer, Senate Majority Leader