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# The U.S. Should Be a Force for Peace in the World

The Russia-Ukraine War has been an unmitigated disaster. Hundreds of thousands have been killed or wounded. Millions have been displaced. Environmental and economic destruction have been incalculable. Future devastation could be exponentially greater as nuclear powers creep ever closer toward open war.

We deplore the violence, war crimes, indiscriminate missile strikes, terrorism, and other atrocities that are part of this war. The solution to this shocking violence is not more weapons or more war, with their guarantee of further death and destruction.

As Americans and national security experts, we urge President Biden and Congress to use their full power to end the war speedily through diplomacy, especially given the grave dangers of military escalation that could spiral out of control.

Sixty years ago, President John F. Kennedy made an observation that is crucial for our survival today. "Above all, while defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy--or of a collective death-wish for the world."

The immediate cause of this disastrous war in Ukraine is Russia's invasion. Yet the plans and actions to expand NATO to Russia's borders served to provoke Russian fears. And Russian leaders made this point for 30 years. A failure of diplomacy led to war. Now diplomacy is urgently needed to end the war before it destroys Ukraine and endangers humanity.

## The Potential for Peace

Russia's current geopolitical anxiety is informed by memories of invasion from Charles XII, Napoleon, the Kaiser and Hitler. U.S. troops were among an Allied invasion force that intervened unsuccessfully against the winning side in Russia's post-World War I civil war. Russia sees NATO enlargement and presence on its borders as a direct threat; the U.S. and NATO see only prudent preparedness. In diplomacy, one must attempt to see with strategic empathy, seeking to understand one's adversaries. This is not weakness: it is wisdom.

We reject the idea that diplomats, seeking peace, must choose sides, in this case either Russia or Ukraine. In favoring diplomacy we choose the side of sanity. Of humanity. Of peace.

We consider President Biden's promise to back Ukraine "as long as it takes" to be a license to pursue ill-defined and ultimately unachievable goals. It could prove as catastrophic as President Putin's decision last year to launch his criminal invasion and occupation. We cannot and will not endorse the strategy of fighting Russia to the last Ukrainian.

We advocate for a meaningful and genuine commitment to diplomacy, specifically an immediate ceasefire and negotiations without any disqualifying or prohibitive preconditions. **Deliberate provocations delivered this war. In the same manner, deliberate diplomacy can end it.**

## U.S. Actions and Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

As the Soviet Union collapsed and the Cold War ended, U.S. and Western European leaders assured Soviet and then Russian leaders that NATO would not expand toward Russia's borders. "There would be no extension of...NATO one inch to the east," U.S. Secretary of State James Baker told Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev on February 9, 1990. Similar assurances from other U.S. leaders as well as from British, German and French leaders throughout the 1990s confirm this.

Since 2007, Russia has repeatedly warned that NATO's armed forces on Russian borders were intolerable – just as Russian forces in Mexico or Canada would be intolerable to the U.S. now, or as Soviet missiles in Cuba were in 1962. Russia further singled out NATO expansion into Ukraine as especially provocative.

## Seeing the War Through Russia's Eyes

Our attempt at understanding the Russian perspective on their war does not endorse the invasion and occupation, nor does it imply the Russians had no other option but this war.

Yet, just as Russia had other options, so too did the U.S. and NATO leading up to this moment.

The Russians made their red lines clear. In Georgia and Syria, they proved they would use force to defend those lines. In 2014, their immediate seizure of Crimea and their support of Donbas separatists demonstrated they were serious in their commitment to defending their interests. Why this was not understood by U.S. and NATO leadership is unclear; incompetence, arrogance, cynicism, or a treacherous mixture of all three are likely contributing factors.

### U.S./NATO Military Bases




### What if the Shoe Were on the Other Foot?




Again, even as the Cold War ended, U.S. diplomats, generals and politicians were warning of the dangers of expanding NATO to Russia's borders and of maliciously interfering in Russia's sphere of influence. Former Cabinet officials Robert Gates and William Perry issued these warnings, as did venerated diplomats George Kennan, Jack Matlock and Henry Kissinger. In 1997, fifty senior U.S. foreign policy experts wrote an open letter to President Bill Clinton advising him not to expand NATO, calling it "a policy error of historic proportions." President Clinton chose to ignore these warnings.

Most important to our understanding of the hubris and Machiavellian calculation in U.S. decision-making is the dismissal of the warnings issued by Williams Burns, the current director of the Central Intelligence Agency. In a cable to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in 2008, while serving as Ambassador to Russia, Burns wrote of NATO expansion and Ukrainian membership:

"Ukraine and Georgia's NATO aspirations not only touch a raw nerve in Russia, they engender serious concerns about the consequences for stability in the region. Not only does Russia perceive encirclement, and efforts to undermine Russia's influence in the region, but it also fears unpredictable and uncontrolled consequences which would seriously affect Russian security interests. Experts tell us that Russia is particularly worried that the strong divisions in Ukraine over NATO membership, with much of the ethnic-Russian community against membership, could lead to a major split, involving violence or at worst, civil war. In that eventuality, Russia would have to decide whether to intervene; a decision Russia does not want to have to face."

Why did the U.S. persist in expanding NATO despite such warnings? Profit from weapons sales was a major factor. Facing opposition to NATO expansion, a group of neoconservatives and top executives of U.S. weapons manufacturers formed the U.S. Committee to Expand NATO. Between 1996 and 1998, the largest arms manufacturers spent $51 million ($94 million today) on lobbying and millions more on campaign contributions. With this largesse, NATO expansion quickly became a done deal, after which U.S. weapons manufacturers sold billions of dollars of weapons to the new NATO members.

So far, the U.S. has sent $30 billion worth of military gear and weapons to Ukraine, with total aid to Ukraine exceeding $100 billion. War, it's been said, is a racket, one that is highly profitable for a select few.

## Timeline

**1990**
U.S. assures Russia that NATO will not expand towards it's border "…there would be no extension of…NATO one inch to the east," says U.S. Secretary of State James Baker.

**1996**
U.S. weapons manufacturers form the Committee to Expand NATO, spending over $51 million on lobbying expenditures.

**1999**
NATO admits Hungary, Poland, and the Czech Republic to NATO. U.S. and NATO bomb Russia's ally, Serbia.

**2001**
U.S. unilaterally withdraws from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty.

**2004**
Seven more Eastern European nations join NATO. NATO troops are now directly on Russia's border.

**2004**
Russia's parliament passes a resolution denouncing NATO's expansion. Putin responds by saying that Russia would "build our defense and security policy correspondingly."

**2008**
NATO leaders announce plans to bring Ukraine and Georgia, also on Russia's borders, into NATO.

**2009**
U.S. announces plans to put missile systems into Poland and Romania.

**2014**
Legally elected Ukrainian president, Viktor Yanukovych, flees violence to Moscow.

**2016**
U.S. begins troop buildup in Europe.

**2019**
U.S. unilaterally withdraws from Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty.

**2020**
U.S. unilaterally withdraws from Open Skies Treaty.

**2021**
Russia submits negotiation proposals while sending more forces to the border with Ukraine. U.S. and NATO officials reject the Russian proposals immediately.

**Feb 24, 2022**
Russia invades Ukraine.

NATO expansion, in sum, is a key feature of a militarized U.S. foreign policy characterized by unilateralism featuring regime change and preemptive wars. Failed wars, most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan, have produced slaughter and further confrontation, a harsh reality of America's own making. The present war in Ukraine has opened a new arena of confrontation and slaughter. This reality is not entirely of our own making, yet it may well be our undoing, unless we dedicate ourselves to forging a diplomatic settlement that stops the killing and defuses tensions.

Let's make America a force for peace in the world.

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## Signers

**Dennis Fritz**, Director, Eisenhower Media Network; Command Chief Master Sergeant, U.S. Air Force (retired)
**Matthew Hoh**, Associate Director, Eisenhower Media Network; Former Marine Corps officer, and State and Defense official
**William J. Astore**, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Air Force (retired)
**Karen Kwiatkowski**, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Air Force (retired)
**Dennis Laich**, Major General, U.S. Army (retired)
**Jack Matlock**, U.S. Ambassador to the U.S.S.R., 1987-91; author of *Reagan and Gorbachev: How the Cold War Ended*
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**Ann Wright**, Colonel, U.S. Army (retired) and former U.S. diplomat

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