

Prioritize Peace and Humanitarian Aid for Ukraine Over Weapons!

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As Congress considers spending \$6.4 billion or more, William D. Hartung suggests that “the bulk of new funding should be for humanitarian aid, not guns and troops.”

While unequivocally condemning Russian President Vladimir Putin’s brutal war on Ukraine, some U.S. experts on Tuesday made the case for prioritizing diplomacy and humanitarian assistance over military aid to end the violence, help suffering Ukrainians, and promote long-term peace.

“Rather than build up weaponry in Europe, could the United States initiate negotiations about shared security, disarmament, and a military stand-down?”

Their arguments came as Russia [held](#) nuclear weapon drills and continued to [attack Kyiv](#) and [other Ukrainian cities](#)—and as the United Nations refugee agency and other humanitarian groups [called for](#) funding to aid the millions who have been displaced by the war.

Although a plan for donated fighter jets from European nations fell apart this week, various countries [have sent or pledged](#) to send arms and other military aid—including ammunition, anti-tank weapons, assault rifles, body armor, helmets, and missiles as well as fuel, medical supplies, and ration packages—to Ukrainians fighting off Russian invaders.

The Biden administration, which [maintains](#) that it won’t send U.S. troops into a war with Russia, has responded to the invasion with economic sanctions and more military aid. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said last week that over the past year, the United States has [committed](#) more than \$1 billion in security assistance to Ukraine.

The White House has [asked](#) Congress for at least \$6.4 billion—including \$3.5 billion for the Pentagon and \$2.9 billion for providing European allies with humanitarian and security assistance—but some lawmakers reportedly think the Ukraine package may ultimately top \$10 billion.

Noting plans to include that package in an annual budget Congress has pledged to finish by next week, William D. Hartung—a senior research fellow at the Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft—urged U.S. lawmakers not to cause more global conflict, [writing](#):

Whatever Congress chooses to do with respect to aid to Ukraine, the military portion should be a carefully circumscribed, not first step towards 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. And given the growing humanitarian crisis sparked by the war, the bulk of new funding should be for humanitarian aid, not guns and troops.

Beyond the question of the composition of a new aid package, Congress should refrain

from promoting steps that could push the current conflict towards a direct military confrontation between the United States and Russia. A shooting war between two nuclear-armed powers would increase the risk of escalation towards a nuclear confrontation. Avoiding that risk means no U.S. or NATO troops in Ukraine, and no imposition of a no-fly zone that would entail aerial combat between NATO and Russian forces. The Biden administration has wisely ruled out either of these options, and it should resist any pressure to pursue either of them.

While blasting the Russian invasion as “a major war crime, ranking alongside the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the Hitler-Stalin invasion of Poland in September 1939,” world-renowned intellectual Noam Chomsky also pointed out that “perhaps Putin meant what he and his associates have been saying loud and clear for years” about the eastward expansion of NATO.

The current crisis, Chomsky told C.J. Polychroniou in an interview [published](#) by *Truthout*, “has been brewing for 25 years as the U.S. contemptuously rejected Russian security concerns, in particular their clear red lines: Georgia and especially Ukraine.”

Referencing Moscow’s recent demands that preceded the invasion last week—including the exclusion of Ukraine from NATO—Chomsky said that “there is good reason to believe that this tragedy could have been avoided, until the last minute.”

Though “it’s easy to understand why those suffering from the crime may regard it as an unacceptable indulgence to inquire into why it happened and whether it could have been avoided,” he continued, “if we want to respond to the tragedy in ways that will help the victims, and avert still worse catastrophes that loom ahead, it is wise, and necessary, to learn as much as we can about what went wrong and how the course could have been corrected.”

The UN estimates that 12 million people will need relief and protection.

As lawmakers respond to the crisis in Ukraine, humanitarian aid needs to be the top priority. <https://t.co/4EnTGAg2z8>

— FCNL (Quakers) (@FCNL) [March 1, 2022](#)

Of the “grim” choices that remain, Chomsky said, “the least bad is support for the diplomatic options that still exist, in the hope of reaching an outcome not too far from what was very likely achievable a few days ago: Austrian-style neutralization of Ukraine, some version of Minsk II federalism within.”

That is “much harder to reach now,” he added, while also emphasizing that it is necessary to include “an escape hatch for Putin, or outcomes will be still more dire for Ukraine and everyone else, perhaps almost unimaginably so.”

“Like it or not,” he said, “the choices are now reduced to an ugly outcome that rewards rather than punishes Putin for the act of aggression—or the strong possibility of terminal war.”

Chomsky also asserted that “we should do anything we can to provide meaningful support for those valiantly defending their homeland against cruel aggressors, for those escaping the horrors, and for the thousands of courageous Russians publicly opposing the crime of their state at great personal risk, a lesson to all of us.”

In her weekly column for *The Washington Post*, Katrina vanden Heuvel also [encouraged](#) learning

from “Putin’s indefensible invasion” that has fueled a “perilous escalation of violence.”

“Putin has simply (and brutally) reasserted Russia’s role. The old order—with its Cold War attitudes, militaries, alliances, and enmities—is reclaiming center stage,” she wrote. *The Nation’s* editorial director and publisher continued:

NATO, adrift since the Soviet Union ended, now claims new purpose and energy. Hawks in Russia and the United States alike are emboldened. Weapons-makers are drawing up plans to profit in the coming arms buildup, and ideologues and demagogues are dusting off familiar rhetoric. China, clearly helping Russia mitigate its sanctions, now weighs heavily in the balance.

Indeed, we should expect ringing calls to arms for a decadeslong battle against authoritarianism. These cries will emanate from a foreign policy establishment that has been discredited by its serial debacles from Iraq to Libya to Afghanistan, but that will nevertheless seek to consolidate bipartisan and militarized support anew. Already an armchair warrior at the Atlantic Council has called on the United States to prepare to fight Russia and China at the same time—and double our military budget to do so.

What’s lacking here is any sense of proportion or grasp on reality. The new Cold War will sap resources and attention from pressing dangers we already face.

“The intense diplomacy spurred by the crisis should also lead to new thinking about security,” she argued. “Could security focus first on building the cooperation needed to address pandemics and climate change? Could it create institutions that divert resources from the entrenched institutions of war?”

“Rather than build up weaponry in Europe, could the United States initiate negotiations about shared security, disarmament, and a military stand-down?” vanden Heuvel wondered. “Could this war lead us to think more seriously about how to build peace rather than how to build weapons?”

Calling for a “courageous and transnational citizens’ movement demanding not simply the end of the war on Ukraine but also an end to perpetual wars” as well as “political leaders who will speak out about our real security needs,” she concluded that “by invading Ukraine, Putin demands a return to just that archaic and obsolete Cold War order. The world would be wise not to accede.”

Jessica Corbett

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