



Vladimir Putin

WHY WON'T THE U.S. NEGOTIATE TO END UKRAINE WAR?

By Prof. Jeffrey D. Sachs

For the fifth time since 2008, Russia has proposed to negotiate with the US over security arrangements, this time in proposals made by President Vladimir Putin on June 14, 2024. Four previous times, the United States rejected negotiations in favour of a neoconservative strategy to weaken or dismember Russia through war and covert operations. Such tactics have failed disastrously, devastating Ukraine in the process, and endangering the whole world.



Richard Cheney

After all the warmongering, it's time for US President Joe Biden to open negotiations for peace with Russia. Since the end of the Cold War in 1991, the Americans' grand strategy has been to weaken Russia. As early as 1992, then Defense Secretary Richard Cheney said that following the 1991 demise of the Soviet Union, Russia too should be dismembered.

In 1999, the US-led NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) alliance bombed Russia's ally, Serbia, for 78 days in order to break Serbia apart and install a massive NATO military base in breakaway Kosovo. Leaders of the US military-industrial complex vociferously supported the Chechen war against Russia in the early 2000s.

To secure these US advances against Russia, Washington aggressively pushed NATO enlargement, despite promises to Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin that NATO would not move one inch eastward from Germany. The 30-year US project, hatched originally by Cheney and the neocons, and carried forward consistently since then, has been to

weaken or even dismember Russia, surround Russia with NATO forces, and depict Russia as the belligerent power.

It is against this grim backdrop that Russian leaders have repeatedly proposed to negotiate security arrangements with Europe and the United States that would provide security for all countries concerned, not just the NATO bloc. Guided by the neocon game plan, the United States has refused to negotiate on every occasion, while trying to pin the blame on Russia for the lack of negotiations.

Now we have Russia's fifth offer of negotiations, explained clearly and cogently by Putin himself in his speech to diplomats at the Russian Foreign Ministry on June 14. Putin laid out Russia's proposed terms to end the war in Ukraine. "Ukraine should adopt a neutral, and undergo demilitarisation and de-nazification," Putin said. "These parameters were broadly agreed upon during the Istanbul negotiations in 2022, including specific details on demilitarisation such as the agreed numbers of tanks and other military equipment. We



Boris Yeltsin

Mikhail Gorbachev

reached consensus on all points.

"Certainly, the rights, freedoms, and interests of Russian-speaking citizens in Ukraine must be fully protected," he continued. "The new territorial realities, including the status of Crimea, Sevastopol, Donetsk and Lugansk people's republics, Kherson, and Zaporozhye regions as parts of the Russian Federation, should be acknowledged. These foundational principles need to be formalised through fundamental international agreements in the future. Naturally, this entails the removal of all Western sanctions against Russia as well."

Let me say a few words about negotiating. Russia's proposals should now be met at the negotiating table by proposals from the United States and Ukraine. The White House is dead wrong to evade negotiations just because of disagreements with Russia's proposals. It should put up its own proposals and get down to the business of negotiating an end to the war.

There are three core issues for Russia: Ukraine's neutrality (non-NATO enlargement), Crimea remaining in Russian hands, and boundary changes in Eastern and Southern Ukraine. The first two are almost surely non-negotiable. The end of NATO enlargement is the fundamental *casus belli*. Crimea is also core for Russia, as Crimea has been home to Russia's Black Sea fleet since 1783 and is fundamental to Russia's national security.

The third core issue, the borders of Eastern and Southern Ukraine, will be a key point of negotiations. The United States cannot pretend that borders are sacrosanct after NATO bombed Serbia in 1999 to relinquish Kosovo, and after the United States pressured Sudan to relinquish South Sudan. Yes, Ukraine's borders will be redrawn as the result of the 10 years of war, the situation on the battlefield, the choices of the local populations, and tradeoffs made at the negotiating table.

Biden needs to accept that negotiations are not a sign of weakness. As former US President John F. Kennedy put it, "Never negotiate out of fear, but never fear to negotiate." Another President, Ronald Reagan, famously described his own negotiating strategy using a Russian proverb, "Trust but verify." The neocon approach to Russia, delusional and hubristic from the start, lies in ruins.

NATO will never enlarge to Ukraine and Georgia. Russia will not be toppled by a CIA covert operation. Ukraine is being



horribly bloodied on the battlefield, often losing 1,000 or more dead and wounded in a single day. The failed neocon game plan brings us closer to nuclear Armageddon. Yet Biden still refuses to negotiate. Following Putin's speech, the US, NATO, and Ukraine firmly rejected negotiations once again. Biden and his team have still not relinquished the neocon fantasy of defeating Russia and expanding NATO to Ukraine.

The Ukrainian people have been lied to time and again by President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Biden and other leaders of

NATO countries, who told them falsely and repeatedly that Ukraine would prevail on the battlefield and that there were no options to negotiate. Ukraine is now under martial law. The public is given no say about its own slaughter. For the sake of Ukraine's very survival, and to avoid nuclear war, the President of the United States has one overriding responsibility today: Negotiate. ■

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