



## The Logistics Lifeline: Analyzing the Crucial Role of Military Aid in Ukraine's Defense Against Russian Aggression

By William Lucyshyn | December 2023

### Key Points

- There has been a significant increase in military assistance to Ukraine following Russia's 2022 invasion, including the provision of lethal weapons—the United States is the largest provider of military aid, committing over \$38 billion since the start of the Biden Administration in 2021.
- Providing military aid to Ukraine aligns with U.S. national security interests by safeguarding Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- Ongoing support for Ukraine is essential to uphold international norms, deterring aggression, and containing Russia, especially in Eastern Europe—reducing the risk of a direct military confrontation between the U.S. and Russia in defense of NATO allies.
- Continued provision of military aid is not without risks that must be carefully managed; these include the potential for deteriorating U.S.-Russian relations, the risk of nuclear escalation, opportunity costs, and resource depletion.

### Recommendation

- The United States should expand its mediation and diplomatic engagement to address the conflict's root causes; encourage Track II diplomacy as a valuable complement to traditional diplomacy; and provide security guarantees including continued military aid and logistics support in order to increase Ukraine's leverage in negotiations.

## I. Introduction

“The amateurs discuss tactics: the professionals discuss logistics.”

*This quote is often attributed to General Omar Bradley.*

Recent events in Ukraine have brought Ukraine’s relationship with the United States and other Western countries into sharp focus, particularly regarding military aid. However, the defense and security links between Ukraine and its allies started soon after Ukraine’s independence in 1991. Following Russia’s annexation of Crimea in 2014, the aid from the United States and its allies increased but consisted primarily of training along with the provision of non-lethal military equipment. With Russia’s subsequent invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, military assistance has increased dramatically, with many of its allies supplying lethal weapons to Ukraine for the first time. The United States is the largest provider of military aid, having committed \$38 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the Biden Administration through September 2023, including more than \$37.3 billion since Russia’s invasion in 2022 (DoD, 2023).

The quote above suggests that while tactical planning is essential, logistics ultimately determines the success or failure of a military operation because even the most brilliant tactical plan will be ineffective if the necessary resources are not available to execute it. The continued provision of equipment, ammunition, and weapons (along with their repair), especially from the United States, has become critical to Ukraine’s defensive operations against Russia’s aggression. While some argue that this logistics support to Ukraine would only escalate and prolong the conflict, others see it as necessary to deter further aggression and ensure Ukraine’s sovereignty and security.

This paper will explore the importance of continued logistical support to Ukraine and examine the arguments for and against this approach. We will also consider the potential impact of this support on the conflict and the broader geopolitical landscape of the region.

## II. Background

Ukraine holds significant strategic importance to the overall stability in Europe. It is located at the crossroads of Eastern Europe, serving as a bridge between Russia and the European Union. Its position makes it a crucial buffer zone between Russia and NATO member states, influencing the balance of power in the region. Consequently, stability in Ukraine is vital for regional security in Eastern Europe. Ukraine also plays a significant role in European energy security since it still serves as a transit country for natural gas pipelines transporting Russian gas to Europe (Chestney, 2023). Disruptions in energy supplies through Ukraine have widespread implications for European energy markets and the economies of neighboring countries. Ukraine has also actively participated in security and defense cooperation initiatives with NATO and other European partners. This enhanced cooperation with Ukraine strengthens the collective defense capabilities of the Euro-Atlantic community, contributes to regional stability, and is essential to counter Russian attempts to assert control over its neighbors (Girgin, 2015).

The relationship between the United States and Ukraine has navigated a complex and dynamic path marked by political, economic, and security interests. Since Ukraine declared independence from the

Soviet Union in 1991, both nations have engaged in a multifaceted interaction shaped by historical events and shifting geopolitical dynamics. Following Ukraine's emergence as a sovereign nation in 1991, the United States promptly recognized its independence and established diplomatic relations. In the early years, the United States focused on extending humanitarian aid and fostering democratic reforms within Ukraine. This commitment laid the foundation for the USAID bilateral agreement with Ukraine to help the country develop its economic, political, and societal potential (CFR, 2022; USAID, n.d.; Clinton, W. J., 1994).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the United States began supporting Ukraine's aspirations to integrate into Euro-Atlantic institutions. Recognizing the strategic importance of Ukraine, the United States signed the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership between NATO and Ukraine in 1997 (Kriendler, 2007). This agreement paved the way for increased cooperation, including military collaboration and assistance in modernizing Ukraine's defense forces.

2004 witnessed the Orange Revolution, a significant turning point in Ukraine's political landscape. That year, a presidential race saw Western-oriented Yushchenko running against Viktor Yanukovich, a candidate supported by Moscow. The election was a contest between those seeking closer ties with the West and those who favored friendlier relations with Russia. After the election of Yanukovich, Ukraine's Supreme Court overturned the results of the disputed presidential election due to "systemic and massive violations" and ordered a new runoff between the main candidates by December 26 (Myers, 2004). Then, protesters dressed in orange (i.e., Yushchenko's campaign color) took to the streets and forced a re-vote in December, which Yushchenko won. The United States supported the Ukrainian people's aspirations for democracy and fair elections and helped diplomatically resolve the post-election crisis. However, Yanukovich was reelected in 2010, and he precipitated the next crisis with his decision to pursue closer ties with Russia and abandon an association agreement with the European Union (CFR, n.d.; Berger, M., 2019). His actions sparked the widespread Euromaidan protests in Ukraine, leading to Yanukovich's ouster and the election of a pro-Western government in 2014.

Russia's response, using the pretext of protecting a large ethnic Russian population from the new government in Kyiv, was to annex Crimea militarily. This action was met with international condemnation, resulting in Western countries imposing economic sanctions against Russia. The conflict escalated to the eastern Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, where pro-Russian separatists held independence referendums and seized control. Even though Russia denied military involvement, a buildup of Russian troops and military equipment was reported near Donetsk and was accompanied by Russian cross-border shelling. Sporadic fighting and shelling continued along the frontlines separating these Russian- and Ukrainian-controlled eastern border regions. The conflict remained an active stalemate until late 2021 when Russia began an unprecedented buildup of forces on its border with Belarus and along the Russia-Ukraine border. On February 24, 2022, Russia began a full-scale invasion of Ukraine (CPA, 2022).

The initial Russian strategy was to attempt to use overwhelming force in the hopes of a quick victory, and even United States officials predicted the fall of Kyiv in a matter of days (Sciutto and Williams, 2022). However, the Ukrainian Armed Forces (UAF) have not only held out much longer than many believed possible, but they have also mounted a counteroffensive and have forced the invaders to retreat from some of their early gains (Austin, 2022).

As of early 2023, the conflict had transitioned into a war of attrition, with forces dug into trenches along a front stretching from 500 to 600 miles in eastern Ukraine. In a war of attrition, neither side seeks a decisive victory through a single battle or campaign. Instead, both sides engage in a series of skirmishes and battles, gradually eroding each other's resources with the piecemeal destruction of personnel and material. This type of warfare can be ferocious and costly, as both sides suffer heavy losses and casualties over a long period (Urcosta, 2022; CSIS, 2023).

### III. United States weapon support to Ukraine

During the presidency of Donald Trump (2017-2021), the United States moved beyond the non-lethal military assistance that the Obama administration had allowed when the Department of State approved the sale of lethal arms (anti-tank weapons) to Ukraine (Berger, 2019). Under President Biden, the United States has reaffirmed its commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The United States has continued to expand its support, providing Ukraine with an increasing variety of weapons and aid to support its defense capabilities in the ongoing conflict with Russia. Some advanced, complex systems, as well as expendable munitions, were included in the weapons provided. See the inset below for a complete list of supplies and equipment provided as of February 2023. The following are some examples of the weapons and military aid provided:

- **Anti-Tank Systems:** The United States has supplied Ukraine with anti-tank weapons such as the Javelin, a man-portable anti-tank guided missile, and other expendable munitions, which proved highly effective against Russia's large numbers of armored vehicles.



- **Artillery Systems:** The United States has provided Ukraine with High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS), Howitzers, and mortars. The systems that have, however, been key in reversing Russia's gains are the long-range artillery systems provided by the United States. The M777 howitzer uses a digital fire control system that provides an accuracy of ten meters at ranges up to twenty-five miles when using the GPS-guided Excalibur munition. Perhaps the weapon having the most significant impact on the battlefield is the HIMARS, an agile mobile launcher that can fire six precision-guided rockets at ranges of over 40 miles. It is a battle-tested system used by the U.S. military in the first Gulf War and during the more recent conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan.



- **Air Defense Systems:** In addition to the man-portable Stinger anti-aircraft system, the United States has delivered the National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS), which can provide short- to medium-range protection against drones, missiles, and some aircraft, as well as offer Ukraine protection from Russian air strikes (Parsons, 2022). The United States, Germany, and The Netherlands have also provided surplus Patriot batteries – each with a radar and several launchers for longer-range protection. These have proved extraordinarily effective; Ukraine recently used the Patriot batteries to shoot down four Russian fighters and two helicopters thirty miles inside Russia in a matter of hours (Axe, 2023b).



- **Small Arms and Ammunition:** The United States has supplied Ukraine with small arms, such as rifles, machine guns, and sniper rifles, along with accompanying ammunition. These weapons provide Ukrainian forces with improved firepower and increased operational capabilities.

The Biden administration recently decided to supply Ukraine with 155mm howitzer rounds capable of dispensing smaller explosive submunitions, often called “bomblets.” These bomblets are scattered over a wide area and intended to destroy multiple targets simultaneously. These are referred to as cluster munitions and have been controversial in the international community since they can pose risks to civilians, as unexploded submunitions can remain a threat even after the conflict has ended. Many countries and international organizations have advocated for their prohibition due to the humanitarian concerns associated with their use. However, using these area weapons will potentially reduce the demand for 155mm artillery rounds, especially considering the diminishing U.S. inventory (since the United States has already provided over two million rounds to Ukraine) (Merchant et al., 2023; Copp and Baldor, 2023).

- **Communications and Intelligence Equipment:** The United States has provided Ukraine with advanced communications systems and intelligence equipment to enhance situational awareness and command and control capabilities. These systems included secure communication devices, unmanned aerial systems (drones), and intelligence gathering and analysis tools.
- **Sustainment Support:** This conflict has exceeded the 500-day mark, and it is unclear how long it will last; some Western analysts have estimated it may last years (Falk, 2022). After many months of near-constant use, the UAF’s battle-worn systems frequently need maintenance and repair. With the speed with which allies provided these systems to Ukraine, it was not possible to train Ukrainian maintainers to make the necessary repairs. It became evident that in addition to the spare parts provided, Kyiv would need expert assistance to repair equipment near the front lines.

In the past, the Department of Defense (DoD) has used contractors to bridge gaps in skills and experience to maintain its deployed systems, including thousands of personnel for training and maintenance in Iraq and Afghanistan. For example, to help maintain its

HIMARS at a high state of readiness in Iraq, Lockheed Martin had a team of field service representatives deployed with operational units to expedite troubleshooting and repairs (Lucyshyn and Rigilano, 2018). Some have suggested that contractor support could be used to help sustain U.S. weapons in Ukraine since this would neither violate the Administration's position not to deploy any service members nor cross the red line established by Putin (Cancian, 2022; McCausland, 2022). Deploying contractors, however, would risk having them near the front lines and could lead to contractors being injured or captured. This level of U.S. involvement would significantly escalate the conflict and has not been considered by the Administration.

To bridge the gap in maintainer skill levels, without a forward presence, the U.S. Army developed an innovative, ad hoc wartime tele-maintenance network at a military base in Poland. There, forty troops and Ukrainian linguists have established fourteen chat rooms, each dedicated to a specific U.S. weapon system. This virtual assistance helps the UAF operate its weapons well beyond its design limits. Using encrypted chats and IPAD images, the American troops help to diagnose problems virtually, and when the spare parts are delivered, they guide the Ukrainians through the repairs. Chats supporting the HIMARS and howitzers are considered priorities and are handled in minutes, and spare parts are delivered within days (Youssef and Kalin, 2022). In some urgent cases, when replacement parts are not available, greater ingenuity is required. Using computer-assisted design (CAD) software, the Ukrainians draw up designs for substitute parts, have them reviewed by U.S. specialists, and then produce them locally for a temporary repair (Tucker, 2022). The chat network has enabled the UAF to keep its sixteen HIMARS systems operational.

Some repairs cannot be handled in the field, however. Many of Ukraine's M777 howitzers have been fired so much that their barrels have worn out. These barrels can be up to twenty feet long, weigh thousands of pounds, and cannot be replaced in the field. For these repairs, the U.S. European Command (EUCOM) has established a facility in Poland where crews can replace the barrels and make other necessary repairs (Ismay & Gibbons-Neff, 2022). The howitzers are then returned to the field.

It's important to note that the provision of military aid and weapons by the United States to Ukraine is subject to specific agreements, legal requirements, and considerations of strategic and political significance. The types and quantities of weapons supplied can vary depending on these factors and the evolving needs of Ukraine's defense forces in the context of the conflict.

**As of February 27, 2023, the DoD has provided the following security assistance to Ukraine (CRS, 2023)**

- 38 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and ammunition
- 8 National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS); 1 Patriot air defense battery; and other air defense systems
- 31 M1 Abrams tanks, 45 T-72B tanks and 109 Bradley infantry fighting vehicles
- 300 M113 and 90 Stryker Armored Personnel Carriers
- 1,600+ Stinger anti-aircraft systems
- 8,500+ Javelin anti-armor systems and 54,000+ other anti-armor systems
- 1,800+ Phoenix Ghost Tactical UAS, 700+ Switchblade Tactical UAS, and other UAS
- 160 155 mm and 72 105 mm Howitzers and artillery
- 30 120 mm mortar systems
- Remote Anti-Armor Mine (RAAM) Systems
- 2,500+ Tube-Launched, Optically-Tracked, Wire- Guided (TOW) missiles, high-speed anti-radiation missiles (HARMS), and laser-guided rocket systems
- 13,000+ grenade launchers and small arms
- communications, radar, and intelligence equipment
- training, maintenance, and sustainment.

#### **IV. Analysis of continued U.S. military aid to Ukraine**

Providing military aid to Ukraine offers a range of advantages that align closely with U.S. national security interests. Firstly, this assistance plays a pivotal role in safeguarding Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Moreover, it contributes significantly to bolstering European security and advancing broader strategic objectives. By actively supporting Ukraine in its efforts to deter and defend against external aggression, the United States unequivocally upholds the fundamental principle of territorial integrity, which stands as a cornerstone of the international order. This commitment, in turn, sends a consistent message to other nations, affirming that the United States firmly opposes any unlawful annexation or occupation. Significantly, the infusion of weaponry enhances Ukraine's alignment with Western nations, fostering greater compatibility and interoperability with NATO (Garamone, 2022).

Furthermore, providing military aid to Ukraine serves the dual purpose of supporting U.S. national security interests and aligning with NATO's goals by deterring aggression and containing Russia. President Putin has openly articulated his vision of re-establishing a "historical Russia," encompassing religious, linguistic, and historical elements rooted in regions previously controlled by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. His call for NATO to diminish its presence in countries he considers part of this historical Russia, including Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, and Finland, raises concerns (Sizov, 2023).

Without a reevaluation of NATO's membership, or even if such an adjustment were made, Eastern Europe would remain vulnerable to ongoing and direct military threats from Russia. Should this threat materialize, invoking Article 5 of the NATO Treaty, which mandates collective defense among member states, would become imperative. Consequently, the United States would find itself

drawn into a direct conflict with Russia, necessitating the deployment of a substantial contingent of NATO forces in the region. This prospect carries profound implications (Sizov, 2023).

Given the critical role that weapons, equipment, and expertise play in Ukraine's defensive operations against Russian aggression, providing such support has become indispensable. These resources enable a robust defense and counteroffensive, potentially dissuading Russia from continuing hostilities and, in turn, potentially shortening the duration of the conflict and facilitating a sustainable peace. General Petraeus, the former CIA Director, has expressed the view that ongoing U.S. support in terms of weapons and operational capabilities could even pave the way for Ukraine to achieve victory on the battlefield and regain territories seized by Russia (Petraeus, 2022). Thus far, the United States has demonstrated its commitment to providing the necessary assistance.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential negative consequences and associated risks of providing military aid to Ukraine. While providing vital support and military aid to Ukraine has yielded significant benefits and strategic alignments for the United States, it has simultaneously triggered substantial actions that have led to a deterioration in U.S.-Russian relations and Sino-U.S. relations, heightened risk for nuclear escalation, opportunity costs of investment in Ukraine's defense, a drawdown of some U.S. weapons stockpiles, and the worsening of the humanitarian consequences of the war.

In response to Russia's actions within Ukraine, the United States, in coordination with its European allies, initiated a series of economic sanctions targeting critical sectors of the Russian economy, including energy, finance, and defense, as well as Russian elites and their family members. These sanctions have been substantial, adversely affecting Russia's economy to the extent that experts have predicted a contraction of up to 15 percent in Russia's GDP (The White House, 2022). Importantly, this economic pressure has significantly contributed to the overall deterioration of U.S.-Russia relations. It is also essential to consider that further escalation through increased militarization in Ukraine could transform the conflict into a proxy war between major global powers, heightening the risk of unintended escalation and fostering broader regional instability. Managing this delicate situation and preventing the conflict from evolving into a proxy struggle will necessitate meticulous and astute diplomatic efforts.

The conflict's geopolitical ramifications have also cast a significant shadow over the U.S.-Sino relationship. How the United States and China react to the Ukraine conflict might influence perceptions of their determination, which could indirectly impact how they engage on various issues since countries often assess the strength and resolve of their potential partners or rivals based on their responses to international events.

China's unwavering support for Russia stems from the strong personal rapport between Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Putin, fueled by their shared distrust of Western powers. China's stance is further motivated by its geopolitical and ideological interests and concerns that a weakened Putin could pave the way for a more Western-friendly Russia or even a new regime, potentially destabilizing China's strategic position. This intricate interplay underscores the multifaceted dynamics of global politics and the critical importance of the China-Russia alignment in challenging American hegemony (Gan, 2023).

The United States has expressed deep concerns regarding China's support for Russia, especially regarding potential weapon supplies. While Secretary of State Antony Blinken has warned China

against such support, there are indications that China may have already provided non-lethal, dual-use products to Russia. The exact extent of this support remains uncertain. China's military-civil fusion policy blurs the lines between civilian and military technology development, posing a significant challenge in controlling the flow of military-related technology to potential adversaries. The United States has responded by imposing restrictions on trade with specific Chinese companies involved in defense, yet the intricate web of global supply chains complicates enforcement efforts. Critics argue that such export controls might inadvertently drive China to invest more heavily in domestic innovation. To effectively compete with China's military-civil fusion strategy, the United States and its allies must prioritize innovation while safeguarding open markets. China holds a significant lead in numerous critical technologies<sup>1</sup>, making the balance between innovation and security a paramount concern (Gan, 2023).

According to a U.S. intelligence report, China has become an increasingly vital economic partner to Russia. Intelligence officials believe that China has actively supplied military equipment (i.e., navigation equipment, fighter jet components, and various equipment to Russian defense firms, including over \$12 million worth of drones and drone parts) to Russia and aided it in evading sanctions related to the Ukraine conflict. U.S. officials hope this report will serve as a clear signal to China that the United States will know if they take further actions to enable Russia's activities in Ukraine (Schrader, 2023).

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has also brought the risk of a nuclear conflict between Moscow and the West into focus. Although NATO's nuclear shield has effectively deterred Russian aggression against NATO member countries, the presence of the nuclear arsenal failed to deter Putin's aggression toward Ukraine.

On the contrary, Russia's possession of nuclear weapons may have inadvertently emboldened Putin. He has shown a willingness to exploit the threat of nuclear warfare to deter international intervention. There have also been discussions among senior Russian military officials about using nuclear weapons in Ukraine, although without direct involvement from Putin. These meetings could be considered initial steps toward more serious nuclear signaling (de Dreuzuy and Gilli, 2022). These threats have not impacted Ukraine's armed forces; they have not curbed their tenacious defensive actions and even launched strikes on targets within Russian territory.

While all NATO countries agree that the likelihood of Russia resorting to nuclear weapons remains low, there is a divergence of views among the United States and some allies regarding when and how this risk could increase. Some officials believe Russia has a heightened risk of using a limited nuclear strike with low-yield tactical weapons to prevent a major defeat or if Ukraine makes significant territorial gains. Others argue that yielding to such threats would only encourage Russia to employ "nuclear blackmail" in the future. For now, the Biden administration acknowledges the seriousness of the nuclear threat but emphasizes that it will not impede the current levels of U.S. support for Ukraine. Additionally, other Western countries have not stopped or reduced their assistance to Ukrainian troops (Gramer, 2023; Collina, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> China has established a significant lead over the United States in various critical and emerging technology domains, positioning itself as a global science and technology superpower. This lead encompasses 37 out of 44 technologies tracked by ASPI (Australian Strategic Policy Institute) and spans fields such as defense, space, robotics, energy, biotechnology, artificial intelligence (AI), and quantum technology (Gaida et al., 2023).

Of course, providing military aid also involves financial and resource commitments. The allocation of resources toward military assistance to Ukraine diverts funds from other domestic or international priorities, raising questions about the opportunity cost of such assistance (Demirjian, 2023). Additionally, supplying Ukraine has resulted in a drawdown of U.S. weapons inventories, some of which have long lead times to replace, creating a potential vulnerability even as the United States faces increasing tension in the Pacific region.

For example, early on, the United States supplied Ukraine with a significant number of Javelin anti-tank missiles, a very effective anti-tank weapon. As a result, the U.S. inventory of Javelins has been significantly reduced, with approximately one-third of its stock already provided to Ukraine. This has raised concerns as the United States nears a point where it must reduce transfers to maintain sufficient stockpiles for its own military plans. The slow production rate of new missiles means replenishing the stock will take several years, and replacing missiles already provided to Ukraine could take years. Similar challenges are faced with other systems like Stinger anti-aircraft missiles (Cancian, 2022).

Ukraine also extensively uses artillery in the ongoing conflict, leading to a rapid depletion of available ammunition. Despite hopes of relying more on combined arms maneuvers, the extensive use of artillery is due to Russia's mining of the land, necessitating longer-range attacks. This has led to concerns about potential shortages that could hinder Ukraine's progress on the battlefield. The United States has supplied Ukraine with 155mm artillery rounds, the NATO standard, and production is ramping up. The shortage of artillery ammunition highlights a lack of preparation for a protracted land war after decades of relative peace. The United States must balance its supply to Ukraine with its own strategic reserves for potential conflicts (Bertrand et al., 2023; Axe, 2023a)

On the other hand, some believe that military aid is an excellent investment that would yield significant benefits if Russia were defeated. The amount invested by the United States, a mere 5.6 percent of the total U.S. defense spending, is minuscule compared to the returns it receives, i.e., eroding and degrading Russia's military capabilities. For example, according to monitoring group Oryx, Russia may have lost up to half of its operational tank fleet since the beginning of the Ukraine war. Oryx has verified 1,000 distinct tank losses, with an additional 544 tanks captured by Ukrainian forces, 79 damaged, and 65 abandoned. These numbers do not include unverified losses, suggesting the toll could be significantly higher. Before the war, Russia had approximately 3,000 operational tanks (Lendon, 2023). In geopolitical terms, the war in Ukraine presents an opportunity for the United States to weaken Russia's conventional defense capability without deploying troops or risking American lives (Carbonara, 2022)

Finally, while military aid bolsters Ukraine's defense capabilities, it does not directly address the underlying humanitarian crisis caused by the conflict. The provision of weapons and the potential escalation of hostilities can exacerbate the humanitarian situation. The war has severely damaged Ukraine's infrastructure, including healthcare facilities, residential areas, and power plants. Millions of people across the country continue to face limited or no access to electrical power, clean water, and other essential supplies. The World Bank estimated the cost of reconstruction, as of December 2022, at up to \$641 billion (Roy, 2023). As a direct consequence of the invasion, more than thirteen million people, comprising nearly a third of Ukraine's prewar population, have been displaced, with over five million internally displaced and more than eight million becoming refugees in neighboring countries. As of June 2023, there have been 8,983 confirmed deaths and 15,442 injuries, but the figures are believed to be higher. Additionally, U.S. officials claim that Russian forces forcibly

transferred up to 1.6 million Ukrainian refugees to Russian territory by July 2022, with reports of coercion to renounce their Ukrainian nationality. (Roy, 2023).

## **V. Balancing Diplomacy and Military Aid: Navigating a Meaningful Peace Process in the Ukraine-Russia Conflict**

In the complex landscape of international conflicts, pursuing a meaningful peace process often requires a delicate balance between diplomatic engagement and military aid. Many voices, including realist and anti-war perspectives, are calling for President Biden and the Western community to mediate a deal between Ukraine and Russia to end the violence. Meaningful peace, however, is not just the absence of conflict; it necessitates addressing the root causes of the disagreement. Diplomatic solutions should focus on acknowledging and redressing the underlying grievances of both parties. By acknowledging the legitimate interests of all sides, negotiations can progress toward a mutually acceptable agreement. The United States and NATO must communicate to Russia and the rest of the world that Russia's legitimate security concerns can be addressed through diplomacy instead of resorting to violence (Taylor, 2023).

A lasting political settlement should aim for regional stability and respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity while considering Russia's security concerns. However, as the humanitarian toll continues to rise, Ukraine may need to consider agreeing to autonomy arrangements or special status for certain regions while preserving Ukraine's overall sovereignty to end the conflict; a decision the Ukrainian government and people will need to make.

While prioritizing diplomacy and mediation is crucial, it is essential to recognize the potential drawbacks of minimizing military aid. Continued military assistance is pivotal in deterring further Russian aggression and maintaining Ukraine's defensive capabilities. Without such support, Ukraine's ability to protect its territory and population could be compromised, potentially leading to escalated violence and a worsening security situation. Perceiving a weakened stance, they may engage in aggressive actions, leading to increased violence, human suffering, and a deteriorating security situation in Ukraine. The absence of military support may fail to deter or discourage such aggressions and undermine Ukraine's defensive capabilities, jeopardizing its ability to protect its territory and civilian population. Withholding military support also diminishes the U.S.'s leverage in negotiations, making it more challenging to compel Russia to engage in meaningful dialogue or to make concessions.

Finding the proper equilibrium between diplomatic engagement and military aid is critical to addressing the Ukraine-Russia conflict. A comprehensive approach that combines necessary military support with diplomatic negotiations is essential. This strategy provides leverage in negotiations, encourages both sides to engage in meaningful dialogue, and maximizes the chances of achieving a fair and lasting resolution while safeguarding the interests of all stakeholders.

The United States can play a significant and multifaceted role in facilitating a meaningful peace process in the Ukraine-Russia conflict. Given its diplomatic influence, economic leverage, and military capabilities, the United States has the potential to make substantial contributions to resolving the conflict while upholding its strategic interests and those of the international community. Therefore, the United States should consider the following steps:

- 1.) Expand mediation and diplomatic engagement*

In the context of the Ukraine-Russia conflict, the United States and its Western allies should bolster diplomatic efforts and continue to utilize international organizations such as the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)<sup>2</sup> to facilitate discussions and mediate a resolution. The international community should provide a platform for open dialogue, enabling Ukraine and Russia to voice their grievances and aspirations and potentially agree to an armistice. Although an armistice would not address the root cause of the conflict it could create the opportunity for the intensification of diplomatic negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, allowing them to focus on finding solutions and address their underlying issues.

President Putin has hinted at a willingness to negotiate, but he has insisted that Ukraine recognize Russia's annexation of four Ukrainian regions. Conversely, in December 2022, Ukraine's President Zelensky put forth a non-negotiable 10-point peace plan that called for Russia to restore Ukraine's territorial integrity (with Russia occupying nearly 20% of Ukraine's territory at that time) and to withdraw all armed forces from the country. While Ukraine has achieved some successes in certain areas, Russia still holds strategically important assets, including a nuclear power plant and the entire Azov Sea coastline. The impasse in bilateral negotiations revolves around the control of the territory occupied by Russia within Ukraine's internationally recognized borders (Trevelyan, 2022; Partlett, 2023), raising ethical concerns about pressuring Ukraine to discuss the status of its sovereign territory. Thus far, the goal of U.S. policy is to enable Ukraine to take back the territory that Russia seized since its invasion on February 24, 2022 (Mauldin, 2022).

China has entered the fray by releasing a twelve-point document outlining its stance on the Ukraine conflict, aimed at dispelling Western allegations of complicity with Russia and portraying itself as a responsible global power. However, the document lacks specificity on critical issues such as territorial disputes and security guarantees, aiming to maintain ambiguity while positioning China as an influential actor in the conflict without direct involvement. On the surface, there is also an opportunity for the United States and China to collaboratively engage with Russia and Ukraine to facilitate and encourage negotiations. However, China benefits from a good relationship with Russia, a major supplier of its energy resources and strategic partner in opposing Western geopolitical dominance, and faces challenges in claiming the role of a peacemaker due to its continued support for Russia. (Gabuev, 2023). Additionally, a negotiated peace does not seem to be China's primary objective. The ongoing conflict seems to support its strategic objectives better, i.e., diverting U.S. resources and attention from the Indo-Pacific.

Reflecting on the second year of the Ukraine war prompts considerations of alternative strategies. While questions persist about providing more weapons and imposing sanctions on Russia, successful diplomatic strategies should be recognized. Diplomatic efforts have included information campaigns, intelligence sharing, and coordination with allies to counter Russian aggression. The unexpected 2022 Russian invasion saw well-organized U.S. preparations, including partnerships with

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<sup>2</sup> The OSCE had previously brokered the Minsk Agreements, an outline roadmap for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, in 2015. These agreements emphasized a ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons, release of prisoners of war, constitutional reform in Ukraine granting limited self-government to Donbas and Luhansk, and restoring control of the state border to the Ukrainian government, among other measures. Implementing the Minsk Agreements would have been a step toward a political settlement, but little progress was made. On February 22, 2022, Russia officially recognized the two breakaway Ukrainian Oblasts Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states, and Putin declared that the Minsk agreements "no longer existed." Russia then invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

the private sector and diplomatic efforts to uphold Ukraine's sovereignty. Diplomatic expertise and resilience remain crucial in supporting Ukraine and countering Russia's ambitions (Braunohler and Reveron, 2023).

President Biden has appointed a new ambassador to Ukraine, and top diplomats and defense officials have visited the war-torn country. The visit emphasized increased military assistance and the reestablishment of diplomatic presence after a hasty February evacuation. During the visit, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin expressed confidence in the West's ability to counter Russian President Vladimir Putin despite Russian attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure. The reopening of the U.S. embassy in Kyiv and the return of American diplomats to Ukraine in May 2022, despite security risks, are seen as essential for closer coordination and consular services (Ryan et al., 2022).

After 15 months of fighting, the trajectory of the Ukraine war indicates that neither side, even with external assistance, may have the capacity for a decisive military victory. Russia and Ukraine can pose a perpetual threat to each other, and the dispute over the areas Russia claims to annex remains unresolved. A counteroffensive by Ukraine, even if successful, may not end the conflict. Therefore, Western governments and Ukraine may need to consider an endgame strategy that transcends military advancements. An armistice agreement, rather than a comprehensive political settlement, is perhaps the most plausible path to ending the war in the near term, given the fundamental differences between Russia and Ukraine.

Supporters and opponents of a negotiated agreement to end the war in Ukraine have differing assumptions about the outcomes. Proponents believe negotiations can lead to peace, even if they do not fully restore Ukraine's territory. At the same time, opponents argue that such an agreement might only temporarily halt fighting and encourage Russia to resume aggression later. Assumptions about the ongoing war play a significant role in shaping these beliefs, with supporters viewing a Ukrainian victory as improbable and negotiations as the only path to survival, while opponents believe Ukraine's victory remains feasible. Historical context, Russia's expansionist history, and the effectiveness of negotiated settlements are critical factors in assessing the potential outcomes of negotiations (Motyl, 2023).

## 2.) *Encouraging track II diplomacy:*

Track Two diplomacy is a valuable complement to conventional diplomacy, facilitating communication and strategic interactions among conflicting parties through unofficial means. It serves as an informal bridge between adversarial nations or groups, aiding in shaping public opinion and mobilizing resources for conflict resolution. While it cannot replace official negotiations, Track Two diplomacy compensates for leadership constraints by involving grassroots and mid-level players. Nevertheless, it has limitations, including limited influence on foreign policy, protracted results, reduced effectiveness during active conflict, resource constraints, challenges in authoritarian regimes, and coordination difficulties due to multiple actors (Mapendere, 2000).

A group of former top U.S. national security officials has already initiated secret negotiations with prominent Russians connected to the Kremlin, including Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister. They aim to lay the groundwork for future discussions to end the Ukraine war. The objective is to maintain open communication channels with Russia and explore possibilities for future negotiations, compromises, and diplomatic solutions to resolve the conflict. It's important to

note that these talks were not initiated by the Biden administration but were undertaken independently. Key participants in these meetings included Richard Haass, Charles Kupchan, and Thomas Graham, addressing critical issues such as the fate of Russian-held territory in Ukraine and potential diplomatic resolutions (Lederman, 2023). These discussions involved former Pentagon officials and individuals from the Russian foreign policy sphere to facilitate communication while preserving the anonymity of Russian participants. The Ukrainian President's office refrained from specific comments on these reports but emphasized that Ukraine's fate cannot be determined without its involvement.

Examples like the Oslo Accords demonstrate that Track 2 diplomacy can play a significant role in conflict resolution. These exchanges can be curated and structured to facilitate discussions and relationship-building, even in the midst of conflict. In light of the ongoing conflict, utilizing all available tools, including Track 2 diplomacy, becomes imperative for promoting dialogue and resolution.

### *3.) Provide security guarantees*

The United States can continue providing security assurances to Ukraine, offering reassurance of its support and acting as a deterrent against further Russian aggression.

The ongoing conflict in Ukraine prompts questions regarding how to guarantee the country's future security, given the intricate nature of the conflict and the involvement of various stakeholders. The concept of security guarantees involves delicate balancing. Proposals include establishing a "strategic partnership" between Ukraine and Western nations, equipping Ukraine for its defense while stopping short of full NATO or E.U. membership. Nonetheless, any option falling short of NATO membership may be met with skepticism by Ukraine due to past unfulfilled promises.

The Western approach is cautious, aiming to balance deterring Russia and avoiding provocation. The potential engagement of individual NATO allies, such as deploying troops to Ukraine, presents challenges and the possibility of provoking Russia. Ukraine's ultimate security guarantee lies in NATO membership, but this remains a complex endeavor due to geopolitical considerations. If Ukraine achieves a complete victory over Russia, including the recovery of Crimea, NATO membership becomes a more viable option. However, significant risks are associated with a total defeat of Russia, which could lead to instability within Russia.

In the interim, Ukrainian President Zelensky envisions Ukraine and the United States reaching security assurances akin to those extended to Israel, encompassing weaponry, technology, training, and financial support. He believes these guarantees will remain effective irrespective of changes in U.S. presidential leadership, as they are determined by Congress (Ukrainska Pravda, 2023). While military aid, including equipment, training, and intelligence sharing, can bolster Ukraine's defensive capabilities and demonstrate its commitment to sovereignty, it's essential to acknowledge the significant disparities between Ukraine and Israel. Israel boasts a robust conventional military capable of addressing diverse threats, holds treaties and agreements with most neighboring nations, produces advanced military technology, and maintains a nuclear deterrent. In contrast, Ukraine lacks these advantages, and its defense needs far surpass those of Israel. While annual military support could help, relying solely on the "Israel Model" would not be sufficient to ensure Ukraine's long-term security (Binnendijk and Kramer, 2023).

The war's conclusion plays a pivotal role in determining the best approach to ensure Ukraine's security. Diplomatic ingenuity will be required to provide Ukraine with a solid prospect of peace and security backed by its allies, given the complexities of the conflict and the diverse interests of the nations involved (Erlanger, 2023).

## **VI. Conclusion**

The conflict in Ukraine has highlighted the importance of continued military logistics support from the United States and its allies. The Biden Administration asserts that Russia's invasion of Ukraine directly threatens European security and poses a significant challenge to NATO allies. Ukraine holds strategic significance as a buffer zone between Russia and NATO member states, influencing the balance of power in the region. The stability of Ukraine is vital for regional security in Eastern Europe and European energy markets. Additionally, Ukraine's participation in security and defense cooperation initiatives with NATO and other European partners strengthens collective defense capabilities and counters Russian attempts to assert control over its neighbors. Therefore, providing military aid to Ukraine is not merely an act of solidarity but a strategic imperative that aligns with U.S. national security interests.

Continued support for Ukraine reinforces the fundamental principle of territorial integrity, sending a clear message to the world that the United States opposes unlawful annexations and occupations. It also strengthens Ukraine's alignment with Western nations and enhances its interoperability with NATO, contributing to European security and broader strategic objectives. Moreover, continued military aid serves as a deterrent to Russian aggression and helps contain Russia's expansionist ambitions. The conflict in Ukraine has highlighted Russia's willingness to use force to redraw borders, posing a direct threat to Eastern Europe. Without ongoing support for Ukraine, the risk of a direct military confrontation between the United States and Russia in defense of NATO allies becomes more significant, with potential global implications. Although an armistice could provide a ceasefire, the broader political and territorial issues would remain unresolved.

However, providing this aid is not without risks and challenges, and it is essential to acknowledge the potential risks and consequences, including the escalation of the conflict and strained U.S.-Russian relations. While military aid is crucial, it should be accompanied by diplomatic efforts to address the conflict's root causes. A meaningful peace process that respects Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity while considering Russia's security concerns is essential for a lasting resolution. By striking the right balance between diplomatic engagement and continued military support, the U.S. and the international community can work towards sustainable peace in Ukraine, ensuring the region's stability, security, and prosperity. It is a complex challenge that the United States and its allies must continue to address with diligence, resolve, and a commitment to upholding international norms and values.

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