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Avoiding the Dangers of a Protracted Conflict in Ukraine

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Executive Summary

A protracted conflict in Ukraine looks increasingly plausible. Russia continues to launch attacks on military and civilian targets, and the United States and its partners are increasing shipments of arms to the Zelensky government. Washington is reportedly making plans to support long-term guerrilla warfare against Russian forces, should Kyiv fall.

The current path toward a protracted war in Ukraine is highly undesirable and is laden with grave risks to the interests of the United States, Ukraine, and the international community. Such risks include:

- a high cost in Ukrainian lives and suffering and the destruction of Ukraine – its infrastructure, institutions, and social fabric;
- radicalization of Ukrainian society and a consequent civil war;
- escalation to a great-power war, potentially involving nuclear weapons and pitting NATO against Russia, thereby threatening U.S. national security;
- a weakening of NATO's cohesion;
- a prolonged global recession that strikes the U.S. as hard as it will any other nation.

The United States and its allies should avoid these destructive outcomes by prioritizing support for the Ukrainian government to achieve a diplomatic settlement. Such a settlement will result in a more secure outcome for Ukraine, the United States, the European allies, and the rest of the world. While the details of such a settlement lie beyond this brief's scope, the progress of Ukrainian–Russian talks indicates that a settlement providing for meaningful sovereignty and independence for Ukraine is possible.

Avoiding a protracted conflict also implies that the United States should not adopt maximalist objectives, such as regime change in Moscow or the complete and decisive defeat of Russia. It should instead deploy sanctions to build up Ukraine's negotiating leverage.

The plausibility of an extended war

Just a week into the invasion Russia launched February 24, officials in the U.S. and British governments warned that even though they expected Russia to achieve a "tactical seizure" of Kyiv and most of Ukraine within a few months at most, the war itself could easily last years.¹

Any continued conflict would likely not be brief. U.S. politicians and former government officials refer frequently to the possibility of making Ukraine "Putin's Afghanistan," indicating that many in Washington see a protracted conflict as a live option.

A protracted conflict of this kind is entirely plausible. In the fourth week of its invasion, Russia's drive to capture much additional territory appears to have stalled. But even if Kyiv eventually falls, Ukrainian forces could continue the war indefinitely by battling from areas of western Ukraine not occupied by the Russians or by supplying arms to an underground resistance to engage in an extended insurgency in Russian-occupied regions. For eight years, Ukrainian officials have made contingency plans to establish a government in Lviv, in the far west of Ukraine, or possibly in Poland.² NATO allies could prolong the conflict indefinitely, if they so choose, by supplying such a government with weapons and matériel.

¹ "Russian Forces close in on Ukraine's capital as death toll mounts." CBS News, February 28, 2022. <https://www.cbsnews.com/live-updates/russia-ukraine-news-kyiv-war-putin-invasion-talks-today/>.

² Bertrand, Natasha, and Kylie Atwood. "U.S. and Europe weigh plans for Ukrainian government in exile." CNN, March 7, 2022. <https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/06/politics/ukraine-government-exile-us-europe/index.html>.

There is ample evidence that the ground is being laid for this possibility. *The Washington Post* recently reported, “Ukraine’s allies are planning how to help establish and support a government-in-exile, which could direct guerrilla operations against Russian occupiers, according to several U.S. and European officials.”³ Even if Russia does not occupy much of Ukraine, working through a government in Lviv could look somewhat similar to current operations, which provide military assistance to a recognized government within Ukraine. That would be a kind of “frozen conflict” scenario involving a long military stalemate wherein current hostilities continue in a divided country.

In Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, an internal insurgency supplied covertly by the U.S. and NATO appears to be a strong possibility. In a recent article in *Foreign Affairs*, Douglas Landon, formerly a high-ranking CIA operations officer, stated that “Ukrainians have spent the last eight years planning, training, and equipping themselves for resisting a Russian occupation.... The United States will invariably be a major and essential source of backing for a Ukrainian insurgency.”⁴ CIA paramilitaries have been training Ukrainian forces for some time, and they have already fought alongside them against Russian-backed separatist forces in the civil war that began in the Donbas in 2014.⁵

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³ “Harris, Shane, Michael Birnbaum, John Hudson, Dan Lamothe, and David L. Stearn. “U.S. and allies quietly prepare for a Ukrainian government-in-exile and a long insurgency.” *The Washington Post*, March 5, 2022. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2022/03/05/russia-ukraine-insurgency/>.

⁴ Landon, Douglas. “The Coming Ukrainian Insurgency.” *Foreign Affairs*, February 25, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-02-25/coming-ukrainian-insurgency>.

⁵ Dorfman, Zach. “Exclusive: Secret CIA training program in Ukraine helped Kyiv prepare for Russian invasion.” Yahoo News, March 16, 2022. <https://news.yahoo.com/exclusive-secret-cia-training-program-in-ukraine-helped-kyiv-prepare-for-russian-invasion-090052743.html>.

⁶ See, e.g., the comments on Twitter of former ambassador Michael McFaul. “Ukraine will be Putin’s Afghanistan,” February 28, 2022. <https://twitter.com/McFaul/status/1498175120447213572>; Slisco, Aila. “Ukrainian Resistance to Russia Will Make Afghans Look Tame, Schumer Says.” *Newsweek*, February 25, 2022. <https://www.newsweek.com/ukrainian-resistance-russia-will-make-afghans-look-tame-schumer-says-1682947>; Reidel, Bruce. “Could Ukraine be Putin’s Afghanistan?” Brookings Institution, February 24, 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/02/24/could-ukraine-be-putins-afghanistan/>; Bruno, James. “How to Make Russia Bleed.” *Washington Monthly*, February 28, 2022. <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2022/02/28/how-to-make-russia-bleed/>.

Administration officials have also indicated that ambitious war aims may involve a long conflict. In March 8 testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Victoria Nuland warned that “this may just be the beginning of the fight” and that Ukraine could face “a long road.”⁷ The administration’s under secretary of state for political affairs also stated that the U.S. endgame was “the strategic defeat of President Putin” – a goal that would greatly reduce the possibility of face-saving compromise to end the war.

While an unwillingness to compromise by the parties involved could force an extended struggle, history shows that long-term conflicts are highly destructive to the countries in which they are fought, carry great risk of escalation and other unpredictable outcomes, and are not effective in achieving key foreign policy goals. The next sections detail these arguments, beginning with the lessons of the Cold War period.

The lessons of protracted conflict in the Cold War

In the early years of the Cold War, first Moscow and then Washington abandoned support for proxy wars in Europe as an instrument of their rivalry. These decisions were crucial in precluding direct armed conflict in Europe; they eventually ended in the peaceful dissolution of the communist bloc and then the Soviet Union itself. While things were very different elsewhere, Europe was the Cold War’s crucial theater, involving as it did the vital interests of both sides and the likelihood that conventional conflict there would develop into mutual nuclear annihilation.

In 1948, Stalin stopped supporting the Communists in Greece’s civil war and advised them to end their struggle. This led directly to the defeat of the Communists by government forces with British and U.S. backing.⁸ Stalin acted partly in response to the split between Moscow and Communist-governed Yugoslavia; but he was also operating

⁷ “Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine: Assessing the U.S. and International Response – Immediately Following the Business Meeting.” United States Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, March 8, 2022. https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/russias-invasion-of-ukraine-assessing-the-us-and-international-response_-_immediately-following-the-business-meeting030822.

⁸ Service, Robert. *Comrades!: A History of World Communism*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007. 266–268; Marantzidis, Nikos. “The Greek Civil War and the International Communist System.” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 5, no. 4, Fall 2013. 25–54; Nakhmani, Amikam. “Civil War and Foreign Intervention in Greece 1946–49.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, vol. 25, no. 4, October 1990. 489–522; Foot, M.R.D. *Resistance: European Resistance to the Nazis, 1940–45*. New York: Dialogue, 2007. 124–146.

in accordance with an agreement he made with Churchill in 1944, which left predominant influence in Greece to Britain.⁹ He understood that Britain and America would "never permit [Greece] to interrupt their lines of communication in the Mediterranean."¹⁰ By this time Stalin had already given up plans for armed communist revolutions in France and Italy. In the background of the Soviet decision was the fact that, from 1945 to 1949, the United States had a monopoly of nuclear weapons and for years after that possessed nuclear superiority.

Five years later, in 1953, the newly elected Eisenhower faced pressure to adopt a "rollback" strategy to overthrow Soviet control of Eastern Europe through local insurgencies backed by U.S. military power.¹¹ His response was to convene Project Solarium, which examined the likely consequences of different U.S. strategies.¹² This exercise demonstrated rather convincingly that the result of a rollback would probably be a conventional war with the Soviet Union, with a strong likelihood of escalation into nuclear war.

President Eisenhower instead opted to continue the strategy of containing the Soviet Union in Europe.¹³ This meant maintaining strong U.S. and NATO defensive forces and engaging in intensive anticommunist propaganda while withholding military support to anticommunist revolts. He stuck to this strategy three years later, when the Soviet army crushed the Hungarian Revolution. (We must note, however, that the encouragement Radio Free Europe and Voice of America had given Hungarian rebels led to understandable feelings of betrayal among them.)¹⁴

⁹ "Stalin's tick on Churchill's note written at the Kremlin on 9 October 1944, dividing up the Balkans into spheres of influence." The National Archives UK, October 9, 1944.

<https://images.nationalarchives.gov.uk/assetbank-nationalarchives/action/viewFullSizedImage?id=30941&size=800>

¹⁰ Djilas, Milovan. *Conversations with Stalin*. New York: Harcourt Brace and World, 1963.

¹¹ "Containment vs. Rollback – Foreign Policy in the early 1950s." *American History USA*.

<https://www.americanhistoryusa.com/containment-vs-rollback-foreign-policy-early-1950s/>.

¹² "Memorandum to the National Security Council by the Executive Secretary." Office of the Historian, Department of State, July 22, 1953. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1952-54v02p1/d80>.

¹³ Marder, Murrey. "Eisenhower Rejected Plan to Disrupt Soviet." *The Washington Post*, December 7, 1984.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/1984/12/07/eisenhower-rejected-plan-to-disrupt-soviet/d12a7d46-1595-4122-9bd7-0e59e823c773/>.

¹⁴ Borhi, Laszlo. "Rollback, Liberation, Containment or Inaction? U.S. Policy and Eastern Europe in the 1950s." *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 1, no. 3, Fall 1999. 67–110. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/9109>.

The result was as George Kennan, the architect of the containment strategy, predicted.¹⁵ It took four decades, but the Soviet bloc, Soviet communism, and the Soviet Union itself eventually collapsed from within as a result of the failures of its political and economic system. This occurred peacefully and without any risk of global war and nuclear annihilation. During those decades, the nations of Eastern Europe had to live under Communist dictatorships – but they were spared the devastation of a conventional war, and the annihilation of a nuclear war, and were eventually to emerge again as free and independent democracies.

It was a different story beyond Europe. The United States, the Soviet Union, and China all supported proxy wars against each other's client states. The result was horrendous suffering for the peoples of the countries concerned, severe and unnecessary losses and defeats for the superpowers, and sometimes unpredicted outcomes that were contrary to the interests of both the United States and the Soviet Union. It turned out that these conflicts were in the end governed by local dynamics that neither Moscow, Beijing, nor Washington understood or could control.¹⁶

In Africa, U.S. support for postcolonial civil wars against governments Washington deemed communist meant aiding UNITA in Angola, led by Jonas Savimbi, a particularly cruel and ruthless warlord, against the Soviet- and Cuban-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. This U.S. support took place in a de facto alliance with apartheid South Africa. The Angolan civil war lasted 27 years (before the MPLA prevailed) and cost some 800,000 lives; four million Angolans were displaced.¹⁷

The death toll in Mozambique from its largely Cold War-driven civil war and a resulting famine is estimated at one million. In both countries, large numbers of people continue to die and lose limbs from the land mines scattered.¹⁸

¹⁵ "X." "The Sources of Soviet Conduct." *Foreign Affairs*, July 1947.

https://www.cvce.eu/content/publication/1999/1/1/a0f03730-dde8-4f06-a6ed-d740770dc423/publishable_en.pdf.

¹⁶ Beckett, Ian F.W. *Insurgency and Counterinsurgency*. Abingdon, Oxon. Routledge, 2001. 183–216.

<https://publications.armywarcollege.edu/pubs/1691.pdf>.

¹⁷ "Angola: Independence and civil war." *Britannica*.

<https://www.britannica.com/place/Angola/Independence-and-civil-war>.

¹⁸ "Angola." The Halo Trust. <https://www.halotrust.org/where-we-work/africa/angola/>.

And for what? After the Soviet Union collapsed, Washington promptly abandoned its Angolan and Mozambican proxies and made deals with the new governments, which turned out not to be communists but corrupt and opportunist oligarchies with a veneer of progressive rhetoric. In Angola, UNITA was then defeated and Savimbi killed; in Mozambique, the Frelimo government waged a long war against a South African-backed insurgency.

The communist great powers, of course, also made use of civil wars during the Cold War, with extremely mixed results. Communist ideology led Moscow to involve itself in local conflicts that had absolutely nothing to do with the interests of the Soviet Union, let alone its citizens. America's desire for revenge for the Soviets' contribution to its defeat in Indochina was one factor behind the United States' support for the mujahideen insurgency against the Afghan communist state and its Soviet backers.

Afghanistan in the 1980s, like Syria after 2011, demonstrates the dangers of U.S. support for local proxies on the basis of wider geopolitical agendas, combined with ignorance of the countries concerned and indifference to the fate of their peoples. In both cases, civil wars led to the ascendancy of extremist groups and criminal warlords, ethno-religious civil wars, and vicious fighting among the resistance groups themselves.

In both Afghanistan and Syria, successive U.S. administrations and the CIA were unable to prevent U.S. money and weaponry from passing to extremist groups whose agendas turned out to be disastrous not only for their own countries but for America.

In Afghanistan, U.S. aid actively favored the extremists. One of the authors of this paper reported on the Afghan mujahideen as a journalist in the late 1980s and learned to understand the truth and the utter folly of a U.S. official's remark that America was right to fund and arm Islamist radical groups (rather than their "moderate" allies) because "they are the ones who kill Russians."¹⁹ The rationale for U.S. support for the mujahideen, as set out in retrospect by Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Carter administration's

¹⁹ Coll, Steve. *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2011*. New York. Penguin, 2004.

national security adviser, made no mention at all of the interests of the Afghan people or the survival of the Afghan state.²⁰

U.S. aid to the armed Syrian opposition (under the CIA codename Timber Sycamore) was the most expensive semi-clandestine operation in American history.²¹ Washington was led into it by a combination of belief in the spread of democracy in the Middle East, disgust at the Syrian state's atrocities, instinctive hostility to any regime backed by Iran and Russia, and domestic pressure from Congress, the media, and nongovernmental organizations.

This strategy was a total failure – a failure that nonetheless helped generate demands for a direct military American intervention. This would probably have become a catastrophe to exceed even that of the Iraq war if President Obama had not rejected these demands. The Trump administration finally wound up Timber Sycamore in 2017, long after it had become obviously pointless.²²

The central problem for the United States in supporting the Syrian insurgents was that the leading role among them was rapidly taken by Islamist extremist forces: first the al-Nusra Front, aligned with al-Qaeda, and then the Islamic State, ISIS.²³ A generation earlier, Washington would simply have ignored this and given them blanket support regardless of their ideologies and conduct; but in the wake of the events of September 11, 2001, and the Islamist insurgency in Iraq, this was no longer possible. The CIA did begin to arm groups close to al-Nusra but abandoned this approach when the risk of U.S. weapons being used in terrorist attacks against the United States became too obvious to ignore. In the end, U.S. support for the Syrian armed opposition was a complete failure.²⁴

²⁰ "How Jimmy Carter and I Started the Mujahideen." *Le Nouvel Observateur*, January 21, 1998. <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/how-jimmy-carter-and-i-started-the-mujahideen/213722>.

²¹ Carson, Justin, and Michael Poznansky. "The Logic for (Shoddy) U.S. Covert Action in Syria." *War on the Rocks*, July 21, 2016. <https://warontherocks.com/2016/07/the-logic-for-shoddy-u-s-covert-action-in-syria/>.

²² Mazetti, Mark, Adam Goldman, and Michael S. Schmidt. "Behind the Sudden Death of a \$1 Billion Secret C.I.A. War in Syria." *The New York Times*, August 2, 2017. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/02/world/middleeast/cia-syria-rebel-arm-train-trump.html>.

²³ Mazetti, Goldman, and Schmidt. "Behind the Sudden Death of a \$1 Billion Secret C.I.A. War in Syria."; Philips, Christopher. *The Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East*. New Haven. Yale University Press, 2020.

²⁴ Lund, Aron. "How Assad's Enemies Gave Up on the Syrian Opposition." The Century Foundation, October 17, 2017. <https://tcf.org/content/report/assads-enemies-gave-syrian-opposition/>.

The risks of major destruction in Ukraine

The strongest argument for an early peace settlement that guarantees Ukrainian sovereignty is, of course, the atrocious suffering that this war is already causing to the Ukrainian people – suffering that can get only worse the longer the war goes on.

Two strategies are open to the Russian government and military if the war continues. The first would be to try to capture more key Ukrainian cities in the east and south. It would no longer seek to conquer the whole of Ukraine and replace the Ukrainian government with a Russian client government; the objective would be to strengthen its hand at the negotiating table and add to the already considerable economic pressure on Ukraine. This could involve, for example, trying to capture the whole of Ukraine's Black Sea coastline.

Initially, the Kremlin and the Russian military apparently hoped to capture Ukrainian cities easily and with minimal civilian casualties. They soon realized that this was impossible. The Russian army has since reverted to the traditional urban-warfare tactics employed in Grozny in the two Chechen wars and in World War II, and by the United States in Vietnam and Korea: using massive firepower to blast the defenders from their positions and spare casualties among the attacking troops.²⁵ The inevitable result of this is massive destruction and huge casualties among civilians unable to flee. This was the strategy adopted by Russia in its assault on Mariupol, which has led to many civilian dead.²⁶ If the war goes on, we can expect the same to happen to one Ukrainian city after another. The overall cost will be far greater than even the devastation in Mariupol. That city had a peacetime population of less than a half a million; Odessa and Kyiv have populations of close to one million and three million respectively.

²⁵ Lieven, Anatol. *Chechnya: Tombstone of Russian Power*. New Haven. Yale University Press, 1999. Chs. 2 and 3; Spencer, John, and Jayson Geroux. "A Case Study of the 1968 Battle of Hue." Modern War Institute at West Point, November 4, 2021. <https://mwi.usma.edu/a-case-study-of-the-1968-battle-of-hue/>.

²⁶ Polityuk, Pavel, and Alessandra Prentice. "Ukrainian city of Mariupol says number of possible casualties at theatre is unclear." Reuters, March 17, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrainian-city-mariupol-says-number-possible-casualties-theatre-is-unclear-2022-03-17/>.

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Alternatively, if the Kremlin and the Russian high command determine that destroying Ukrainian cities one by one will cost too many Russian dead and risk intensified antiwar protests at home, Russia could stop at a defensible line (incorporating the whole of the Donbas provinces and a land bridge from Russia to Crimea) and challenge the Ukrainians to counterattack. Russia might even offer a unilateral ceasefire at that point. This would force the Ukrainian government and military either to live with the indefinite loss of much larger territories, or to attack Russian forces in an effort to drive them out.

In this case, the balance of military advantage would shift to the defenders, and Ukraine should expect massive casualties among its own forces. Russia would also undoubtedly continue to bombard key Ukrainian infrastructure. The eight-year war in the Donbas, which was fought to a bloody stalemate with some 15,000 casualties, gives a hint of what such a conflict might look like. A divided Ukraine could easily result in a kind of supersized version of the Donbas conflict, with far more casualties and greater disruption to the region. In addition, if Ukraine were seen to be pursuing such a war with unrealistic goals and at the behest of the United States, after a Russian ceasefire offer, parts of international public opinion might shift away from Ukraine and the West.

The risks of extremism and radicalization

The other development that should concern us in a protracted war is the likelihood that it will strengthen extremist forces in Ukraine. These are forces that will reliably defend Ukraine against Russia but could dangerously impede Ukraine's progress toward joining the West as a fully fledged liberal democracy.

This concern focuses on radical, ethno-nationalist forces of which the most important are the Svoboda (“Freedom”) political party (formerly the Social National Party), the Right Sector political group, and the Azov paramilitary units formed in May 2014 to fight pro-Russian separatists in the Donbas.²⁷ These groups trace their descent from the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists, OUN, and its military wing, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, UPA, which were active during and after World War II.²⁸

This force intermittently collaborated with the Nazi occupation of Ukraine and carried out massacres of Poles, Jews, and Soviet partisans and their supporters among ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking Ukrainians.²⁹ Encouraged by decades of Soviet propaganda, this has left a strong legacy of distrust of Ukrainian ethnic nationalism in much of eastern and southern Ukraine.

OUN–UPA’s ideology was extreme ethnic-nationalist and authoritarian, with affinities for the Nazi Führerprinzip, absolute loyalty to charismatic dictators. This group carried on an insurgency against the Soviet Union from 1944 to the early 1950s; it was eventually crushed with heavy losses.³⁰

Russian propaganda has colossally exaggerated the contemporary strength of Ukrainian extreme nationalist groups in support of the Kremlin’s stated condition that Ukraine be “denazified” as part of any peace agreement.³¹ Because these groups have been integrated into the Ukrainian National Guard yet retain their autonomous identities and command structures, over the course of an extended war they could amass a formidable fifth column that would radicalize Ukraine’s postwar political dynamic.

²⁷ “Svoboda Party.” *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Svoboda-Party>; “Profile: Who are Ukraine’s far-right Azov regiment?” *Al Jazeera*, March 1, 2022. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/1/who-are-the-azov-regiment>; Colborne, Michael. *From the Fires of War: Ukraine’s Azov Movement and the Global Far Right*. Stuttgart and Hannover. Ibidem Press, 2022.

²⁸ “Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists.” *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Organization-of-Ukrainian-Nationalists>; “Ukrainian Insurgent Party.” *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Ukrainian-Insurgent-Army>.

²⁹ Katchanovski, Ivan. “The OUN, the UPA and the Nazi Genocide in Ukraine,” in Black, Peter. Béla Rásky, and Marianne Windsperger, eds. *Collaboration in Eastern Europe During World War II and the Holocaust*. Vienna. New Academic Press, 2019. 67–93.

³⁰ “Ukraine – Anti–Soviet Partisans – 1941–1949.” *GlobalSecurity.org*, January 9, 2016. <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/ukraine-40s.htm>.

³¹ Ripp, Allan. “Ukraine’s Nazi problem is real, even if Putin’s ‘denazification’ claim isn’t.” *NBC News*, March 5, 2022. <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/ukraine-has-nazi-problem-vladimir-putin-s-denazification-claim-war-ncna1290946>.

Electoral support for these groups has so far been very weak. Right Sector has elected only one member to parliament. Svoboda achieved the pinnacle of its success in the 2012 parliamentary elections, with 10.44 percent of the vote. By 2019, however, this had shrunk to 2.15 percent, concentrated in the far west of the country.³² On the other hand, the extreme nationalist paramilitaries are very much the kind of force that gains in power as part of a war involving not only state forces but independent paramilitary volunteers.

Their influence is now disproportionate to their limited popular support for two reasons. The first is their ability to put pressure on Ukrainian governments and parliaments by mobilizing sometimes violent demonstrations in Kyiv.³³ This was evident in their leading role in the Maidan demonstrations of 2014, which brought down the government of Viktor Yanukovich, and in which a number of Svoboda and Right Sector members were killed.³⁴ On May 2, 2014, Right Sector activists together with nationalist soccer hooligans fought against pro-Russian protesters in Odessa, leading to the deaths of 46 of the latter when Ukrainian nationalists set fire to the trade union building they had occupied.³⁵

The second explanation for the outsized influence of these groups is the central role the Azov regiment and Right Sector forces (both of which were incorporated in the Ukrainian National Guard in September 2014) have played in the fight against separatist forces and their Russian backers in the Donbas.³⁶ This included a key part played by Azov in the defense of Mariupol against Russian-backed forces. Since then, Azov has

³² Gabidullina, Roksana, and Jeffrey Mankoff. "Ukraine's Parliamentary Elections." Center for Strategic and International Studies, July 24, 2019. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ukraines-parliamentary-elections>.

³³ Ishchenko, Volodymyr. "The unique extra-parliamentary power of Ukrainian radical nationalists is a threat to the political regime and minorities." The Foreign Policy Centre, July 18, 2018. <https://fpc.org.uk/the-unique-extra-parliamentary-power-of-ukrainian-radical-nationalists-is-a-threat-to-the-political-regime-and-minorities/>.

³⁴ Medea, Benjamin, and Nicholas J.S. Davies. "The West Ignores the Presence of Neo-Nazis in Ukraine." *Fair Observer*, March 11, 2022. <https://www.fairobserver.com/region/europe/medea-benjamin-nicholas-js-davies-ukraine-war-russia-ukrainian-neo-nazi-fascists-azov-battalion-89292/>; Ishchenko, Volodymyr. "Far Right Participation in the Ukraine Maidan Protests: An attempt at a systematic evaluation." *European Politics and Society*, vol. 17, No. 4, 2016. 453–472.

³⁵ "Chronology of events May 2, 2014 in Odessa, Part 1." Група 2 травня, January 11, 2016. <https://2maygroup.blogspot.com/2016/01/chronology-of-events-may-2-2014-in.html>.

³⁶ Hume, Tim. "How a Far-Right Battalion Became a Part of Ukraine's National Guard." *Vice*, February 16, 2022. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/3ab7dw/azov-battalion-ukraine-far-right>; Likhachev, Vyacheslav. "The Far Right in the Conflict Between Russia and Ukraine." Institut français des relations internationales, July 2016. 17–18.

had a dominant security role in Mariupol, which they have defended with great courage and grit in the present war.³⁷

Their role in the Ukrainian armed forces reportedly increased dramatically in early 2022, as Ukraine prepared to defend itself against Russian invasion.³⁸ Their fighting reputation gives these groups the chance to recruit from beyond their own narrow ideological base. According to Andreas Umland, an expert on the Ukrainian extreme right,

People sign up because these are the tough guys... If you're going to fight a war, who is going to fight it? For war, you need a certain type of people. The people who are willing to do that are the ultranationalists.³⁹

These groups have been widely criticized by Western politicians and in the media for their antisemitism, racism, white supremacism (with close links to such groups in the West), antifeminism, anti-LGBTQI ideology, and fascistic antecedents and symbols.⁴⁰ They have frequently taken part in violent attacks on political opponents and demonstrations of which they disapprove and have actively intimidated allegedly pro-Russian political parties and journalists.⁴¹

In 2018 Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and Freedom House wrote to the Ukrainian government criticizing it for not doing more to stop these groups' hate crimes and warning that the Ukrainian state risked losing a monopoly on armed force in the

³⁷ "Ukraine: Azov Battalion fighters defend Mariupol." BBC News, February 27, 2015.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-europe-31657354>; Gorbach, Denys. "Entrepreneurs of political violence: the varied interests and strategies of the far-right in Ukraine." *openDemocracy*, October 16 2018.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/entrepreneurs-of-political-violence-ukraine-far-right/>.

³⁸ Loyd, Anthony. "Ukraine's far-right warriors set for war with Russia." *The Times*, January 15, 2022.

<https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/ukraines-far-right-warriors-set-for-war-with-russia-f335tvl8v>.

³⁹ Carless, Will. "A regiment in Ukraine's military was founded by white supremacists. Now it's battling Russia on the front lines." *USA Today*, March 5, 2022.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2022/03/05/russia-invasion-ukraine-attention-extremist-regiment-nazi/9368016002/?qnt-cfr=1>.

⁴⁰ Kuzmenko, Oleksiy. "The Azov Regiment has not depoliticized." Atlantic Council, March 19, 2020.

<https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/ukrainealert/the-azov-regiment-has-not-depoliticized/>; Miller-Idriss, Cynthia.

"Fighting Russia in Ukraine sadly appeals to racist, far-right extremists." MSNBC, March 7, 2022.

<https://www.msnbc.com/opinion/msnbc-opinion/fighting-russia-ukraine-sadly-appeals-far-right-extremists-n1290901>;

"Right Sector threatens Kyiv gay pride march." *Kyiv Post*, June 6, 2015.

<https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/reform-watch/right-sector-threatens-kyiv-gay-pride-parade-390397.html>.

⁴¹ Gorbach, Denys. "The struggle for progressive politics in Ukraine." *openDemocracy*, June 11, 2015.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/struggle-for-progressive-politics-in-ukraine/>; Gorbach, Denys. "Entrepreneurs of Political Violence: the varied interests and strategies of the far right in Ukraine." *openDemocracy*, October 16, 2018.

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/entrepreneurs-of-political-violence-ukraine-far-right/>.

country.⁴² A report from the office of the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights has accused Azov (as well as the Russian-backed separatists) of carrying out atrocities in the disputed Donbas region.⁴³ In another worrying sign for any future insurgency, Right Sector has been widely accused of links to organized crime and of recruiting among soccer hooligans and other youth gangs.⁴⁴

There is concern in the U.S. Congress about Azov and other extreme nationalist paramilitary groups receiving arms and training as part of NATO military assistance to Ukraine.⁴⁵ In 2018, an amendment by the U.S. House of Representatives banned Azov from receiving U.S. military assistance.⁴⁶ Representative Ro Khanna, California Democrat, stated:

White supremacy and neo-Nazism are unacceptable and have no place in our world... I am very pleased that the recently passed omnibus prevents the U.S. from providing arms and training assistance to the neo-Nazi Azov Battalion fighting in Ukraine.

Despite these representations, however, subsequent evidence suggests that Azov continued to receive Western weaponry.⁴⁷

⁴² "Ukraine: Investigate, Punish Hate Crimes." Human Rights Watch, June 14, 2018.

<https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/14/ukraine-investigate-punish-hate-crimes#>.

⁴³ "Report on the human rights situation in Ukraine 16 November 2015 to 15 February 2016." United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, March 3, 2016.

https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Countries/UA/Ukraine_13th_HRMMU_Report_3March2016.pdf.

⁴⁴ Bidder, Benjamin, and Uwe Klußmann. "Ukrainian Civilians Take Up Arms." *Spiegel International*, April 16, 2014.

<https://www.spiegel.de/international/europe/ukrainian-militias-prepare-for-possibility-of-russian-invasion-a-964628.html>.; "Profile: Ukraine's 'Right Sector' movement." BBC News, January 21, 2014.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25826238>; Lutsenko, Yuriy. "Mukacheve incident is a collision between mafia and militants." *Kyiv Post*, July 13, 2015. <https://en.interfax.com.ua/news/general/277525.html>.

⁴⁵ Kuzmenko, Oleksiy. "Far-Right Group Made Its Home in Ukraine's Major Western Military Training Hub." IERES Occasional Papers, no. 11, September 2021.

<https://www.illiberalism.org/far-right-group-made-its-home-in-ukraines-major-western-military-training-hub/>; Pugliese, David. "Far-right extremists in Ukraine brag they have received training from the Canadian Forces: report." *Ottawa Citizen*, October 4, 2021.

<https://ottawacitizen.com/news/national/defence-watch/far-right-extremists-in-ukraine-brag-they-have-received-training-from-the-canadian-forces-report>.

⁴⁶ "H.R.2685 – Department of Defense Appropriations Act, 2016." U.S. House of Representatives, June 11, 2015.

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/2685>; Kheel, Rebecca. "Congress bans arms to Ukraine militia linked to neo-Nazis." *The Hill*, March 27, 2018.

<https://thehill.com/policy/defense/380483-congress-bans-arms-to-controversial-ukrainian-militia-linked-to-neo-nazis>.

⁴⁷ Kennard, Matt, and Mark Curtis. "Ukraine neo-Nazis pictured with UK-made rocket launchers." *Declassified UK*, March 10, 2022. <https://declassifieduk.org/ukraine-neo-nazis-pictured-with-uk-made-rocket-launchers/>.

Should these forces ever gain the ascendancy in Ukraine, this would create immense problems for a country that hopes eventually to join the European Union. It should be noted in this connection that as Svoboda's party program announces, it is a national revolutionary movement.⁴⁸ If it should gain the military leadership in an anti-Russian insurgency, it seems quite possible that (like the Communist resistance movements in World War II) it would then try to use this as the basis for seizing control of the state and transforming Ukraine in accordance with its ideology – with how much success we cannot of course say.

Should [far right] forces ever gain the ascendancy in Ukraine, this would create immense problems for a country that hopes eventually to join the European Union.

Moreover, the longer the war goes on the greater will be the postwar problem of young, brutalized, and unemployed Ukrainian military veterans making their way into radical political parties and their paramilitary wings. This same issue haunted Europe after World War I and played a key part in the rise of Fascism; it also haunted Chechnya after the war of 1994–96 and helped generate support for Islamist extremism there.

The rise of far-right militias could also play straight into Moscow's hands. Many extreme ethno-nationalists detest not only the Russian state but the ethnic Russian minority in Ukraine; they often regard Russian-speaking Ukrainians as actual or potential traitors. As a Ukrainian nationalist official of Prosvita, a cultural organization, told one of the authors,

In the Ukrainian genocide and all their other crimes, the Communists always carried out a policy based on great Russian chauvinism and the great-power ambitions of the Russian people.... Worst of all is that Russian rule and Russian

⁴⁸ Colborne, Michael. "There's One Far-Right Movement That Hates the Kremlin." *Foreign Policy*, April 17, 2019. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/04/17/theres-one-far-right-movement-that-hates-the-kremlin-azov-ukraine-biletsky-nouvelle-droite-venner/>; Ghosh, Mridula. "The Extreme Right in Ukraine." Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, October 2012. <https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/09407.pdf>.

immigration has damaged our genotype. Everything that you see here — lack of order, dirty toilets — is the result of racial assimilation. Because once a man has been drawn away from his ethnos, his traditions, his language, he can no longer behave decently in any way or find a decent place in the world.⁴⁹

All armed resistance movements prove willing to kill not only the troops and officials of an occupying power but also of their local collaborators — and often their families, too. This can easily combine with banditry. And as noted, in ethnically divided societies, insurgencies have a strong tendency to increase local ethnic fears and hatreds.

Since Russia's invasion in February 2022, the destruction and civilian loss of life inflicted on urban populations in the eastern and southern areas of the country seems to have eliminated whatever pro-Russian feeling remained. Reflecting this, even ethnically Russian mayors and other elected officials have often rallied their populations to resist — and in towns occupied by Russian forces they have been arrested in consequence.⁵⁰ This has not only destroyed the moral basis for the Russian invasion and discredited the attendant propaganda; it will also make it virtually impossible for Russia to create any kind of stable administration in the areas it occupies. This is a change in the traditional political culture of these regions that is of the greatest potential importance for Ukraine's future.

The only factor that could drive these Russian and Russian-speaking populations back into support for and dependence on Russia would be if the Azov Battalion and other extreme nationalist paramilitaries were seen as spearheading Ukrainian forces — and in consequence these forces were seen as directed not just against the Russian military but against the Russian-Ukrainian minority.

It is entirely possible that the end result of a war waged along these lines would be not a complete Russian withdrawal from Ukraine, but the permanent partition of Ukraine along ethno-linguistic lines. It is thus essential that the United States stand for a civic version of Ukrainian identity — in accordance with American ideals and for the sake of

⁴⁹ Lieven, Anatol. *Ukraine and Russia: A Fraternal Rivalry*. Washington. U.S. Institute of Peace, 1999. 67.

⁵⁰ "Second Mayor In Ukraine Said To Have Been Abducted By Invading Russian Forces." Radio Free Europe, March 13, 2022. <https://www.rferl.org/a/ukraine-mayor-abducted-russia-dniprordne/31750806.html>.

Ukraine itself. The longer a war goes on, the deeper these ethnic divisions and the associated radicalization are liable to become.

The risks of escalation to wider war

The Russian army's lack of progress in the first month of its campaign implies a war of attrition in which the frontlines move slowly and Ukraine retains a semi-functioning government and army for an extended period. Conversely, the Russian army could make steady, albeit slow progress over the next few months to gain effective control of eastern Ukraine. In the latter case, a Ukrainian insurgency, armed and trained at bases in NATO states, emerges as a distinct possibility, as previously noted. Both of these scenarios open the door to a protracted conflict.

There has been informed speculation as to the Ukraine conflict's escalation to the nuclear plane.⁵¹ But the dangers of conventional escalation are probably higher. Emma Ashford and Joshua Shifrinson write in *Foreign Affairs* of an "insecurity spiral" gathering pace in the conflict, with multiple paths for escalation that would draw in NATO states.⁵² Ashford and Shifrinson list Russian attacks on supply convoys laden with NATO-supplied weapons and matériel, risky actions by U.S. allies such as Poland or the Baltic states, and spillover into cyberwarfare.

The first of these – Russian attacks on NATO supplies – is already in prospect. As American and allied weapons are rapidly mobilized to aid Ukraine, supply lines have emerged that run from border states such as Poland and Slovakia into eastern and central Ukraine. Enhanced Ukrainian resistance, fueled in part by these arms deliveries, could further slow the Russian advance. This creates an incentive for Moscow to attack these supply convoys. Indeed, Russia has already made a point of threatening such action. The Russian military carried out its first major attack close to NATO borders on

⁵¹ Cirincione, Joseph. "Coming to terms with the nuclear risks of the Ukraine war." *Responsible Statecraft*, February 25, 2022. <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2022/02/25/coming-to-terms-with-the-nuclear-risks-of-the-ukraine-war/>.

⁵² Ashford, Emma, and Joshua Shifrinson. "How the War in Ukraine Could Get Much Worse." *Foreign Affairs*, March 8, 2022. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/ukraine/2022-03-08/how-war-ukraine-could-get-much-worse>.

March 12, 2022, when about 30 cruise missiles struck a major base used for training foreign fighters.⁵³

Russia could continue to confine any future attacks on supply convoys within Ukrainian territory, but targets just across the border in countries such as Poland and Romania may also be hit, intentionally or inadvertently. Technically, this would be an attack on the sovereign territories of these states, and NATO could invoke Article V of its charter, the mutual-assistance clause, to retaliate against Russian troops.

If the conflict metastasizes to an insurgency, it may be even harder to end. Insurgencies often go on for long periods of time if they begin with at least a degree of popular support. The median length of insurgencies is about 10 years, according to a RAND study, and many have gone on for much longer.⁵⁴ Good examples are the Tamil insurgents in Sri Lanka, who fought the Sinhalese-dominated government for nearly three decades, and the FARC in Colombia, which was active for five decades. Support from an external state is a major factor in maintaining an insurgency. If the external state withdraws such sponsorship, the insurgency is typically dealt a major blow. This implies that U.S. or NATO states' support for any future Ukrainian insurgency will be a key factor for its continuance in the longer run.

The long temporal horizon of a protracted conflict also presents major risks of escalation. Even if Russia confines its attacks on supply lines and arms deliveries to those within Ukrainian borders, the chances of inadvertent strikes into NATO territory or "hot pursuit"–type incidents, in which Russian troops or aircraft cross the border into Poland or another NATO member, greatly increase under these conditions. This risk would be much lower in the case of a shorter conflict that is brought to an end early through a negotiated compromise.

Other risks of escalation are also enhanced through the conflict's long duration. One pathway is through a major NATO buildup in vulnerable areas close to its defense

⁵³ "Russia strikes Ukrainian military base, killing more than 30 people." National Public Radio, March 13, 2022. <https://www.npr.org/2022/03/13/1086329977/russia-strikes-ukrainian-military-base-killing-more-than-30-people>.

⁵⁴ Connable, Ben, and Martin C. Libicki. "How Insurgencies End." RAND Corporation, 2008. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG965.pdf.

perimeter. The best example of these is the Suwalki Gap, a thin corridor of Polish and Lithuanian territory that separates the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad from Russian territory and Russia's ally Belarus.⁵⁵ Though NATO may do this from a defensive standpoint, it can trigger a counter-buildup by Russian troops, leading to potential clashes through accident or misinterpretation.

The risks to the cohesion of NATO

In the wake of the Russian invasion, there was a tremendous surge of support for an embattled Ukraine among almost all NATO states. Even normally pro-Russian Hungary signaled a distancing from Russia. However, as the weeks have gone by, the stresses of the war have revealed significant differences within the alliance as to the extent of military support for Ukraine. When the Biden administration blocked Poland's push to supply MiG-29 combat aircraft to Ukraine (in exchange for American F-16s), mixed messaging and different priorities led to a temporary rift between Warsaw and Washington.⁵⁶ Poland and the U.S. have also differed strongly on the former's suggestion of a NATO "peacekeeping force" to be deployed in Ukraine.⁵⁷

More enduring differences could emerge if the war turns into a protracted conflict. Anti-Russian nationalism has been a strong factor in the politics of Poland and the Baltic states for many years. The influx of millions of Ukrainian refugees into Poland, Romania, and other Central European states can also add to a strong desire to intervene in risky ways in the hope of decisively defeating Russia.

These factors encourage riskier attitudes in some of these states when it comes to responding to the Russian invasion. For instance, Poland has openly backed a no-fly zone in Ukraine.⁵⁸ A no-fly zone would need to be enforced in contested skies over

⁵⁵ Roblin, Sebastien. "The Suwalki Gap Could Be NATO's Biggest Weakness." *The National Interest*, January 9, 2021. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/reboot/suwalki-gap-could-be-nato%E2%80%99s-biggest-weakness-176135>.

⁵⁶ Sevastopulo, Demetri, and James Shotter. "Doomed plan to send Polish jets to Ukraine exposes rift in western alliance." *Financial Times*, February 14, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/a6cf1424-da51-456a-ba0a-7c34d21a53e6>.

⁵⁷ Choi, Joseph. "Top diplomat rules out US role in Ukraine peacekeeping mission." *The Hill*, March 20, 2022. <https://thehill.com/policy/international/598961-top-diplomat-rules-out-us-role-in-ukraine-peacekeeping-mission>.

⁵⁸ "Ukrainian no-fly zone would end war quicker, says Polish ambassador." Reuters, March 10, 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukrainian-no-fly-zone-would-end-war-quicker-says-polish-ambassador-2022-03-10/>.

Ukraine by attacking Russian air defense and aircraft in the skies — in other words, a NATO–Russia war. Rifts such as those noted here could grow if the conflict stretches out, putting the alliance under strain.

There is currently tremendous goodwill in Central Europe toward the millions of Ukrainian refugees who have arrived mostly in the border states of Poland, Slovakia, Romania, and Hungary.⁵⁹ But in a prolonged conflict, tensions will likely grow between Western and Central Europe as to how these arrivals should be settled across Europe, an echo of the earlier acrimony between Greece and Italy on one hand and the U.K., Germany, and other states over housing refugees from the Syria and Libya conflicts.⁶⁰

The risks of a prolonged economic recession

If the war and the most severe Western economic sanctions last only a short period of time, the wider economic effects of the Ukraine crisis will be limited.⁶¹ Economists warn, however, that a prolonged conflict accompanied by intense sanctions risks triggering a global recession.⁶²

These recessionary effects will be threefold. First, a steep reduction in Ukrainian and Russian wheat and other food exports will drive a rise in global food prices. This will badly damage the wellbeing of the world’s poorest and most vulnerable populations. It would be very likely to trigger unrest and increase extremism in poorer countries dependent on wheat imports, including in the Middle East and North Africa.⁶³ The resulting instability could worsen the global economic and financial climate.

⁵⁹ “Operational Data Portal: Ukraine Refugee Situation.” UNHCR. <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/ukraine>.

⁶⁰ “How is the migrant crisis dividing EU countries?” BBC News, March 4, 2016.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34278886>.

⁶¹ Holland, Ben, et al. “How War in Ukraine Threatens the World’s Economic Recovery.” *Bloomberg Business*, February 25, 2022.

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-02-25/war-in-ukraine-how-the-ukraine-russia-conflict-could-impact-the-global-economy?sref=QKEpsi6k>.

⁶² El–Erian, Mohamed. “Market fallout from Ukraine war combines the risks of past crises.” *Financial Times*, March 15, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/db9e3706-84dd-47bc-a943-90d7dfef6abe>.

⁶³ “Ukraine war: More countries will ‘feel the burn’ as food and energy price rises fuel hunger, warns WFP.” World Food Program, March 11, 2022.

<https://www.wfp.org/stories/ukraine-war-more-countries-will-feel-burn-food-and-energy-price-rises-fuel-hunger-warns-wfp#:~:text=A%20report%20just%20published%20by,US%2471%20million%20per%20mont;Poorer nations in Asia, Africa, Middle East face food crisis: UN.> *Al Jazeera*, March 11, 2022.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/economy/2022/3/11/food-crisis>.

International financial markets and confidence will also be affected if Russia defaults on its international debt of some \$480 billion.⁶⁴

Economists warn that a prolonged conflict accompanied by intense sanctions risks triggering a global recession.

Second, when combined with the rise in energy prices due to the volatility in energy markets caused by the war and sanctions, these commodity shortages would increase inflationary pressures, especially in the United States, where inflation has already risen sharply in recent months.⁶⁵ As families spend more on food and fuel, their spending on other things will drop.

Finally, if the West were to extend secondary sanctions to China in an effort completely to isolate Russia and in response to continued Chinese trade with Russia, as administration officials have threatened in recent encounters with Chinese counterparts, then the entire global trading system will be disrupted, with extremely unpredictable but potentially disastrous consequences.⁶⁶

Conclusions

It is urgently necessary that the Biden administration and the U.S. Congress give their full support to a peace process that will bring about an early end to the war on terms that will safeguard Ukrainian sovereignty and independence.

The idea is circulating in U.S. policy circles that Washington should in effect obstruct efforts to achieve a diplomatic settlement and encourage a protracted war to “bleed”

⁶⁴ Sorkin, Andrew Ross, et al. “Markets Worry About a Russian Debt Default.” *The New York Times*, March 16, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/16/business/dealbook/russia-debt-default.html>; “Russia Total External Debt.” *Trading Economics*, 2022. <https://tradingeconomics.com/russia/external-debt>.

⁶⁵ “Press Release No. 22/61: IMF Statement on the Economic Impact of War in Ukraine.” International Monetary Fund, March 5, 2022. <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2022/03/05/pr2261-imf-staff-statement-on-the-economic-impact-of-war-in-ukraine>.

⁶⁶ Langley, William, et al. “China warns of retaliation if hit by Russia sanctions fallout.” *Financial Times*, March 15, 2022. <https://www.ft.com/content/2b46df50-c6ab-4d58-9eef-5d3fb86905b1>.

and weaken Russia, overthrow the Putin regime, and isolate China.⁶⁷ This would cause great harm to innocents and would be contrary to the interests of the United States and the international community. It would repeat the worst aspects of U.S. behavior during the Cold War, when it sought geopolitical gain at the expense of the lives of other peoples. A protracted conflict would help inflict deep and unending suffering and death on the people of Ukraine, for American goals that have nothing to do with their interests or those of their country.

A prolonged war would present a grave and permanent risk of the war spreading, especially if Russia were tempted to attack NATO countries responsible for supplying arms to Ukraine. The impact of the war and sanctions on European economies would increase the danger of a rift in the Western alliance, especially if the continuation of the war were seen widely as due to Ukrainian intransigence encouraged by the United States. A protracted war would also risk strengthening and empowering radical ethno-nationalist groups that, in the postwar period, might prove a threat to liberal democracy in Ukraine and an obstacle to Ukraine joining the European Union.

The United States should do its utmost to prevent a protracted conflict in Ukraine, as well as to promote an early settlement on terms that will safeguard Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, and peace.

Some proponents of discouraging or blocking diplomatic negotiations maintain that rigorous, extensive sanctions can bring down the Putin regime and should not be lifted prematurely in a diplomatic give-and-take. However, sanctions as a regime-change tool have historically tended to strengthen the regimes they are intended to destroy, both by increasing nationalist sentiment in the affected populations and by allowing the regimes concerned to tighten their grip on their economies. If they remain in place for long, the sanctions imposed on Russia and the war itself risk severe damage to the world economy and severe economic harm to U.S. citizens and to America's global interests.

⁶⁷ Riedel, Bruce. "Could Ukraine Be Putin's Afghanistan?" Brookings Institution, February 24, 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2022/02/24/could-ukraine-be-putins-afghanistan/>.

There is a significant risk of economic recession, starting in Europe but spreading to the United States and the rest of the world.⁶⁸ The World Food Program and the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization are already issuing dire warnings of the consequences of a steep rise in wheat prices for poor nations and vulnerable populations.⁶⁹

Finally, barring the complete collapse of the Russian state as occurred 30 years ago, it is highly unlikely that a protracted war will bring Ukraine significantly better terms than those now possible. Both sides are going to have to accept painful compromises – all of which will become even more difficult to achieve if the conflict is allowed to continue.

For all these reasons, the United States should do its utmost to prevent a protracted conflict in Ukraine, as well as to promote an early settlement on terms that will safeguard Ukrainian sovereignty, independence, and peace.

⁶⁸ Henney, Megan. “Goldman says Ukraine–Russia war could trigger US economic recession.” Fox Business, March 17, 2022. <https://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/ukraine-russia-war-us-economic-recession-goldman-sachs>.

⁶⁹ “Ukraine war: More countries will ‘feel the burn’ as food and energy price rises fuel hunger, warns WFP.” World Food Program, March 11, 2022. <https://www.wfp.org/stories/ukraine-war-more-countries-will-feel-burn-food-and-energy-price-rises-fuel-hunger-warns-wfp#:~:text=A%20report%20just%20published%20by,US%2471%20million%20per%20mont>.

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