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**From:** Grand Strategy Director George Beebe & Advocacy Director Marcus Stanley

**RE:** Is U.S. Diplomacy Possible in the War in Ukraine? Your Questions Answered.

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The Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft today released a national poll conducted by Data for Progress, which found that the majority of American voters want the United States to make diplomatic efforts for a peaceful end to the war in Ukraine. A diplomatic track would parallel and complement U.S. assistance for Ukraine's self-defense. Russia's announcement of a broad mobilization that is likely to double the military forces it has committed to the war only increases the urgency to seek an end to the conflict — an effect compounded by President Vladimir Putin's references to potential use of nuclear weapons.

But are U.S. and NATO diplomatic efforts possible, especially given the recent escalation on the ground? Below we answer some common questions regarding diplomacy from those concerned — as are we — with protecting Ukraine and opposing Russian aggression.

### **Your Questions Answered**

➡ *If neither Russia nor Ukraine is interested in negotiations, who is there to negotiate with?*

There is, in fact, evidence of both Russian and Ukrainian interest in negotiations. According to Fiona Hill, former senior director for Europe and Russia on the National Security Council, negotiations took place as recently as April 2022. She [notes](#) that “in April 2022, Russian and Ukrainian negotiators appeared to have tentatively agreed on the outlines of a negotiated interim settlement: Russia would withdraw to its position on February 23, when it controlled part of the Donbas region and all of Crimea, and in exchange, Ukraine would promise not to seek NATO membership and, instead, receive security guarantees from a number of countries.”

As recently as September 13, Ukrainian deputy prime minister Olga Stefanishaya confirmed that Russia had sought negotiations with Ukraine. And Putin specifically referenced the April agreement in announcing Russia's partial mobilization, accusing the West of scuttling diplomatic progress — a reference suggesting some openness to negotiations.

Moreover, the United States can and should play an important role helping create the conditions for both sides to opt for diplomacy.

➡ *Would reaching a negotiated cease-fire with Russia threaten Ukraine's continued existence as a sovereign state? Would it be surrendering to Putin?*

Russia's effort to overthrow the government of Ukraine and end Ukrainian independence has already been soundly defeated. Russian forces have retreated to the east of the country, where the Ukrainian military has pressed all the way to the Russian border on the northeastern front.

Given Ukraine's clear demonstration of its capacity for self-defense and the West's continued support, a cease fire on the basis of guaranteed national independence and security for Ukraine should be possible and worth pursuing. As for the notion that opening a diplomatic track constitutes giving in to Russia, in a negotiation process the U.S. can seek terms which protect our national interests, the well-being of Ukraine, and permanently deny Putin the goals he sought at the beginning of the war.

➡ *Do Russia's territorial claims in eastern Ukraine and Crimea make any peaceful settlement impossible?*

Russia's claims pose formidable barriers to peace. But the alternative to indefinite war in the face of Russia's stated willingness to escalate poses a far greater threat to the process of reconstructing Ukraine as a secure and prosperous democracy.

Final settlement of these territorial issues may not be necessary to reach a durable cease-fire. In the case of the Korean War, a 1953 armistice agreement has kept the peace on the Korean Peninsula for some 70 years and allowed the growth of a prosperous democracy in South Korea, even though it did not settle bitter territorial disputes. Granted the Korean agreement was not signed until both sides had suffered some three million deaths, but it may not be necessary for such extreme destruction to occur in the Ukraine war before the parties are willing to settle the conflict.

➡ *Don't we need to punish Russian aggression now to avoid having to confront it again in the future?*

If these arguments were to be accepted as universal, no negotiated peace settlement or ceasefire would ever have been possible.

Ukraine's future defense against Russian attack lies in recognizing that, in the current war, Russia has failed to achieve key objectives while suffering humiliating losses. If Russia can attain a minimally acceptable peace settlement and NATO continues to support Ukrainian self-defense, Russia is unlikely to seek a repeat of this experience. Now that Russia has shown the limitations of its conventional military capacity, it is less capable to threaten European countries west of Ukraine.

➡ *Why must the United States provide leadership for negotiations?*

The United States is deeply involved in the war through massive supplies of weapons and training, extensive intelligence sharing, and vital military guidance. Americans are being directly affected by this war; U.S. inflation is rising, as is the threat of a nuclear confrontation that would put U.S. citizens at risk.

To argue that Kyiv alone should determine when and if to seek a settlement is to surrender American agency in matters that directly affect U.S. national security and contravene American interests.

Moreover, without U.S. involvement a diplomatic settlement will be impossible. Russia perceives this as a war with the United States and NATO, the implications of which extend beyond Ukraine to include economic and political warfare aimed at the weakening or dissolution of Russia. The Kremlin won't compromise with Ukraine in the absence of assurances that the United States will lift some of its sanctions and negotiate a broader truce in the strategic conflict it is waging with Russia. Zelensky too needs strong and public American backing for a settlement in order to overcome Ukrainian nationalist opposition to compromise with Russia.