

Ukraine, De Facto NATO Partner: To End the War, Peace Champions must “Win the War of Ideas”

Letter to the Left on Ukraine

By [Marcy Winograd](#)

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[Marcy Winograd](#) 2 December 2022

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To end the war in Ukraine, peace champions must win the war of ideas. This requires tackling two often-repeated claims that serve as obstacles to a diplomatic agreement between Ukraine and Russia. The first problematic claim is that the war was unprovoked; the second that Ukraine can achieve a decisive military victory.

To challenge claims the Russian invasion of Ukraine was an “unprovoked” decision of an imperial maniac, the anti-war Left has pointed to the official expansion of NATO –a hostile military alliance on Russia’s borders– as the match that lit the fire, unleashing death, destruction and displacement upon the breadbasket of the world.

NATO’s official expansion from 12 countries at the end of WWII to now 30 countries, including countries sitting on Russia’s neck-was not a neighborhood bake sale or a regional Tupperware party.

It was, however, old news.

Supporters of sending billions more in weapons to Ukraine argue that NATO expansion largely ended 18 years before the Russian invasion, in 2004 with the addition of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Russia President Putin’s order to invade his neighbor, they argue, was untethered to Russian national security concerns.

Two Little Known Documents

To shift public opinion against weaponizing endless war in Ukraine, it’s imperative the Left present persuasive evidence to debunk the impulsive madman myth that suggests one cannot negotiate a diplomatic resolution with an unprovoked leader of 143-million people who rolled out of bed one morning determined to reconstitute the Czarist empire.

The Left must turn its attention to two little-talked about agreements, one signed by President Biden and Ukrainian President Zelensky on Sept. 1, 2021, the other signed by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleb on Nov. 10, 2021, three months before Russia invaded Ukraine.

The September, 2021, [Joint Statement on the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership](#) reaffirmed Ukraine as a de facto NATO partner, "to continue our robust training and exercise program in keeping with Ukraine's status as a NATO Enhanced Opportunities Partner."

Established at the [Wales Summit in 2014](#), the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII) encouraged favored non-NATO nations, then Australia, Finland, Georgia, Jordan and Sweden—the NATO farm team— to share intelligence and participate in NATO-led military interventions, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, and join in euphemistically-labeled "war games."

For Ukraine's support of NATO operations in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo, as well as cyber defense and Black Sea maritime maneuvers, NATO in 2020 welcomed Ukraine into the club of favored NATO wannabes, [awarding Ukraine](#) special status as the 6th Enhanced Opportunity Partner (EOP) to receive military training and participate in the multinational [NATO Response Force](#) (NRF) of land, air, and sea troops and Special Operations Forces to deploy in a flash, wherever commanded. Such B list status allowed Ukraine to integrate into [NATO's military command structures](#) to prepare, plan and conduct joint operations.

The NATO Farm Team

The degree of present-day involvement of "enhanced opportunities partners" in NATO remains a mystery shrouded in secrecy, even as NATO conducts [mock nuclear exercises](#) during Europe's largest war since the second world war. For two weeks in October fourteen NATO countries, most unnamed, participated in the annual training and flying missions commanding fighter jets and B-52 capable nuclear bombers, albeit without live warheads, over Belgium, the United Kingdom and the North Sea in a dress rehearsal for a nuclear attack on Russia.

According to the [Federation of American Scientists](#), *Steadfast Noon* participants were to practice conducting strikes with US nuclear equipment loaded onto fighter jets of non-nuclear NATO countries—a violation of the spirit of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

One does not need a cinematic Hollywood imagination to envision Ukraine, part of NATO's farm team, one day agreeing or rather inviting the US and NATO to install nuclear equipment on Ukrainian fighter jets targeting Russia—or go one step further to install nuclear weapons in Ukraine itself, much as the US has installed its nuclear weapons in the NATO countries of Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Turkey.

Now the argument that Ukraine was not a NATO country, would never be allowed to join NATO, had nothing to do with NATO and, therefore, posed no existential threat to Russia falls flat. As does the argument that Ukraine posed no nuclear threat to Russia because it had agreed to transfer back to Russia the nuclear weapons left in Ukraine following the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Who needs nuclear weapons when you can borrow them like a prom dress or store borrowed

nukes in your air base garage?

Following an innocuous preamble that references “democratic values, respect for human rights and the rule of law, *“the November 2021 US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership committed the US and Ukraine to joint defense and security operations “deepening cooperation in areas such as Black Sea security, cyber defense and intelligence sharing ..”*

Crimea

Additionally, the Charter of Strategic Partnership endorsed Ukraine retaking a strategic asset in Russia’s defense operations: Crimea. The document emphasizes the US’s refusal to ever recognize Crimea, home to ethnic Russians, as part of Russia, stating an *“unwavering commitment to Ukraine’s sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders, including Crimea and extending to its territorial waters ...”*

Crimea, a peninsula on the northern coast of the Black Sea, was part of Russia from 1783 until 1954, when Nikita Krushchev, leader of the Soviet Union, peacefully transferred Crimea to Ukraine’s administrative control without seeking a vote of approval from Crimeans. Some historians [speculate](#) Krushchev, who had once worked in Ukraine’s mines and married a Ukrainian woman, wanted to make nice in the aftermath of Stalin’s tortuous reign; others conclude Krushchev wanted to extend greater Soviet control over Ukraine.

Even after the transfer, Ukraine allowed Russia’s naval fleet at Sevastopol to remain in place, leasing Crimea to Russia until 2042.

Then came the 2014 Maidan square uprising, revolution, US-backed coup, whatever you want to call it, that overthrew Ukraine’s Russia-friendly President Yanukovich. In a secretly taped phone conversation, State Department official Victoria Nuland, then Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs, was recorded engineering the transition government, saying “Fuck the EU” should the European Union not approve of her plan.

Russia grew concerned, deeply concerned. Might the new Ukrainian leaders, hand-picked by Nuland, evict Russia’s defense forces from the Crimean peninsula? In March 2014, a month after Nuland’s taped phone call, Putin ordered troops to march into Crimea.

The Set Up

Only the most naive would believe Russia would ever again surrender Crimea, which was part of Russia for nearly 200 years and affords Russia naval access to the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans, as well as the Mediterranean.

In signing the U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership, Secretary of State Blinken encouraged Ukraine to pursue a goal-repossession of Crimea- that in all probability would never be realized short of massive human suffering, the likes of which we are witnessing today.

The document reads:

The United States and Ukraine intend to continue a range of substantive measures to prevent external direct and hybrid aggression against Ukraine and hold Russia

accountable for such aggression and violations of international law, including the seizure and attempted annexation of Crimea ... The United States intends to support Ukraine's efforts to counter armed aggression ... until the restoration of the territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders.

Did Secretary of State Blinken believe Russia's leaders would play chess or take a nap while Ukraine snatched back Crimea with guns blazing? *The subtext of this Strategic Partnership was that the US would pump Ukraine full of weapons so it could fight like hell-or to the last Ukrainian-to reclaim a Russian naval port Ukraine had agreed to lease to Russia for decades. Yes, this was a setup for Ukraine to provoke a war with Russia, so that Ukrainian, not US soldiers, would do the fighting and dying on the battlefield to "weaken" Russia in the interests of maintaining a unipolar world with the US on top.*

None of this is to excuse Russia for taking the bait to launch a horrific invasion of Ukraine that has killed or made casualties of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians and Russians, uprooted eight million Ukrainians from their homes, sent hundreds of thousands of Russians fleeing conscription, and worsened the climate crisis with more greenhouse gas emissions from missile launches. Rocket attacks and explosions have reduced infrastructure-railways, electrical grids, apartment buildings, oil depots- to charred rubble, leaving blackened cities blanketed by toxic munitions.

Provocation, Not Justification

The focus on the Joint Statement on the U.S.-Ukraine Strategic Partnership and two months later the U.S.-Ukraine Charter of Strategic Partnership (a steroid-enhanced cousin of the former) is *not to justify the invasion, but to clarify that the United States and NATO provoked the war from which we all must turn back* before we find ourselves engulfed in another world war. In that tragic case, provided we are still alive, the only winners will be the military contractors-Raytheon, manufacturer of the Stinger, surface-to-air missile; Lockheed Martin, the Javelin-a portable anti-tank missile system; and HIMARS rocket.

In a Merry Christmas-Happy New Year gift to bomb-makers, Congress will soon consider a [bipartisan amendment](#) to the proposed \$850 billion National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to "grant the Pentagon wartime procurement powers." Such emergency powers would greenlight automatic multi-year renewal contracts for war profiteers to continuously produce more weapons, thus making the US-provoked war in Ukraine a cash cow for military contractors.

How do we turn back? Back to sanity, back to diplomacy?

No Military Solution

Just as we challenge the "unprovoked" claim repeated by the White House and corporate press, we must challenge the fiction that a military solution is the answer.

As Ukraine drove Russian troops out of occupied Kherson, a port city on the Black Sea, reporters championed Ukraine's victory, telling us Ukrainians -with the wind at their backs-could defeat Russia if only the US and NATO would send more weapons. Days later we learned Kherson was virtually uninhabitable as millions of its Ukrainians struggled to survive following retaliatory Russian missile strikes that knocked out electricity and heat in sub-zero winter temperatures.

To awaken from this nightmare, to disrupt the surge of weapons, to counter the narrative that more rockets and drones will deliver a final military victory for Ukraine, the anti-war Left must build a diverse coalition centered around reasonable demands for a truce leading to a more lasting ceasefire and negotiated peace. To date, over 500 US religious leaders have signed onto a [statement](#) calling for a Christmas truce to kick-start diplomatic efforts.

According to Columbia University professor Jeffrey Sachs, a former economic advisor to Russia and global leader in sustainable development, a diplomatic agreement must address three issues of primary concern: Ukraine's relationship with NATO; semi-autonomy for the eastern Donbas; the future of Russian-annexed Crimea.

How do we elevate diplomacy? Clearly, the sanctions-drunk US State Department tasked with promoting diplomacy has not prevented conflict, only fomented it with Blinken's 2021 signing of the U.S-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership affirming the right of Ukraine, already a NATO stepchild, to cross Putin's red line to officially join NATO.

The Peace in Ukraine Coalition

The elevation of diplomacy is the hard work of the [Peace in Ukraine Coalition](#), which calls for a ceasefire and negotiations, as well as investments in climate, healthcare, housing, education and jobs, not more weapons to prolong the fighting in Ukraine.

Launched by CODEPINK, the coalition also includes Veterans for Peace, World Beyond War, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom-US, DSA-International, Massachusetts Peace Action, RootsAction, Progressive Democrats of America and others.

Coalition partners share [resources](#) to table at farmers markets, circulate petitions, send letters to Congress, pass resolutions at political clubs, erect picket lines in front of congress members' offices, elevate the voices of diplomacy on [CODEPINK Radio](#), and support the national tour of Medea Benjamin, cofounder of CODEPINK, and Nicolas J.S. Davies, journalist and researcher, the co-authors of the riveting book, ["War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict."](#)

In the words of the authors, "The lesson of this war is the same one we have failed to learn from every other war; that the real monsters are war itself and the morally bankrupt leaders on all sides, who keep feeding it with our resources and our bodies."

Join the [Peace in Ukraine Coalition](#) to say no to war and yes to diplomacy and peace.

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Marcy Winograd is the Coordinator of CODEPINK Congress and a steering committee member of the Peace in Ukraine Coalition. The coalition calls for a ceasefire, peace negotiations and investments in climate, housing, healthcare and jobs, not endless war in Ukraine. To join the coalition, visit peaceinukraine.org.

Featured image: CODEPINK "No War with Russia Rally, Negotiate Ukraine, Don't Escalate." (2022)

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