



## Americans Don't Want War With Russia

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Even *New York Times* columnist Tom Friedman is getting worried about America sliding into war with Russia. The problem is not the ends, which he shares with the Biden administration. Rather, it is the means.

Despite President Biden's assurance that Washington would not send troops to Ukraine, US involvement in the Russo-Ukrainian war has steadily expanded. Officials from the president on down have been telling the world and, more importantly, Moscow that America is essentially using Ukraine as a weapon to fight the Russian Federation.

Observed an obviously disturbed Friedman: "Loose lips sink ships – and they also lay the groundwork for overreach in warfare, mission creep, a disconnect between ends and means and huge unintended consequences." Such as war with Russia, perhaps with nuclear weapons.

Friedman is not alone in his fears. My church home group met shortly after Biden announced that his administration was going all into the war with \$33 billion in aid to Ukraine. Most of that will be lethal. The attendees, largely politically conservative and strongly patriotic, some with military backgrounds, generally opposed the president's plan. Why are we getting so deeply involved, they wondered? They understood that the more Washington did and Washington officials said, the greater the tensions with Russia. They believed Biden's actions contradicted his promises of military noninvolvement.

Then I watched a webinar on Biden's fitness and the potential of removing him from office. The host and participants were all right-leaning, a couple extremely so, and none were friends of Moscow. However, they generally agreed that one of the most important reasons to force Biden from office was his administration's increasingly irresponsible stance toward Russia.

For instance, they noted, saying that Vladimir Putin cannot remain in power and should be put on trial for war crimes was playing with fire. Shifting the administration's objective from defending Ukraine to defeating Russia made full-scale war increasingly possible.

Coming through these views is a basic common sense lacking in Washington's War Party. The American people, in contrast to those who make US foreign policy, understand that the worst

outcome of the Russo-Ukraine war is not a loss by Kyiv, but entry by Washington, with horrors that could only be imagined.

How to think about the ongoing conflict?

- Ukraine deserves America's sympathy, not America's defense. There is no vital interest at stake that warrants the US going to war. Nor does Moscow's botched campaign indicate that such a battle would be easy. Russians would fight better for their nation if attacked by Washington than when attacking Ukraine. Moreover, as the weaker power Russia likely would turn to tactical nuclear weapons as an equalizer. Having escaped the Cold War without triggering another catastrophic global conflict, Washington should step extra carefully now.
- Europe should take the lead in providing aid to Ukraine. US peace activists across the spectrum disagree on the appropriateness of military assistance. However, all agree that Washington's involvement has become increasingly risky. Surely any role should be carefully limited and calibrated, while emphasizing the goal of ending the conflict. Ostentatiously shipping weapons of war, celebrating involvement in sinking Russian ships and killing Russian generals, and proclaiming plans to weaken Moscow are reckless acts, inviting retaliation and war. Congress was demanding blood over the fake news story of Russian payments to the Taliban for killing US personnel. Imagine the reaction of Russians, people as well as officials, to the real news of American participation in killing Russian personnel.
- Washington should be working to end the war. Moscow's brutal invasion was murderous, unjustified aggression. It should fail. However, the imperative is to end the conflict. Ukraine, the battleground, is suffering grievously, with thousands of deaths, millions of refugees, multiple cities wrecked, and an economy in collapse. It is up to Kyiv to decide its future, but the allies should indicate their support for a negotiated settlement. The longer the conflict continues, the greater the chance that the fighting will spread, with catastrophic consequences. Any war is dangerous. One in which some combatants and potential entrants have nuclear weapons is far worse.
- Europe requires a new security order. It should begin with the Europeans taking over their own defense. They appear vulnerable to Russian threats only because they have spent nearly eight decades cheap riding on the US. It is difficult to blame them, since Washington allowed them to get away with their irresponsible behavior. However, there no longer is any reason for America to risk a nuclear confrontation with Moscow because the Europeans prefer to fund generous welfare states than robust military establishments. In fact, Vladimir Putin has never indicated much interest in invading Europe and the performance of his military in Ukraine suggests that continental conquest is beyond his means. It is time for burden-shifting, not burden-sharing, in Europe.
- The US and its allies should seek a long-term outcome that avoids a new Cold War. Treating Russia like a very large and much better armed North Korea would make for a more dangerous world. A policy of permanent hostility and isolation would fuel continuing conflict. And new global divisions would not be as simple as the West might desire. Even today Moscow is isolated from America and Europe, not the world. The most populous nations – including China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan,

Nigeria, Brazil, and Bangladesh – and most of the Global South have remained aloof from the allied campaign against Russia. They are even less likely to back a permanent cordon sanitaire.

- The American people should insist that the War Party become the Peace Party. The Putin made the decision to invade Ukraine. However, Western policy was dishonest, foolish, and reckless, ignoring Moscow's security concerns and daring Vladimir Putin to respond. Indeed, Washington policymakers would never have tolerated similar conduct by the Russians in the Western hemisphere. Yet as was said of the Bourbons who once ruled France, America's neoconservatives and other hawks have learned nothing and forgotten nothing. Without a sharp break in policy, Americans will find themselves again at war for nothing, other than a vain desire to dominate the earth.

US policymakers may be glorying in Russia's distress in Ukraine. For having started a war of conquest, Moscow should lose. However, Washington's conduct risks broadening and intensifying the conduct, which would put Europe and America at risk.

Instead of talking about victory, the Biden administration should promote peace. Ukraine is being ravaged. Europe would be the immediate target if the conflict spreads. And America's homeland would be the final target if a US-Russian military confrontation spiraled out of control. Nothing involved in today's conflict is worth taking these kinds of risks.

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