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War in Ukraine

Ukraine and the Dangers of Nuclear War

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Given the danger of nuclear conflagration, should the peace movement demand – as some have suggested — that the United States and NATO stop providing arms to Ukraine as a way to avoid provoking Russia?

Nuclear war – along with climate change and pandemics — represents one of the existential threats facing humanity. The very future of our species could be ended in the event of a full-scale nuclear war.

Given the stakes, it is absolutely essential to prevent an all-out nuclear conflict. Moreover, because a limited nuclear exchange between superpowers has the potential to escalate into all-out war, the avoidance of even a limited exchange must be a major priority.

When Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, 2022, he released a pre-recorded message that warned:

> Whoever tries to interfere with us, and even more so to create threats to our country, to our people, should know that Russia's response will be immediate and will lead you to such consequences as you have never experienced in your history. [1]

And then three days later, Putin made his threat more explicit, declaring:

> I order the defense minister and the chief of the general staff of the Russian armed forces to put the deterrence forces of the Russian army into a special mode of combat service. [2]

"Western countries aren't only taking unfriendly economic actions against our country, but leaders of major NATO countries are making aggressive statements about our country," Putin said. "So I order to move Russia's deterrence forces to a special regime of duty."

U.S. officials reported that they saw no indications that Moscow was actually planning to use nuclear weapons and that there would be no change to the posture of U.S. nuclear forces. But one can certainly understand why 141 nations in the General Assembly, against only five negative votes, not only deplored the Russian invasion of Ukraine but specifically condemned "the decision of the Russian Federation to increase the readiness of its nuclear forces."

A week before the invasion, at a time when Moscow was still insisting that it had no plans to invade Ukraine, the Kremlin announced that that it would carry out drills of its nuclear forces and that Putin would supervise the practice missile launches himself. Two months later, on April 20, Russia tested a new long-range missile, with appropriate notice, but also with Putin's warning that this should "make those, who in the heat of frantic aggressive rhetoric try to threaten our country, think twice."

Russia had issued new guidelines for nuclear weapon use back in June 2020. The Basic Principles of the Russian

Federation's State Policy in the Domain of Nuclear Deterrence declared that Moscow would only use nuclear arms in situations where Russia or its allies were attacked with weapons of mass destruction or where there was a conventional attack against Russia in which "the very existence of the state is put under threat." This seems quite restrictive, but when Putin charged on the eve of his Ukraine invasion that the policy of the United States and its allies "is not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and to its sovereignty" – one of the situations allowing nuclear weapon use — the implications were unsettling.

Various Russian officials have since stated that Moscow had no intention of using nuclear weapons in Ukraine and that nuclear weapons were not applicable to the situation in Ukraine. On August 5, a Russian delegate at the United Nations denounced as baseless any allegations that Russia was threatening to use nuclear arms in Ukraine. It was impossible that Russia would do so, he said, because neither of the conditions under which Russian doctrinal guidelines permitted nuclear weapon use applied in the case of Ukraine. He further explained that Putin's February 27 announcement that he was putting Russian nuclear forces on "special duty" didn't mean he was putting them on high alert, but only that there would be "increased vigilance." These were all welcome statements, though given Moscow's continual prevarication on its actions in Ukraine, the threat and the concerns certainly remain.

Nuclear Power Plants

This article is going to focus on the threat of nuclear war, but brief mention should be made here regarding the danger emanating from nuclear power plants. (Recall that the world's worst nuclear power plant accident took place at Chernobyl in Ukraine in 1986.) The current Russian invasion represents the first time in world history that a war has been waged around nuclear power stations, the first time a nuclear power plant has been seized by force, and the first time workers have been made to run a captured plant at gunpoint.

On February 24, the Russians seized control of Chernobyl and the exclusion zone surrounding it. The Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency condemned the seizure and demanded that Russia withdraw immediately. On March 4, the Russians attacked and occupied the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant complex, half a square mile in area, with a missile hitting a building on the site and starting a fire, but without harming the reactors. Russian forces withdrew from Chernobyl on March 31, as part of their general retreat from the Kyiv area, but they have remained in the Zaporizhzhia plant.

In July, Russian troops turned the plant into a military base, and used it as a shield as they fired artillery and rockets across the river at Ukrainian-held Nikopol. Some firing at the plant complex has taken place – a drone attack on Russian troops by Ukraine, for example — and some rockets. Russia blames the latter on Ukraine, but plant workers and various independent experts think the fire came from the Russians, carefully aimed to cut the plant's power lines to Ukrainian territory, part of a highly perilous
https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-by-under-secretary-of-state-bonnie-d-jenkins-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-the-zaporizhzhya-nuclear-power-plant/" class="spip_out" rel="external">Russian strategy, the EU, and the UN Secretary General have all called for the establishment of a demilitarized zone around the plant. Russia has rejected the call. But the deputy chair of Russia's Security Council, former president Dmitr]y Medvedev, didn't miss the opportunity to issue another threat: "Let's not forget that the European Union also has nuclear power plants. And accidents can happen there, too."

A nuclear accident at Zaporizhzhia would be horrible, though not nearly as bad as Chernobyl disaster because of Zaporizhzhia's more modern design. Neither, however, would compare with the harm from even a small nuclear weapon explosion, to which we now return.

The History of Nuclear Threats

Nuclear threats have a long, sordid history in the Cold War. As a study for the non-governmental National Security Archive summarized it,

> During the 1950s and early 1960s, there were a remarkable number of crises during which U.S. leaders made threats, authorized nuclear weapons for use, and put strategic forces in a higher state of readiness. While the Soviets also made threats, e.g., Suez, in 1956, the U.S. threat posture was comparatively overwhelming. [3]

In 1953, a top-secret National Security Council directive declared that “In the event of hostilities, the United States will consider nuclear weapons to be as available for use as other munitions.” In 1955, Pres. Eisenhower, in part to encourage the American public to get over its squeamishness regarding nuclear arms, publicly stated that he saw no reason “why they shouldn’t be used just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else.”

Eventually, however, and particularly following the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, after the world had peered into the abyss, U.S. presidents came to appreciate that nuclear arms were in an entirely different category from conventional weapons and that their use would, in John Kennedy’s words, “open up a whole new world.” Both U.S. and Soviet leaders became much more restrained in their nuclear threats and pursued arms control agreements to reduce the risks of nuclear war. In recent years, it has been very rare for a national leader to threaten the use of nuclear weapons. Yes, North Korea has warned of preemptive nuclear strikes against the United States (complete with videos showing Washington DC or lower Manhattan going up in flames). And Donald Trump has blustered that: “North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States. They will be met with fire and fury like the world has never seen.” But their schoolyard behavior, with Trump tweeting that his nuclear button was “much bigger & more powerful” than Kim Jong-un’s, while infantile and reckless, was not as worrisome as Putin’s threats, which take place in the context of Europe’s largest war in the past seventy years, when inadvertent escalation presents a real risk.

Numerous experts have expressed concern that we are today nearer to nuclear war than at any time since the Cuban missile crisis.

Responding to Nuclear Threats

Returning to the initial question, should the peace movement demand that the United States and NATO stop arming Ukraine so as to avoid provoking Russia? Sometimes it makes sense to give in to an unjust aggressor if the consequences of not doing so are potential extermination. If a villain points a gun at our heads and demands we drop our weapons, we reluctantly do so.

Of course, Putin – unlike the hypothetical villain — knows that it is not just his adversary who will suffer the consequences if he pulls the trigger. In June 2021, Putin joined Biden in reaffirming “the principle that a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought.” But might Putin be crazy enough to start a nuclear war that would destroy Russia too? And does that mean that even the remote chance of nuclear war requires us to accede to Putin’s demands to stop arming Ukraine or imposing sanctions?

The problem with succumbing to Putin’s demands is that doing so is not necessarily the best way to minimize the

dangers of nuclear war. Because a rational leader would not undertake a policy whose costs outweighed the benefits, sometimes leaders bluff, feigning that they are willing to face costs far greater than warranted in order to intimidate their adversaries into surrender. Surrender here, however, can increase the prospects of nuclear war going forward.

One of the foremost advocates of this nuclear bluffing strategy was Richard Nixon. As he explained his approach to his White House chief of staff H. R. Haldeman,

> I call it the Madman Theory, Bob. I want the North Vietnamese to believe I've reached the point where I might do anything to stop the war. We'll just slip the word to them that, 'for God's sake, you know Nixon is obsessed about Communism. We can't restrain him when he's angry — and he has his hand on the nuclear button' and Ho Chi Minh himself will be in Paris in two days begging for peace. [4]

Nixon and his national security adviser Henry Kissinger tried to carry out this strategy in October 1969, hoping to frighten the Soviet Union into pressing North Vietnam to accept American terms. On October 6, Kissinger ordered the secretary of defense to conduct a "series of increased alert measures designed to convey to the Soviets an increasing readiness by U.S. strategic forces." The next week, the Strategic Air Command put on alert 176 bombers and 189 refueling tankers. Nixon met with the Soviet ambassador, displaying, according to an impressed Kissinger, the "guts of a riverboat gambler." On October 26, the Strategic Air Command flew six armed B-52 bombers over Alaska. But, despite the intimidation, Moscow did not compel Hanoi to surrender – and (fortunately) nor did Soviet leaders panic and launch a preemptive strike on the United States.

The political science literature shows that the madman strategy generally doesn't work. The biggest problem with the strategy is, in the words of Stephen Walt, an advocate of realism in international relations:

> When other states deal with a powerful but unpredictable leader, they may tread carefully but they aren't going to make big concessions.
>
> After all, if a madman is dangerous now, doing anything that makes them more powerful just makes them more dangerous later. Appeasement is sometimes a smart diplomatic strategy, but only if one believes that making concessions will remove grievances, reduce suspicions, make the other side more benign, and allow mutually beneficial relations to emerge. [5]

Imagine what would happen if Washington responded to Putin's nuclear bluster by stopping its weapons supplies to Ukraine or lifting its sanctions.

The Kremlin, now with a proven method of getting its way, could then demand surrender from Georgia and Moldova, two former Soviet republics where Russian troops currently hold contested territory. And when the United States and NATO refused to provide arms to these governments (because, after all, one doesn't want to risk nuclear war), the two countries would have little option but to submit. But why stop there? If Russia then demanded (with appropriate rhetoric and missile tests) that NATO troops be removed from the Baltic states, would it be worth risking madman Putin escalating to nuclear war? So best comply. And if it then further demanded that no NATO arms be provided to these former components of the Soviet Union, again, why provoke the Bear? But at some point, either Moscow or

Washington will miscalculate – will NATO back down? is Russia bluffing? — and we'll be in the midst of a nuclear war.

And Putin wouldn't be the only one to try to take advantage of this strategy. Would his success encourage other nuclear bullies? Might Israel then make demands of Iran, to which Tehran would have to give in lest it face Armageddon? Might China demand that the United States stop arming and even trading with Taiwan, facilitating a bloodless conquest? Might North Korea demand that South Korea and Japan subsidize its economy?

But giving in to Putin's threats wouldn't only encourage continuing acts of nuclear extortion. It would also provoke the potential victims of this extortion to rush to acquire nuclear arms of their own as a means of self-protection. South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Egypt, and others would inevitably seek to become nuclear weapons states (if they are not already doing so). Some experts have claimed that widespread nuclear proliferation would be great, because no one would ever go to war again, fearing nuclear retaliation. But as most analysts understand, the risks, of accidental inadvertent, or escalatory war, or terrorism, or sabotage increases exponentially with the number of nuclear weapons states.

To be sure, the historical record suggests that nuclear arms have not been very successful as a coercive tool. (Consider that possession of nuclear weapons didn't allow the United States to prevail in Vietnam or the Soviet Union in Afghanistan.) But if nuclear threats gave the Russians a victory in Ukraine (for that's what a cut-off of Western military supplies would mean), the calculus would change dramatically. Nuclear weapons expert Todd Sechser has observed:

> Russia has given us a vivid reminder that nuclear weapons are not a magic wand. As the war began, Vladimir Putin made several nuclear threats – both explicit and implied. But the fear of nuclear escalation has not intimidated Ukraine into submission. Nor have these threats dissuaded the West from imposing crippling sanctions on Russia and providing military aid to Ukraine. If anything, Putin's nuclear bellicosity has only fueled the international backlash against Russia. The war has thrown a spotlight on the political limits of nuclear weapons, and dictators with nuclear ambitions should take note. [6]

If instead, NATO had given in or gives in to Putin's demands, the lessons for leaders with nuclear ambitions would be rather different.

Appeasement, then, has its dangers, setting off dynamics that might increase rather than decrease the risks of nuclear war. But military build-up and the logic of deterrence have their dangers as well, as we know from many historical examples. International relations scholars and peace researchers has long identified the "security dilemma" as a major cause of war: when one country takes steps to increase its own security that in turn decrease the security of its adversaries, the resulting countermoves end up reducing everyone's security. (The eastward expansion of NATO was a classic example of this dynamic.) So while it would make good sense to call for the scaling back of aid to Ukraine if there were a real danger of nuclear war, giving in to Russian demands if they were a bluff might actually increase the dangers of nuclear war.

Nuclear threats always have to be taken seriously, and great care taken in responding to them. There are several reasons, however, to regard Putin's threats as posturing and to treat them as such.

First, his threats have involved insinuation and bluster, but have not actually involved any corresponding military moves. This might make Putin look tough to his domestic audience, might scare public opinion in Ukraine and in the

West, but without actually risking the consequences of military escalation. Were Putin in fact to put his nuclear forces on alert, that might have real consequences. Washington might increase the alert status of its own forces, and, at worst, there would be the risk of a U.S. preemptive strike. But by engaging in dramatic rhetoric while making sure that U.S. intelligence can see that he has not moved his tactical nuclear arms from their storage facilities to military bases, Putin shows that he appreciates the dangers of nuclear weapons. Indeed, in March 2022, the United States and Russia established a "deconfliction hotline" to avoid any inadvertent escalation in Ukraine. In May, the U.S. Secretary of Defense and Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff re-established communication with their Russian counterparts for the first time since the war began.

Second, Putin had a history of trying to use nuclear blackmail. He said he was prepared to put his nuclear forces on alert during the 2014 annexation of Crimea. As in 2022, however, the rhetoric was not matched by actions.

Third are domestic costs. It is sometimes suggested that there are no forces or institutions in Russian society limiting Putin – the antiwar movement is too weak — and thus the danger of his pushing the button is all too real. But Russia doesn't have to be a well-functioning democracy for there to be domestic constraints on Putin. Consider that the Russian armed forces do not have the number of troops they need (Russia has been fighting a large conventional war" "at peacetime strength," in the words of U.S. military analyst Michael Kofman); this deficit could be solved by ordering a general mobilization, but Putin evidently judges that the domestic political costs of doing so would be too great. One can assume that escalating a "special military operation" into a nuclear war would also substantially raise the domestic political costs for Putin and his supporting oligarchs.

Fourth are international costs. We have seen Russian diplomacy engaged full tilt at trying to win over foreign countries. Europe is united against Putin's invasion, but in other parts of the world, many countries are trying to avoid taking sides. For Russia to use nuclear weapons would deliver a tremendous blow to Moscow's international position, especially in Africa and Latin America, where there are nuclear-free zones. Even China, which has given tacit support to Russia, would be hard pressed to support a first use of nuclear arms, contradicting its own declared policy. (China's military cooperation with Russia since the invasion has been quite limited, and it abstained on the General Assembly resolution condemning the Russian assault.) The prediction that China would support sanctions against Moscow in the event it uses nuclear weapons does not seem unreasonable.

And fifth, Russia seems to be quite cautious in actually declaring that red lines have been crossed. For example, in April, when a Ukrainian missile struck Russia's Black Sea Fleet flagship, with the help of U.S. intelligence, Russia insisted that there had been no missile at all, just an onboard fire. And in August, when Ukrainian forces set off explosions at a Russian airbase in Crimea, "Russia's Defense Ministry moved quickly to play down the extent of the damage, saying no equipment had been destroyed and no casualties reported," assertions that "were contradicted by a video from the scene and by a tally of the damage by officials in Crimea." The Kremlin's interest in hiding its military failures from the Russian people makes it harder to mobilize Russian public opinion to support any escalation.

Red Lines

Despite these reasons for believing Putin's nuclear threats to be more bark than bite, caution requires thinking through different levels and types of aid the United States and NATO might give to Ukraine and when these might be too risky.

Those policies that would put U.S. military personnel into direct combat with Russian troops are obviously highly dangerous. Yes, it is possible that Russia would back down in the face of a direct challenge from Western military forces, but that seems a risk too serious to take. A no-fly zone – as advocated by Zelensky and various U.S. pundits

– would entail similar risks , because shooting down Russian planes or destroying the anti-aircraft weapons that might threaten U.S. planes raises the prospect of direct U.S.-Russian conflict.

Biden has stated very clearly: “So long as the United States or our allies are not attacked, we will not be directly engaged in this conflict, either by sending American troops to fight in Ukraine or by attacking Russian forces.” But where is the red line in terms of indirect U.S. involvement? This is not a matter of what Putin says – given his incentive and tendency to bluff – but a question of what U.S. actions might provoke Russia to resort to nuclear arms.

One way to get a sense of actual red lines would be to look at historical precedent: other cases where a great power with nuclear weapons was fighting a non-nuclear-armed opponent that was being supported by another great power. How far did they go? What were the red lines?

Consider the Korean War. The United States was fighting against (non-nuclear) North Korea. China, which also didn’t yet have nuclear weapons, directly intervened in the fighting on North Korea’s side, sending in two million “volunteers” — without precipitating U.S. attacks on Chinese soil, nuclear or otherwise. (The U.S. general in charge, Douglas MacArthur, called for strikes on China, but Truman fired him.) The Soviet Union had helped prepare Pyongyang’s initial attack on the South, and increased its military aid to North Korea tenfold from 1949 to 1951. It gave China enough arms for 64 infantry divisions and 22 air divisions and provided 90 percent of its munitions. In addition, Soviet pilots directly participated in the war, flying the latest Soviet fighter, the MIG-15 (though with Chinese or North Korean markings, and only over communist-held territory), shooting down many U.S. planes. Some 5,000 Soviet pilots served in the conflict. Even though Moscow went to great length to disguise their direct involvement, the United States was aware of it and decided to keep it secret so as not to lead to a wider war.

In the Vietnam war, China sent some 100,000 engineering troops to North Vietnam, where they built and repaired military facilities and rail lines, and 150,000 anti-aircraft artillery soldiers, to defend strategic targets north of Hanoi from U.S. planes. In the years that U.S. forces were heavily engaged, 1965-1972, Beijing provided Hanoi with 1.3 million guns, nearly a billion bullets, 43,000 pieces of artillery, 12 million artillery shells, 344 tanks, 141 military vessels, and 82 planes. (Keep in mind that China at this time was a very poor country, in the midst of its own violent and chaotic Cultural Revolution.)

Soviet aid to North Vietnam was much more substantial. From 1965 to 1972, Moscow provided more than $2 billion in military aid, which would be $12 billion in 2022 dollars. For a country with about a third the GDP of the United States at the time, this was an extraordinary level of support. (For comparison, U.S. military aid to Ukraine under the Biden administration has been about $10 billion.) Soviet aid included surface to air missiles (SAMs), jet planes, and technical advisers. The first SAMs fired at U.S. planes in 1965 were fired by Soviet crews. The CIA reported in 1968 that there seemed to be no limit to the type of aid Moscow was providing “with the possible exception of offensive weapons that would result in a confrontation with the US.”

The Cuban missile crisis is another interesting example. Kennedy publicly stated that Soviet anti-aircraft missiles in Cuba were not a threat to the United States. Obviously, these could be used against U.S. planes attacking the island, but that was not a problem. If, however, the Russians should place offensive missiles that could hit the American homeland, then “the gravest issues would arise.” Kennedy was being hypocritical here, given that the United States had nuclear missiles in Turkey that could hit the Soviet Union; to Kennedy, Moscow was forbidden to do what Washington was permitted to do. Nevertheless, the distinction between a weapon that can only be used for self-defense and one that can be used to inflict substantial damage on another country’s home territory is a real one.

And it’s a distinction that applies in Ukraine too. Giving Ukraine weapons that could strike deep into Russia would be much more provocative than providing arms that could be used against the Russians inside Ukraine.

These historical examples suggest that NATO aid to Ukraine is not more reckless than superpower behavior of the past.

Research analysts Samuel Charap and Jeremy Shapiro suggest that the search for a specific red line is misguided. While stating that the United States and its allies should continue providing Ukraine with the armaments it needs, they argue that there is no specific red line the crossing of which would cause Russian escalation. Rather, the risk of escalation comes from Russia finding its aims thwarted.

The problem is not that providing Ukraine with some specific weapon could cause escalation but rather that if the West's support of Ukraine succeeded in stemming Russia's advance, that would constitute an unacceptable defeat for the Kremlin.

They are certainly correct that the United States ought to contribute to a negotiated settlement by spelling out to the Russians which of its economic sanctions it is prepared to lift if and when they reach a settlement acceptable to the Ukrainians. And Washington needs to make very clear to Ukraine the limits of its aid so that Kyiv can make decisions with full information. And NATO certainly ought to declare its readiness to conclude a new, verifiable treaty to eliminate intermediate range nuclear forces from Europe, thereby increasing security for all. But if Russia still hopes to "advance," it is hard to see how the West could avoid thwarting Russia's aims.

Moreover, it is no longer possible for Moscow to avoid an "unacceptable defeat" because it has already lost more than anything it could gain in Ukraine. The mobilization of NATO and the accession of Finland and Sweden have weakened Russia's security far more than any hypothetical Ukrainian membership might have done; and the economic losses it will suffer from the flight of capital and skilled workers and the loss of access to high tech imports will more than outweigh the value of what it can loot from Ukraine.

U.S. Policy

Given the stakes involved, the U.S. response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine needs to be very carefully calibrated. So far, the Biden administration has shown commendable caution in not responding to Putin's nuclear bluster with bluster of its own, and without increasing the alert status of its own nuclear forces. Washington even delayed and then cancelled a planned ICBM test to avoid escalating tensions. Moreover, Biden explicitly declared:

> As much as I disagree with Mr. Putin, and find his actions an outrage, the United States will not try to bring about his ouster in Moscow. So long as the United States or our allies are not attacked, we will not be directly engaged in this conflict, either by sending American troops to fight in Ukraine or by attacking Russian forces. We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders. We do not want to prolong the war just to inflict pain on Russia. [7]

(There are some statements by U.S. officials that seem to contradict the last sentence, but it is hard to believe that the Biden administration thinks U.S. interests are served by dragging out a war that is taking such an economic toll on Western nations and that is delaying Washington's strategic pivot to Asia.)

Does this mean that Washington is adequately addressing the risks of nuclear war? Not at all. There are many ways in which U.S. policy contributes to the continuing danger of nuclear holocaust and where different policies enacted

today could make us all safer.

1. The United States still formally takes the position that it is willing to use nuclear weapons first. It states that it “will not use or threaten to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states that are party to the NPT [Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty] and in compliance with their nuclear nonproliferation obligations,” which covers about 180 countries. This limitation on Washington’s nuclear weapon use is welcome, but it still means that the United States could attack Russia, China, North Korea, or Iran with nuclear arms despite no prior use of nuclear weapons.China, on the other hand, despite some reckless language on party media, has declared that it would never be the first to employ nuclear arms. The Soviet Union had a no-first-use policy from 1982-93, but dropped it for a less restrictive policy after the end of the Cold War. Britain, France, and Pakistan too do not have a no-first-use policy.There are two main benefits of a no-first-use policy. First, the country that makes the declaration will be less likely to use nuclear weapons. And, second, nervous adversaries of the country making the declaration will be less likely to preempt out of fear that in a crisis they will be hit first, which in turn makes the declaring country more inclined to adhere to its commitment.

So the first thing the Biden administration could do to reduce the dangers of nuclear war is to issue a no-first-use declaration.

2. There is disagreement among analysts about whether Putin has the authority on his own to order a nuclear strike. The best guess is that he doesn’t have that authority on paper, but in practice can make sure that only his lackeys hold the relevant checking positions. This seems reckless in the extreme, to put the fate of the world into the hands of three or maybe even one person. But whatever ambiguity exists with regard to Russian authority structures, it is unambiguous that in the United States the president has sole authority to launch a nuclear war. Just think, we had the fate of our species in the exclusive hands of Donald Trump for four years. It is absolutely essential that sole presidential authority be revoked.

3. Many have lamented the toothlessness of the United Nations in being able to address the aggression of a major power. The Security Council, which under the UN Charter has primary responsibility for international peace and security, is often blocked by the veto, as when Russia cast the lone negative vote on a resolution condemning its aggression in Ukraine. But Washington is in no position to condemn the undemocratic veto power, given its own frequent use of the veto.The United States did co-sponsor the recent General Assembly resolution, adopted by consensus, which calls for the General Assembly to meet whenever a veto is cast in the Security Council. But it has not joined Britain and France and 120 other member states in supporting a code of conduct under which permanent Security Council members pledge not to use their veto on issues relating to genocide, crimes against humanity, or war crimes.

4. One country beyond the original five nuclear powers that acquired its nuclear arsenal by theft and deception is Israel. (Israel also cooperated on nuclear weapons development with South Africa, before the latter voluntarily gave up its nuclear program.) The pressures for developing nuclear weapons on Iran and then other Middle Eastern powers trace their origins to the Israeli program. U.S. military aid to and diplomatic support for this “rogue” nuclear power continues to undermine global efforts at non-proliferation.

It is urgent that the war in Ukraine come to an end. Apart from the horrendous devastation in Ukraine, the risks of accidents and inadvertent escalation are quite serious. But to cut off Western arms supplies to Kyiv in response to these risks can only lead to Ukraine’s military defeat and more suffering for its people, along with the victory of an international aggressor and nuclear bully. This would mean the creation of a far more dangerous world.

Source: New Politics.

PS:

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