



U.S. National Interests in Ukraine

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War is afoot in Ukraine. Its impact has been tragic. Ukrainian civilians are being targeted, with one of the most recent attacks being upon a [Ukrainian children's hospital](#). On the other side, [over 7,000 Russian soldiers have died](#), and [protests have been suppressed throughout the country](#). What is the U.S. to do? Here, three points are elaborated upon: the U.S. national interests in Ukraine, the impact of these interests on the American people, and the reasoning that the U.S. should not go to war against Russia.

The U.S. has two national interests in this war in Ukraine. First, is to end this war as soon as possible. Wars tend to be concluded in one of two ways: through negotiated settlements, or through unconditional surrender. The Congress of Vienna and the Treaty of Versailles epitomize these two forms of ending wars respectively. To end the war in Ukraine as soon as possible, the U.S. should pursue the pathway of negotiated settlement. It is the lesser of two evils. Unconditional surrender will most probably result in Russia digging in its heels, namely with Vladimir Putin's political legitimacy being on the line. As Mark Galeotti makes apparent in his book, [A Short History of Russia: How the World's Largest Country Invented Itself, from the Pagans to Putin](#), Putin has created a quasi-social contract with the Russian people: do not criticize his regime and he will bring the people and elite prosperity. With sanctions targeting Russian elites and society, Putin is at risk of losing this legitimacy. As Andrea Kendall-Taylor makes apparent [in a recent article](#), the only way for Putin to keep his legitimacy is to come out with something from this war. In essence, Putin needs to make sure that this war has not been for nothing. [As Herman Pirchner Jr. asserts](#), the overthrow of Nikita Khrushchev after the Cuban Missile Crisis makes one ponder how much more risk the Russian elite will tolerate with Putin's war against Ukraine.

The second national interest of the U.S. is to refrain from going war against Russia. The reasoning for this is simple: the invasion of Ukraine does not risk the national security of the U.S. There is no possibility of Russia invading the shores of the U.S. As Barry Posen asserts in his [2013 piece in Foreign Affairs](#), the geographic position of the U.S. makes it one of the most secure nations in the world.

Prudence is needed to ensure that the U.S. does not go to war, nor get inadvertently entangled in this war. Firstly, implementing a "no-fly zone" is a recipe for disaster. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky has [pressed for the U.S. and the West to implement this no-fly zone](#) over Ukrainian skies. As notable [experts in the field of international affairs and politics warned in an open letter](#), war would be almost inevitable if the U.S. were to commit to a no-fly zone. Second, there are dangers to the U.S. sending weapons to Ukraine. Russia [threatened to attack these weapons shipments](#) sent from NATO countries. Given that all NATO members are guaranteed collective security protection under NATO's Article 5, such possible attacks upon



weapon shipments bring a real possibility of the U.S. going to war. While the [Biden administration rejected the call for a U.S.-led no-fly zone](#), U.S. policymakers are [approving more military supply shipments to Ukraine](#). To ensure that the U.S. does not become entangled in this war, it is crucial to limit, if not all out eliminate, U.S. military involvement in this war.

In order to accomplish these two U.S. national interests, the U.S. will need to support the “Finlandization” of Ukraine. [Finlandization](#) refers to a policy of neutrality of Finland during the Cold War, where the Soviet Union maintained a degree of political influence over Finland. Putin has [lambasted the NATO expansion throughout his presidency](#)— especially on the prospect of Ukraine joining the alliance. The policy of Finlandization would satisfy both parties — Russia would have a neutral Ukraine on its border, and Ukraine would be able to maintain its sovereignty. In other words, if Ukraine is to have any sort of independence, the U.S. must set aside its ambitions to extend NATO.

It is quite possible that Ukraine can become a republic in the future. However, to have any chance of this occurring, Ukraine must be free from war and of the invading Russian military. The brave fortitude of Ukrainians to push back and defend their country from Russian encroachment has [forced Russia to reduce its political demands in this war](#). This is a sign that Russia may be willing to negotiate an end to this war. However, such a scenario will only take place after Russia is convinced that it is stuck in a quagmire of a war. In essence, Ukraine needs to become Russia’s Vietnam, or better yet, something synonymous to Russia’s [Winter War](#) against Finland.

Achieving these two interconnected national interests will impact American citizens in two main ways. First, by supporting a negotiated settlement to the war and refraining from being entangled in the conflict, American soldiers and citizens will not need to die in the streets of Ukraine. Essentially, the U.S. would avoid shedding more blood in this war. Second, the U.S. would avoid spending money on military assets for Ukrainians. Inflation is currently at a [40-year high point in the U.S.](#) Spending billions of dollars on military weapons — dead-end spending — will not help with this inflation. Instead, such funds should be reserved for possible domestic spending, and used to help Ukrainian refugees flee as safely as possible. These benefits to American citizens may seem selfish. However, this is the nature of international politics. As Kenneth Waltz noted in [Theory of International Politics](#), international politics is a system of “self-help.”

What Russia is doing in Ukraine heinous. The color red on its national flag will be forever stained by the blood of Ukrainians. The U.S. has an obligation to ensure that this bloodshed does not expand to the U.S. and will not extend indefinitely. Ukraine must not be beholden to the whims of either Russia or the West. The U.S. must maintain its independence from the political entanglements of other nations and must show support for the independence of these other nations. While a negotiated settlement may not result in Ukraine being fully independent from Russia, achieving some freedom is better than not having any at all.