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Jeffrey D. Sachs  
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## *What Ukraine needs to learn from Afghanistan about proxy wars*

Above all, the Ukrainian government and people would tell Russia and the United States that Ukraine refuses to remain the battlefield of a proxy war. In the face of deep internal divisions, Ukrainians on both sides of the ethnic divide would fight for peace, rather than believing that an external power will spare them the need to compromise.



The greatest enemy of economic development is war. If the world falls further into global conflict, our economic hopes and our very survival could burst into flames. The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists has moved the hands of the Doomsday Clock to just 90 seconds to midnight.

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[afgazad@gmail.com](mailto:afgazad@gmail.com)

The world's biggest economic loser in 2022 was Ukraine, where the economy collapsed by 35% according to the International Monetary Fund. The war in Ukraine could end soon and economic recovery could begin, but this depends on Ukraine understanding its status as a victim of a proxy war between the United States and Russia that erupted in 2014.

The United States has been heavily arming and funding Ukraine since 2014 with the goal of expanding NATO and weakening Russia. U.S. proxy wars usually last for years and even decades, leaving battleground countries like Ukraine in rubble.



Unless the proxy war ends soon, Ukraine faces a terrible future. Ukraine needs to learn from Afghanistan's horrific experience to avoid becoming a long-term disaster. It could also consider the U.S. proxy wars in Vietnam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Iraq, Syria and Libya. Beginning in 1979, the U.S. armed the mujahideen (Islamist fighters) to harass the Soviet-backed government in Afghanistan. As President Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, later explained, America's goal was to provoke the Soviet Union's intervention to trap it in a costly war. The fact that Afghanistan would be collateral damage did not worry American leaders.

The Soviet army entered Afghanistan in 1979 as the United States expected, and fought during the 1980s. Meanwhile, U.S.-backed fighters established al-Qaeda in the 1980s and the Taliban in the early 1990s. The American "trap" of the Soviet Union had had a boomerang effect.

In 2001, the United States invaded Afghanistan to fight al-Qaeda and the Taliban. The U.S. war continued for another 20 years until the U.S. finally left in 2021. Sporadic US military operations in Afghanistan are still continuing.

Afghanistan is in ruins. While the US wasted over \$2 trillion of US military outlays, Afghanistan is impoverished, with 2021 GDP below \$400 per person! As a farewell "gift" to Afghanistan in 2021, the US government seized Afghanistan's small foreign exchange holdings, crippling the banking system.

Ukraine's proxy war began nine years ago when the U.S. government backed the overthrow of Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich. Yanukovich's sin from the U.S. point of view was his attempt to maintain Ukraine's neutrality despite the U.S. desire to expand NATO to include Ukraine (and Georgia). The U.S. goal was for NATO countries to surround Russia in the Black Sea region. To achieve this goal, the United States has been massively arming and funding Ukraine since 2014.

The American protagonists then and now are the same. The U.S. government's point person in Ukraine in 2014 was Deputy Secretary of State Victoria Nuland, who is now Assistant Secretary of State. In 2014, Nuland worked closely with Jake Sullivan, President Joe Biden's national security adviser, who played the same role for Vice President Biden in 2014.

The United States overlooked two harsh political realities in Ukraine. The first is that Ukraine is deeply divided ethnically and politically between Russian-hating nationalists in western Ukraine and ethnic Russians in eastern Ukraine and Crimea.

The second is that NATO's enlargement into Ukraine crosses a Russian red line. Russia will fight to the end and escalate as necessary to prevent the United States from incorporating Ukraine into NATO.

The United States repeatedly claims that NATO is a defensive alliance. However, NATO bombed Russia's ally, Serbia, for 78 days in 1999 to separate Kosovo from Serbia, after which the United States established a giant military base in Kosovo. NATO forces similarly toppled Russian ally Muammar Gadhafi in 2011, sparking a decade of chaos in Libya. Russia will certainly never accept NATO into Ukraine.

At the end of 2021, Russian President Vladimir Putin made three demands to the US: Ukraine should remain neutral and outside NATO; Crimea should remain part of Russia; and the Donbas should become autonomous in accordance with the Minsk II Agreement.

The Biden-Sullivan-Nuland team rejected negotiations on NATO enlargement, eight years after the same group backed Yanukovich's ouster. With Putin's demands for negotiation flatly rejected by the United States, Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022.

In March 2022, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky seemed to understand Ukraine's dire situation as a victim of a proxy war between the United States and Russia. He publicly

declared that Ukraine would become a neutral country and called for security guarantees. He also publicly acknowledged that Crimea and Donbas would need some kind of special treatment.

Israel's prime minister at the time, Naftali Bennett, became involved as a mediator, along with Turkey. Russia and Ukraine came close to reaching an agreement. However, as Bennett has recently explained, the United States "blocked" the peace process.

Since then, the war has intensified. According to US investigative reporter Seymour Hersh\*, US agents blew up Nord Stream pipelines in September, a claim denied by the White House. More recently, the U.S. and its allies have pledged to send tanks, long-range missiles and possibly fighter jets to Ukraine.

The basis for peace is clear. Ukraine would be a neutral country outside NATO. Crimea would remain home to Russia's Black Sea naval fleet, as it has been since 1783. A practical solution would be found for Donbas, such as a territorial division, autonomy or an armistice line.

Most importantly, the fighting would stop, Russian troops would leave Ukraine, and Ukraine's sovereignty would be guaranteed by the UN Security Council and other nations. Such an agreement could have been reached in December 2021 or March 2022.

Above all, the Ukrainian government and people would tell Russia and the United States that Ukraine refuses to remain the battlefield of a proxy war. In the face of deep internal divisions, Ukrainians on both sides of the ethnic divide would fight for peace, rather than believing that an external power will spare them the need to compromise.

\* Seymour Hersh is an American journalist who received the Pulitzer Prize for best journalist. Now, as your investigations have shown the heavy responsibility of the United States in the war in Ukraine... They have launched a smear campaign against him.

*Jeffrey D. Sachs*

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*Translated by Luis Casado*

*Edited by María Piedad Ossaba*

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