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NATO's War Summit in Washington

NATO leaders should conduct a clear-eyed review of how the organization that claims to be a force for peace keeps escalating unwinnable wars and leaving countries in ruins, say Medea Benjamin and Nicolas J. S. Davies.



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in May 2024. (NATO, Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

After NATO's catastrophic, illegal invasions of Yugoslavia, Libya, and Afghanistan, on July 9 NATO plans to invade Washington, D.C. The good news is that it only plans to occupy Washington for three days. The British will not burn down the U.S. Capitol as they did in 1814, and the Germans are still meekly pretending that they don't know who blew up

their Nord Stream gas pipelines. So expect smiling photo ops and an overblown orgy of mutual congratulation.

The details of NATO's agenda for the Washington summit were revealed at a NATO foreign ministers' meeting in Prague at the end of May.

NATO will drag its members into the U.S. Cold War with China by accusing it of supplying dual-use weapons technology to Russia, and it will unveil new NATO initiatives to spend U.S. tax dollars on a mysterious "drone wall" in the Baltics and an expensive-sounding "integrated air defense system" across Europe.

But the main feature of the summit will be a superficial show of unity to try to convince the public that NATO and Ukraine can defeat Russia and that negotiating with Russia would be tantamount to surrender.

On the face of it, that should be a hard sell. The one thing that most Americans agree on about the war in Ukraine is that they support a negotiated peace. When asked in a November 2023 *Economist/YouGov* poll "Would you support or oppose Ukraine and Russia agreeing to a cease-fire now?" 68 percent said "support," and only 8 percent said "oppose," while 24 percent said they were not sure.

However, while U.S. President Joe Biden and NATO leaders hold endless debates over different ways to escalate the war, they have repeatedly rejected peace negotiations, notably in April 2022, November 2022 and January 2024, even as their failed war plans leave Ukraine in an ever worsening negotiating position.

[See: *RAY McGOVERN: Will Putin Attack Poland & the Baltics?*]

The endgame of this non-strategy is that Ukraine will only be allowed to negotiate with Russia once it is facing total defeat and has nothing left to negotiate with — exactly the surrender NATO says it wants to avoid.



Field of Mars at the Lychakiv Military Cemetery in Lviv, Ukraine, December 2023. (President of Ukraine/Wikimedia Commons)

As other countries have pointed out at the United Nations General Assembly, the U.S. and NATO's rejection of negotiation and diplomacy in favor of a long war they hope will eventually "weaken" Russia is a flagrant violation of the "Pacific Settlement of Disputes" that all U.N. members are legally committed to under Chapter VI of the U.N. Charter. As it says in Article 33(1):

"The parties to any dispute, the continuance of which is likely to endanger the maintenance of international peace and security, shall, first of all, seek a solution by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangements, or other peaceful means of their own choice."

But NATO's leaders are not coming to Washington to work out how they can comply with their international obligations and negotiate peace in Ukraine. On the contrary. At a June meeting in preparation for the summit, NATO defense ministers approved a plan to put NATO's military support to Ukraine "on a firmer footing for years to come."

The effort will be headquartered at a U.S. military base in Wiesbaden, Germany, and involve almost 700 staff. It has been described as a way to "Trump proof" NATO backing for Ukraine, in case former President Donald Trump wins the election and tries to draw down U.S. support.

At the summit, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg wants NATO leaders to commit to providing Ukraine with \$43 billion worth of equipment each year, indefinitely. Echoing George Orwell's doublethink that "war is peace," Stoltenberg said, "The paradox is that the longer we plan, and the longer we commit [to war], the sooner Ukraine can have peace."



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at NATO headquarters in Brussels on June 28, 2024. (NATO, Flickr, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0)

The summit will also discuss how to bring Ukraine closer to NATO membership, a move that guarantees the war will continue, since Ukrainian neutrality is Russia's principal war aim.

As Ian Davis of *NATO Watch* reported, NATO's rhetoric echoes the same lines he heard throughout 20 years of war in Afghanistan: "The Taliban (now Russia) can't wait us out." But this vague hope that the other side will eventually give up is not a strategy.

There is no evidence that Ukraine will be different from Afghanistan. The U.S. and NATO are making the same assumptions, which will lead to the same result. The underlying assumption is that NATO's greater GDP, extravagant and corrupt military budgets, and fetish for expensive weapons technology must somehow, magically, lead Ukraine to victory over Russia.

When the U.S. and NATO finally admitted defeat in Afghanistan, it was the Afghans who had paid in blood for the West's folly, while the U.S.-NATO war machine simply moved on to its next "challenge," learning nothing and making political hay out of abject denial.



U.S. soldiers with Afghans boarding a C-17 Globemaster III at Hamid Karzai International Airport on Aug. 21 after the Taliban captured Kabul. (U.S. Air Force, Brennen Lege)

Less than three years after the rout in Afghanistan, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin recently called NATO "the most powerful and successful alliance in history." It is a promising sign for the future of Ukraine that most Ukrainians are reluctant to throw away their lives in NATO's dumpster fire.

In an article titled "The New Theory of Ukrainian Victory Is the Same as the Old," the Quincy Institute's Mark Episkopos wrote, "Western planning continues to be strategically backwards. Aiding Kyiv has become an end in itself, divorced from a coherent strategy for bringing the war to a close."

Episkopos concluded that "the key to wielding [the West's] influence effectively is to finally abandon a zero-sum framing of victory..."

We would add that this was a trap set by the United States and the United Kingdom, not just for Ukraine, but for their NATO allies too. By refusing to support Ukraine at the negotiating

table in April 2022, and instead demanding this “zero-sum framing of victory” as the condition for NATO’s support, the U.S. and U.K. escalated what could have been a very short war into a protracted, potentially nuclear, war between NATO and Russia.

Turkish leaders and diplomats complained at how their American and British allies undermined their peacemaking, while France, Italy, and Germany squirmed for a month or two but soon surrendered to the war camp.

When NATO leaders meet in Washington, what they should be doing, apart from figuring out how to comply with Article 33(1) of the U.N. Charter, is conducting a clear-eyed review of how this organization that claims to be a force for peace keeps escalating unwinnable wars and leaving countries in ruins.



The U.S. Capitol at night. (Diane Krauthamer, Flickr, CC BY-NC-SA 2.0)

The fundamental question is whether NATO can ever be a force for peace or whether it can never be anything but a dangerous, subservient extension of the U.S. war machine.

We believe that NATO is an anachronism in today’s multipolar world: an aggressive, expansionist military alliance whose inherent institutional myopia and blinkered, self-serving threat assessments condemn us all to endless war and potential nuclear annihilation.

We suggest that the only way NATO could be a real force for peace would be to declare that, by this time next year, it will take the same steps that its counterpart, the Warsaw Pact, took in 1991, and finally dissolve what Secretary Austin would have been wiser to call “the most dangerous military alliance in history.”

Medea Benjamin is co-founder of Global Exchange and CODEPINK: Women for Peace. She is the co-author, with Nicolas J.S. Davies, of *War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict*, available from OR Books in November 2022. Other books include, *Inside Iran: The Real History and Politics of the Islamic Republic of Iran* (2018); *Kingdom of the Unjust: Behind the U.S.-Saudi Connection* (2016).

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