

# Bill Kaplan: Avoid nuclear war and end Putin's aggression

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President Eisenhower's diary observed that a Pentagon war game concluded that a nuclear war would eviscerate the federal government, destroy most of America and worse: "65 percent of the population would require some kind of medical care, and in most instances, no opportunity whatsoever to get it, (and that) the damage inflicted by us against the Soviets was roughly three times greater." The apocalypse.

Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine has brought the world to the precipice of nuclear holocaust. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov told CNN that the use of nuclear weapons would be permissible if Russia faced an "existential threat." Earlier, Putin put Russian nuclear forces on "special combat readiness." And, Russian troops attacked a Ukrainian nuclear plant and occupied Chernobyl, unmindful of the threat of releasing radiation across Europe.

Ukraine's heroic resistance, armed by the U.S. and NATO, against Russian aggression, plus economic sanctions have put Putin in a corner. The White House is preparing contingency plans if a cornered Putin uses chemical, biological or nuclear weapons. Ominously, the Washington Post headlined: "Russian military leaders declined calls from U.S., Pentagon says". Lack of communication could lead to errors and miscalculations with dire consequences.

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Now is not the time for an escalatory U.S. enforced no-fly zone over Ukraine. Nor would it be prudent to deploy U.S. troops to Ukraine, conventional medium-range

missiles in Eastern Europe or having ambiguous first-use “nuclear options in (U.S.) defense strategy” championed by Wisconsin GOP Representative Mike Gallagher. The U.S. needs off-ramp options to avoid nuclear war and end Putin’s aggression.

At present there may be a stalemate in Ukraine with heavy casualties on both sides (Ukrainian civilians and Russian troops). Perhaps a ceasefire is possible. Already there has been an exchange of POWs. One roadmap forward might be the 1955 Austrian State Treaty.

President Reagan heralded the “historic importance” of the agreement between the U.S., its allies and the Soviet Union. It ended post-WWII occupation of Austria, confirmed its prewar borders, forbade Austria to have nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction, allowed Austria to have conventional armed forces and protected the language rights of its minorities. Critically, Austria declared its “permanent neutrality”, with no foreign military bases or membership in a military alliance.

The agreement is not an exact fit. Ukraine gave up all its nuclear weapons in 1994, and should not be equated with a Hitler-annexed Austria. However, many of its principles are applicable. Ukrainian President Zelensky is no longer seeking NATO membership; there has been talk of accepting neutrality and negotiating the status of Crimea and Russian-speaking eastern Ukraine. The growing costs for Putin may force a deal.

However, Putin must accept President Zelensky as Ukraine’s leader. Moreover, there won’t be regime change in Russia. The first step is a ceasefire to end the carnage. Then Zelensky and Putin must directly negotiate. Economic sanctions against Russia and conventional weapons for Ukraine should continue until an agreement is reached and implemented. There’s no military solution. The world must avoid nuclear war.

— Kaplan wrote a guest column from Washington, D.C., for the *Wisconsin State Journal* from 1995 - 2009