



What Ukraine needs to end the war

December 19, 2022 **Ilan I. Berman** *The Washington Times*

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Back in 1971, the Swiss American scholar Fred Ikle authored a slim volume on a relatively obscure topic: how nations should think about entering and exiting conflicts. The following decade, Ikle went on to serve as undersecretary of defense for policy in the Reagan administration. Meanwhile, his book “Every War Must End” turned into essential reading for policymakers because of its core premise — since war is a temporary condition, governments need to act accordingly during hostilities and create the necessary conditions for the peace that follows.

That guidance applies to the current war in Ukraine. It could be argued that Russia is doing its best to create a state of permanent conflict with its western neighbor through tactics such as bombing schools, kidnapping Ukrainian children, and dismantling critical infrastructure. Nevertheless, officials in Kyiv are actively preparing for the end of the conflict — and laying out the parameters for what an acceptable peace would look like.

Those particulars, however, aren’t well understood in Washington, where partisan calls for Kyiv to compromise with Moscow have grown of late. Yet understanding Ukraine’s core conditions is vital if we hope for some feasible settlement soon.

- **Restoration of territory.** The central demand of the Ukrainian government is that the Kremlin return all the territories it has seized, both in the course of the current war and beforehand. This includes the Crimean Peninsula, which was unlawfully annexed by Russia after a stage-managed referendum in 2014. In the past, pundits have speculated that Kyiv should give up its claims to Crimea to make peace with Moscow. But for Ukraine, regaining the peninsula is a central objective, without which a cessation of hostilities is simply not possible.
- **Return of citizens.** Russia’s assault on Ukraine has included a massive displacement of the country’s population. Since the start of the war, nearly 8 million Ukrainians have left the country. More than a quarter of that total has crossed into Russia, according to U.N. statistics. Many, however, have not done so willingly; reports have abounded of forcible transfers of Ukrainians from territories occupied by Russian forces. U.S. officials estimate that hundreds of thousands have been “interrogated, detained and forcibly deported” as part of the Kremlin’s “filtration” operations in the parts of Ukraine under its control. Repatriating these de facto prisoners of war has become a cardinal priority for Kyiv — one that its officials say will preoccupy them until all their citizens come home.
- **Reconstruction.** Some 10 months of war have witnessed the destruction of Ukraine’s population centers and infrastructure on a massive scale, and their rebuilding is a prerequisite for the country to return to normal. The likely price of such an effort, however, is formidable, now estimated at \$1 trillion or more. It’s for this reason that European nations have increasingly begun to call for a “Marshall Plan” for Ukrainian reconstruction — and for Western nations to begin serious planning of post-conflict aid. While it’s still too early to envision what form such an effort might ultimately take, it is already possible to identify a key element of it. If Western nations want to decisively shape Ukraine’s geopolitical outlook, they need to make it an active partner in its rebuilding (rather than simply a passive recipient of aid). And Ukrainian officials need to avoid giving China a major stake in postwar reconstruction or risk running afoul of Washington against the backdrop of intensifying U.S.-Chinese “great power competition.”
- **Reparations.** In Ukraine today, there’s a near-unanimous consensus that Moscow needs to pay restitution for its unprovoked aggression. Notably, the international community concurs; in mid-November, the U.N. General Assembly passed a landmark resolution calling for Russia to pay reparations. Exactly how much that should be, however, is a matter of some dispute. Ukrainian officials have estimated the damage caused by Russia’s aggression at upward of \$750 billion. Kyiv, however, has indicated that it plans to seek a significantly more modest sum, just \$300 billion, as compensation. That figure isn’t coincidental; it roughly corresponds with the estimated total of the Russian foreign exchange reserves held in Western countries that have been frozen in response to the Kremlin’s war of choice. In effect, then, Kyiv is asking Western nations to give it those Russian assets to compensate it for wartime hardship and simultaneously impose steep added costs on Moscow.

For policymakers in both Washington and European capitals, these criteria should be instructive. Ukraine didn’t start the current war, but it has now told us what it needs in order to exit the fight. If Western nations truly want the conflict to end as soon as possible, we should help them get it.

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