

## Open letter opposing a no-fly zone in Ukraine

We, the undersigned, urge the Biden administration to continue to reject calls to impose a dangerous no-fly zone over all or part of Ukraine. A no-fly zone would commit the U.S. and NATO forces to shoot down any Russian aircraft that enter. It would be naive to think that merely declaring a no-fly zone would convince the Russian military to comply voluntarily. In short, a no-fly zone would mean going to war with Russia.

We deplore Russia's aggression, admire the bravery of Ukrainians, mourn the loss of innocent life, and wish for a speedy end to the conflict. However, it strains credulity to think that a U.S. war with Russia would make the American people safer or more prosperous. To the contrary, going to war with Russia, a nuclear peer of the United States, would expose Americans to vast and unnecessary risks. A war that expands beyond Ukraine's borders could also inflict damage across Europe and weaken America's NATO allies. We call upon the administration to avoid such a gambit and continue to use appropriate diplomatic means and economic pressure to end the conflict.

The United States has already made clear its opposition to the war and to Russia's attacks on innocent Ukrainians, and has imposed punishing economic sanctions. What the announcement of a no-fly zone would add would be the threat to engage in a shooting war with Russian forces. And if the United States threatens to do something, it will have to deliver. As [two retired U.S. officers have written](#), "Contrary to what so many in the commentariat seem to believe, a no-fly zone is not a military half-measure. It is a combat operation designed to deprive the enemy of its airpower, and it involves direct and sustained fighting."

Some of those calling for even a "limited" no-fly zone admit that they are willing to see the United States and its NATO allies wage war against Russia in defense of Ukraine. For example, one prominent signatory of a letter advocating a no-fly zone has [recently admitted](#) that a no-fly zone "is an act of war . . . You have to enforce a no-fly zone, which means you have to be willing to use force against those who break the no-fly zone." Even before the war began, [another signatory wrote](#) that "U.S. leaders should be marshalling an international coalition of the willing, readying military forces to deter Putin and, if necessary, prepare for war . . . The horrible possibility exists that Americans, with our European allies, must use our military to roll back Russians—even at risk of direct combat." A no-fly zone would expand the war, not stop it.

Throughout the current crisis, the Biden administration has been clear-eyed in rejecting the possibility of using U.S. military force in Ukraine. The administration's principled restraint commands [bipartisan support](#). For example, [Republican Senator Marco Rubio](#)

[has warned](#) that a no-fly zone “means starting World War III.” [Democratic Senator Chris Murphy likewise writes](#) that a no-fly zone is “a bad idea and Congress would never authorize it.”

The United States and its European allies have imposed sanctions on Russia so severe that they have little historical precedent. We are also providing Ukraine with significant military support. Yet there must be a clear ceiling for escalation, as U.S. officials and experts appreciated during the Cold War, when the United States faced a more powerful adversary than Russia represents today. Russian President Vladimir Putin will pay for his reckless gamble in Ukraine. The United States should respond in responsible ways, not make a reckless gamble of its own.

*Individuals have signed in their personal capacity, using affiliations for identification purposes only:*

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6. Paul Avey, Virginia Tech
7. Andrew Bacevich, Quincy Institute for Responsible Statecraft
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9. Peter Beinart, City University of New York
10. Nora Bensahel, Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies
11. Rachel Bovard, Conservative Partnership Institute
12. Emerson Brooking, Atlantic Council
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14. Dan Caldwell, Stand Together
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23. Michael Brendan Dougherty, *National Review*
24. Jeffrey A. Engel, Southern Methodist University

25. Ryan Evans, *War on the Rocks*
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