

Call for an Immediate Ceasefire and Peace Negotiations to End the War in Ukraine. Joseph Gerson

By [Dr. Joseph Gerson](#)

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Week of Global Mobilization for Peace in Ukraine (WGMPU) from Saturday 30th September to Sunday - 8th October 2023.

The common goal is to call for an immediate ceasefire and peace negotiations to end the war in Ukraine.

During the webinar, Joseph Gerson addressed the need to prevent nuclear escalation and the absence of arms control and strategic security diplomacy

My talk will be in two parts:

First, I will focus on the continuing dangers of Ukrainian War desperation or the possibility of miscalculations triggering possible use of nuclear weapons. I'll then turn to how the war has eliminated what remained of a fragile arms control regime and what passed for "strategic stability."

There I will draw on what I have heard in a track II process about possible constructive ways forward.

Even as there were hopeful words from Sergey Lavrov yesterday, the current situation remains dangerous for all of us. If we are not moving into a new Cold War, we seem to be moving into both tectonic and still uncertain geopolitical changes and an international great power ice age which increases the danger of war. That said, change is a constant, ice melts, and we can prevent further catastrophes with popular pressure and time.

Earlier this week, Dr. Alexey Gromyko, the grandson of the longtime Soviet foreign minister

and a significant figure in the Russian establishment, reiterated what serious analysts have been saying since February 2022.

Almost two years into the war, we are still confronted by the most dangerous moment in world history since 1962.

That was when the U.S. and the Soviet Union went “eyeball to eyeball” during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Back then, the Kennedy Administration believed the chances of an apocalyptic U.S.-Soviet nuclear war were between a third and a half. That’s how dangerous the Ukraine war remains, especially if it drags on.

The Cuban Missile was also the occasion for a series of miscalculations.

We were brought to the brink of nuclear annihilation when a mistaken launch order was sent to a U.S. missile base in Okinawa and again when a nuclear-armed Soviet submarine was attacked by depth charges in violation of Kennedy’s orders.

We were saved by a courageous Russian submarine officer who chose to risk losing rather than using his nuclear-tipped torpedoes and by a U.S. missileer who chose to ignore the mistaken Okinawan launch order. Those decisions, luck, and inspired diplomacy – which we lack today – explain why we are still alive.

There is no reason to believe that command and control systems are significantly better now than they were then.

Dr. Gromyko’s other point, which we needn’t love but must respect, helps to explain the urgency of today’s crisis. Victory in the Ukraine War is, he said, a “key national security interest of Russia”, and “no nuclear power can accept losing a military conflict.” Fortunately, at this stage in the war, unlike February 24, 2022, “victory” may consist of an armistice that leaves Moscow in control of Crimea and the devastated districts that it occupies rather than the total defeat and functional elimination of the Ukrainian state.

The greatest danger we face, which has diminished as a result of the military stalemate, would be if Kyiv threatened Moscow’s hold of Crimea, which has been the home for Moscow’s Black Sea fleet for almost three centuries.

As one Russian general said in our track II exchange, if Crimea is threatened “All bets are off” in terms of Russian resort to its nuclear arsenal.

The annexation of Crimea in 2014 violated the U.N. charter, but it was consistent with Russian history, with the current Russian empire’s perceived vital interests, and it reflected popular support of the Russian-identified majority there.

Sixty years ago, President Kenedy was prophetic when he advised that “while defending our own vital interests, nuclear powers must avert those confrontations which bring an adversary to a choice of either a humiliating retreat or a nuclear war. To adopt that kind of course in the nuclear age would be evidence only of the bankruptcy of our policy—or of a collective death wish for the world.” Hopefully, this is remembered in Western capitals.

Regardless of rights and wrongs: NATO’s reckless expansion to Russia’s borders, the EU’s insistence that Kyiv sever all economic ties with Moscow in order to join the economic union,

and Putin's brutal preemptive and imperial invasion of Ukraine, the reality is that time is NOT on Ukraine's side.

And, as Tom Friedman wrote in the New York Times in the early days of the war, like it or not the war can only end with a "dirty deal." Better now than later.

With the Ukraine War, Russia's turn to the East including North Korea, and with the U.S.-Chinese competition for regional hegemony in Asia and the Pacific, we are also faced with the dangerous absence of what once passed for strategic stability and the complete absence of arms control agreements and disarmament diplomacy among the nuclear powers.

I have had the privilege and challenge of being invited into a confidential track II semi-diplomatic process that includes current and former senior government advisors, arms control, and other diplomats, and even a few generals from Russia, the U.S, and Europe. In my remaining time, I'll share some of what I have been hearing from them.

Nothing is left of the arms control architecture.

Practicing what Henry Kissinger called linkage, Moscow has pulled the plug on the New START and Open Skies treaties, as well as on most of the communications and transparency provisions that served crisis management throughout much of the Cold War and post-Cold War era.

Until Moscow is satisfied with Ukraine War-related diplomacy or the war's outcome, the Kremlin has no intention of resuming arms control or strategic stability negotiations.

Blame does not lie entirely with Moscow. We need to acknowledge that Russia's nuclear threats mirror the more than 30 times during wars and international crises that the U.S. has prepared and threatened to initiate nuclear war.

The first, and maybe determinative, attack on the arms control order - which never eliminated the danger of nuclear annihilation - came when the Bush II-Cheney government abandoned the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty. Along with the NPT, it was a cornerstone of the arms control architecture. And then came, Donald Trump who abrogated INF Treaty that had ended the Cold War.

In the Track II sessions there is recognition that the initial failure of Russian conventional military forces to overwhelm Ukraine revealed Russian conventional inferiority. Faced now with a strengthened and enlarged NATO, Russian military doctrine is placing greater reliance on its nuclear arsenal. We see this in Medvedev's repeated nuclear saber-rattling. And, using the precedent of U.S. nuclear weapons in Western Europe, Russians explain that the new deployment of nuclear weapons to Belarus is simply the equalizing of the balance of forces, which is to say, terror.

There are also increasing Russian concerns about defending Kaliningrad and assertions that if NATO nuclear weapons were deployed to Poland, Moscow would respond by basing tactical nuclear weapons in Kaliningrad. Fortunately, Europeans in our meetings are clear that the deployment of nuclear weapons to Poland will never be permitted. We also need to consider that with global warming the Arctic is becoming a zone of strategic competition. With the snowcap melting, there is the temptation to deploy nuclear weapons there.

You will remember that in June Jake Sullivan, President Biden's National Security Advisor, gave a major speech to the U.S. Arms Control Association. While highlighting U.S. modernization of all three legs of its nuclear triad, he communicated willingness to unconditionally engage Russia and China in arms control diplomacy, and he pledged that more proposals for arms control would be forthcoming. Russians in the Track II process noted that the Kremlin did not trash Sullivan's speech, and they expressed interest in seeing those proposals. Unfortunately, unless something is happening secretly in a back channel, those proposals have yet to be transmitted.

There is also the dangerous absence of strategic stability, the loss of essential crisis and strategic planning communications, which is now compounded by a near total loss of mutual trust and transparency.

And the icing on top of this dystopian nuclear cake is the rise of China, Beijing's expanding nuclear arsenal; its military, economic, and diplomatic competition with the U.S. for regional hegemony; and its disinclination to engage in arms control negotiations until it has parity with the United States and Russia.

Participants in the Track II process do not share our commitments to a nuclear weapons-free world, to common security diplomacy, or even the U.N. charter. Especially those from the U.S., Russia, and France are deeply, if unconsciously, rooted in their empire's world views and ambitions. BUT, within those limitations, they are united in pursuit of avoiding nuclear catastrophe and in hopes of finding ways to resume arms control and strategic stability diplomacy.

Two processes they have identified stand out. Drawing from Cold War history, when U.S./NATO vs. Russia/Warsaw Pact tensions were near their height and the U.S. was savaging the people of Indochina, they note that there was compartmentalization. SALT arms control treaties were negotiated. A hotline between Washington and Moscow was established. And there was significant transparency, including notifications of major troop movements in order not to generate miscalculations.

But at this stage, with the balance of power and shape of the emerging world disorder still at play, and with Russian-Ukraine War linkage, there are serious doubts about the possibility of compartmentalization. But if not now, maybe in the future.

The second and not particularly promising path they have identified out of a sense of desperation, is negotiations within the P-5 structure. The history of arms control progress in that venue is less than inspiring. But given the increasing complexity of great power nuclear planning, preparations, and diplomacy has become a three-way, no longer bilateral game, and the P-5 is seen as one way to bring China into arms control and strategic stability diplomacy.

In the Track II process, as here, there is a sober recognition of the truth that we are as the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists warns, 90 seconds from midnight. In addition to our work to end the Ukraine War, we have the challenge of imagining ways to revive the nuclear consciousness that contributed so mightily to the end of the Cold War. Beyond consciousness, we must do all that we can to build a new movement to prevent nuclear war and to create the path to a nuclear weapons-free world.

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Dr. Joseph Gerson is President of the Campaign for Peace, Disarmament and Common Security and Vice-President of the International Peace Bureau. His books include With Hiroshima Eyes: Atomic War, Nuclear Extortion and Moral Imagination and Empire and the Bomb: How the U.S. Uses Nuclear Weapons to Dominate the World.

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