

War in Ukraine: How Should the United States Respond?

On February 24th, 2022, Russia invaded neighboring Ukraine. Since the invasion, thousands have died, with millions more uprooted and forced to flee their homes. This has led to a robust discussion regarding Russia's motivations for invading Ukraine, including fears over NATO expansion and Ukraine's interest in Western institutions, the democratization of Ukraine, and the expansion of Russian borders. Thus far, diplomatic negotiations have not ended the war, and the intensity of the day-to-day conflict continues to rise. This war challenges both European politics and the current international order. Therefore, it is of concern to the United States and its European and global interests. Because of variation in public opinion on the issue of response, it is vital to deliberate over potential options and actions. This issue sheet proposes three options for a possible response: Minimal Intervention, Continued Sanctions and Diplomacy, and Military Intervention. As we collaboratively evaluate this issue, it is essential to consider the drawbacks and trade-offs of each option and action.



Source: Wikimedia Commons, 2022

Option 1: Minimal Intervention

This option says the United States should refrain from directly intervening in the current war in Ukraine. Because Ukraine is not a member of NATO, the United States does not have a treaty obligation to defend Ukraine. The United States needs to let European countries take the lead in addressing this war. The United States must focus on repairing its domestic politics and not get distracted by new conflicts on foreign soil.

Overall Drawback

This option might undermine NATO and American leadership and credibility in world politics while putting too much confidence in the ability of our European allies to manage local conflict without the benefit of a unified military alliance.

Example Actions and Drawbacks



Option 2: Continued Sanctions and Diplomacy

This option says the United States should assertively respond to Russia's aggression while simultaneously keeping the door open for a diplomatic solution. The United States has leadership responsibility in world politics but must be careful not to further escalate the war in Ukraine. This means the United States must consider negotiating a diplomatic solution involving third-party states and organizations to the benefit of all involved actors.

Overall Drawback

This option's use of severe sanctions and diplomatic isolation could be interpreted by Russia as an escalation and have the opposite effect, might fail to deter Russia from using force in the future, and requires long-term unity among the states applying sanctions.

Example Actions and Drawbacks



Option 3: Military Intervention

This option says the United States should militarily intervene to defend its European interests and protect Ukraine. The United States must deter Russia from further aggression in Europe. This can only be done by aiding Ukrainian forces or directly using or threatening American military action. Rather than waiting for sanctions and diplomacy to work, the United States needs to act now and signal to the world that unprovoked attacks are not legitimate uses of force in world politics.

Overall Drawback

This option greatly increases the likelihood of war between the NATO and Russian forces, who possess tactical nuclear weapons and significant cyber capabilities.

Example Actions and Drawbacks



Guiding Questions

1. Option 1 says the U.S. should avoid entanglement in this war. Is it a more significant problem for world politics if the U.S. stands aside?
2. Option 2 says the U.S. should pursue a diplomatic solution. What costs are you willing to ask Ukraine to accept to end this war? For example, what if Russia demands Ukraine surrender territory to separatists or Russia itself?
3. Option 3 says the U.S. should militarily intervene. Is the U.S. prepared to fight another war immediately following Iraq and Afghanistan?
4. Thinking about Options 1 and Option 3, does the U.S. have a moral obligation to use its power to intervene and protect the Ukrainian people?
5. Thinking about Options 2 and 3, do you fear retaliation from Russia if the U.S. is too aggressive?

