

From [Democracy Now](#) | Original Article

The Biden administration has ruled out the idea of pushing Ukraine to negotiate with Russia to end the war, even though many U.S. officials believe neither side is “capable of winning the war outright,” reports The Washington Post. This comes as the war in Ukraine appears to be escalating on a number of fronts, with Russian President Vladimir Putin accusing Ukraine of committing a “terrorist act” and launching the largest strikes on Ukraine in months. For more on the war, we speak with CodePink co-founder Medea Benjamin and independent journalist Nicolas Davies, the co-authors of the forthcoming book, “War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict.” “We, the American public, have to push the White House and our leaders in Congress to call for proactive negotiations now,” says Benjamin.

AMY GOODMAN: *The Washington Post* is [reporting](#) the Biden administration has ruled out the idea of pushing Ukraine to negotiate with Russia to end the war, even though many U.S. officials believe neither side is, quote, “capable of winning the war outright.”

This comes as the war in Ukraine appears to be escalating on a number of fronts. On Saturday, a massive explosion damaged a key bridge connecting Russia to Crimea, which Moscow annexed in 2014. Russian President Vladimir Putin accused Ukraine of committing what he called a terrorist act. Since then, Russian missiles have struck over a dozen Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv and Lviv, killing at least 20 people.

On Tuesday night, President Biden was interviewed by Jake Tapper on CNN.

JAKE TAPPER: Would you be willing to meet with him at the G20?

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: Look, I have no intention of meeting with him, but, for example, if he came to me at the G20 and said, “I want to talk about the release of Griner,” I’d meet with him. I mean, it would depend. But I can’t imagine — look, we’ve taken a position — I just did a G7 meeting this morning — the idea nothing about Ukraine with Ukraine. So I’m not about to, nor is anyone else prepared to, negotiate with Russia about them staying in Ukraine, keeping any part of Ukraine, etc.

AMY GOODMAN: Despite Biden’s comments, there are growing calls for the U.S. to push for negotiations. On Sunday, General Mike Mullen, the former chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, appeared on *ABC This Week*.

MICHAEL MULLEN: It also speaks to the need, I think, to get to the table. I’m a little concerned about the language, which we’re about at the top, if you will.

MARTHA RADDATZ: President Biden’s language.

MICHAEL MULLEN: President Biden’s language. We’re about at the top of the language scale, if you will. And I think we need to back off that a little bit and do everything we possibly can to try to get to the table to resolve this thing.

AMY GOODMAN: We’re joined now by two guests: Medea Benjamin, co-founder of the peace group CodePink, and Nicolas J.S. Davies. They are the co-authors of the forthcoming book, *War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict*.

Medea, let’s begin with you in Washington, D.C. I mean, you look at this past week, the massive raining down of missiles and drone strikes by the Russian military across Ukraine, all the way into western Ukraine, in places like Lviv and the capital, Kyiv, and you see that President Putin is threatening to use a nuclear bomb. Is negotiation possible? What would that look like? And what needs to happen to accomplish that?

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Negotiations are not only possible, they are absolutely essential. There have been some negotiations on key issues so far, such as the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, such as getting the grain out of Ukraine, such as the prisoner swaps. But there have been no negotiations on the big issues. And Antony Blinken, the secretary of state, has not met with Lavrov. We just heard in that clip how Biden does not want to talk to Putin. The only way this war is going to end is by negotiations.

And we have seen the U.S. actually torpedo negotiations, starting from the proposals that the Russians put forward right before the invasion, which was summarily dismissed by the U.S. And then we saw, when the Turkish government was mediating talks at the end of March, early April, how it was the U.K. president, Boris Johnson, as well as Secretary of Defense Austin, who torpedoed those negotiations.

So, I don't think that it is realistic to think that there is going to be a clear victory by the Ukrainians that are going to be able to get back every inch of territory like they're now saying, including Crimea and all of Donbas. There has to be compromises on both sides. And we, the American public, have to push the White House and our leaders in Congress to call for proactive negotiations now.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Medea, could you be a little more specific about those talks that occurred, sponsored by Turkey and also Israel, as I understand, in terms of what was the potential way forward to a ceasefire, that was torpedoed? Because most Americans are not aware that early in the war there was a possibility of being able to stop the fighting.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Well, yes, and we go into great detail in our book, *War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict*, about exactly what happened then and how the proposal, that included neutrality for Ukraine, a removal of Russian troops, how the Donbas region was really going to be going back to the Minsk accords, that were never fulfilled, and there was a very positive response from the Ukrainians to the Russian proposals. And then we saw Boris Johnson coming to meet with Zelensky and saying that the, quote, “collective West” was not about to make an agreement with the Russians and was there to support Ukraine in this fight. And then we saw the same kind of message coming from the secretary of defense, Austin, who said that the goal was to weaken Russia. So the goalposts changed, and that entire agreement was blown up.

And we now see that Zelensky, from once saying that he was accepting neutrality for Ukraine, is now calling for fast-tracking a NATO application for Ukraine. And we then see the Russians, that have also hardened their views by having these — a referendum and then trying to annex these four provinces. So, if that agreement had actually moved forward, I think we would have seen an end to this war. It's going to be harder now, but it's still the only way forward.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And the fact that President Biden is still discounting the possibility of talks with Russia — those of us old enough to remember the Vietnam War understand that the United States, while fighting in the Vietnam War, spent five years at the negotiating table in Paris, between 1968 and 1973, in peace talks with the National Liberation Front of Vietnam and the Vietnamese government. So it's not unheard of that you can have peace talks while a war is still going on. I'm wondering your thoughts about that.

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Yes, but, Juan, we don't want to — we don't want to see these peace talks going on for five years. We want to see peace talks that come to an agreement very soon, because this war is affecting the entire world. We're seeing a rise in hunger. We're seeing a rise in the use of dirty energy. We're seeing a rise and a hardening of militarists throughout the world and increased expenditures on militarism, a strengthening of NATO. And we're seeing the real possibility of nuclear war. So we can't afford, as a globe, to allow this to keep going on for years.

And that's why I think it's so important that the progressive people in this country recognize that there is not one Democrat who voted against the \$40 billion package to Ukraine or the more recent \$13 billion package, that this issue is actually being questioned by the right, the extreme right in this country. It's being questioned also by Donald Trump, who said that if he had been president, this war wouldn't happen. He would have probably talked to Putin, which is right. So, we've got to build an opposition movement from the left to say that we want the Democrats in Congress to join with any Republicans that will join in this to put pressure on Biden. Right now the head of the Progressive Caucus, Pramila Jayapal, is having a hard time even getting her Progressive Caucus to sign onto a very moderate letter saying that we should pair the military assistance to Ukraine with a diplomatic push. So it's our job now to really create the momentum for diplomacy.

AMY GOODMAN: In April, the U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson met with Ukrainian President Zelensky. It's been reported Johnson pressured Zelensky to cut off peace negotiations with Russia. This is then-Prime Minister Johnson being interviewed by Bloomberg News back in May.

PRIME MINISTER BORIS JOHNSON: To any such proponent of a deal with Putin, how can you deal?

KITTY DONALDSON: Yeah.

PRIME MINISTER BORIS JOHNSON: How can you deal with a crocodile when it's in the middle of eating your left leg? You know, what's the negotiation? And that is what Putin is doing. And any kind of — he will try to freeze the conflict, he will try and call for a ceasefire, while he remains in possession of substantial parts of Ukraine.

KITTY DONALDSON: And do you say that to Emmanuel Macron?

PRIME MINISTER BORIS JOHNSON: And I make that point to all my friends and colleagues in the G7 and at NATO. And by the way, everybody gets that. Once you go through the logic, you can see that it's very, very difficult to get a —

KITTY DONALDSON: But you must want this war to end.

PRIME MINISTER BORIS JOHNSON: — to get a negotiated solution.

AMY GOODMAN: I wanted to bring Nicolas Davies into the conversation, co-author of *War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict*. The significance of what Boris Johnson said, and also the attempts of some in the U.S.

Congress to push for negotiation, very different from what the former prime minister was saying in Britain, like Congressmember Pramila Jayapal, who drafted a congressional sign-on letter calling on Biden to take steps to end the Ukraine war using — through several steps, including a negotiated ceasefire and new security agreements with Ukraine? So far only Congressmember Nydia Velázquez has signed on as a co-sponsor. So, if you can talk about the pressure?

NICOLAS DAVIES: Yeah, well, I mean, the effect of what we’re seeing is, effectively, a sort of ratcheting up of tensions. If the U.S. and the U.K. are willing to torpedo negotiations when they’re happening, but then they’re not willing to — you know, they’re willing to go and tell Zelensky and Ukraine what to do when it’s a matter of killing the negotiations, but now Biden says he’s not willing to tell them to restart negotiations. So, it’s pretty clear where that leads, which is to endless war.

But the truth is that every war ends at the negotiating table. And at the U.N. General Assembly a couple of weeks ago, world leaders, one after the other, stepped up to remind NATO and Russia and Ukraine of that, and that what the U.N. Charter calls for is for the peaceful resolution of conflicts through diplomacy and negotiation. The U.N. Charter does not say that when a country commits aggression, that they should therefore be subjected to an endless war that kills millions of people. That is just “might makes right.”

So, actually, 66 countries spoke up at the U.N. General Assembly to restart peace negotiations and ceasefire negotiations as soon as possible. And that included, for instance, the foreign minister of India, who said, “I’m being — we’re being pressured to take sides here, but we have been clear from the very beginning that we are on the side of peace.” And this is what the world is calling for. Those 66 countries include India and China, with billions of people. Those 66 countries represent the majority of the world’s population. They are mostly from the Global South. Their people are already suffering from shortages of food coming from Ukraine and Russia. They are facing the prospect of famine.

And on top of that, we’re now facing a serious danger of nuclear war. Matthew Bunn, who’s a nuclear weapons expert at Harvard University, told NPR the other day that he estimates a 10 to 20% chance of the use of nuclear weapons in Ukraine or over Ukraine. And that was before the incident on the Kerch Strait Bridge and the retaliatory bombing by Russia. So, if both sides just keep escalating, what will Matthew Bunn’s estimate of the chance of nuclear war be in a few months’ time or a year’s time? And Joe Biden himself, at a fundraiser at media mogul James Murdoch’s house, just chatting with his financial backers in front of the press, said he does not believe that either side can use a tactical nuclear weapon without it then escalating to

Armageddon.

And so, here we are. We have gone from early April, when President Zelensky went on TV and told his people that the goal is peace and the restoration of normal life as soon as possible in our native state — we have gone from Zelensky negotiating for peace, a 15-point peace plan that really looked very, very promising, to now a rising — a real prospect of the use of nuclear weapons, with the danger rising all the time.

This is just not good enough. This is not responsible leadership from Biden or Johnson, and now Truss, in the U.K. Johnson claimed, when he went to Kyiv on April the 9th, that he was speaking for, quote, “the collective West.” But a month later, Emmanuel Macron of France and Olaf Scholz of Germany and Mario Draghi of Italy all put out new calls for new negotiations. You know, they seem to have whipped them back into line now, but, really, the world is desperate for peace in Ukraine right now.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Nicolas Davies, if that’s the case, why do you see so little in the way of peace movements in the populations of the advanced Western countries at this stage?

NICOLAS DAVIES: Well, actually, there are quite large and regular peace demonstrations in Berlin and other places around Europe. There have been bigger demonstrations in the U.K. than in the U.S. And, you know, I mean, all credit to my co-writer here, Medea, because she has been working so, so hard, along with all of CodePink and the members of Peace Action, Veterans for Peace and other peace organizations in the United States.

And really, but the public — the public really needs to understand the situation. And, you know, this is why we’ve written this book, to try and give people — it’s a short book, about 200 pages, a basic primer to the people — to give people a clearer understanding of how we got into this crisis, the role of our own government in helping to set the stage for this over the years leading up to it, you know, through NATO expansion and through the events of 2014 in Ukraine and the installation of a government there that, according to a Gallup poll in April 2014, barely 50% of Ukrainians even considered it a legitimate government, and that provoked the secession of Crimea and a civil war in Donbas, you know, that killed 14,000 people by the time the Minsk peace — the Minsk II peace accord was signed a year later. And we have a lot more about all of this in our book, and we really hope people will get a copy and read it and join the peace movement.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Nicolas, if I can, I wanted to bring in Medea again. Speaking of peace, Medea, the Nobel Peace Prize Committee recently gave the Nobel Prize to a group of civil society groups in Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. And in Ukraine, it was the Center for Civil Liberties. You wrote a [piece](#) in *Common Dreams* this week talking about the criticism of that prize by a leading pacifist in Ukraine who criticized the Center for Civil Liberties for embracing the agendas of international donors, like the State Department and the National Endowment for Democracy. Could you elaborate on that, and the lack of attention in the West to civil liberties violations inside of Ukraine?

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Well, yes, we were quoting a leading war resister, pacifist inside Ukraine that said that that organization that won the Nobel Peace Prize was following the agenda of the West, was not calling for peace talks but was actually calling for more weapons, was not — would not allow for the discussion of violations of human rights on the side of Ukraine and would not support those who were being beaten up or otherwise abused for not wanting to fight.

And so, our piece was to say that a Nobel Prize should really be going to those organizations in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, that are supporting the war resisters. And, of course, we know there are many, many thousands of them inside Russia who are trying to flee the country and having a hard time finding asylum, especially coming to the United States.

But, Juan, before we go, I just wanted to correct something that Amy said about Pramila Jayapal's letter. It has 26 members of Congress that have signed it now, and we're still pushing to get more signing it. So, I just wanted people to be clear that there still is a moment now to be calling your members of Congress and to be pushing them to call for diplomacy.

AMY GOODMAN: That's very significant, 26 members. Do you feel like there is a push in Congress now, that there is a kind of changing of the tide? I didn't realize that many had signed on. And also, finally, are you concerned about this last week Putin appointing this head of military operations, Sergei Surovikin, known as the “Butcher of Syria,” as “General Armageddon,” in this massive bombing by missiles and drone strikes across Ukraine and the killings of scores of people?

MEDEA BENJAMIN: Well, of course we're concerned about it. Our whole effort in this, writing

this book — and we produced a 20-minute video — is to show people the terrible devastation for the Ukrainian people that this war is causing.

And in terms of Congress, we think that 26 members is actually quite pathetic, that it should be all members of Congress. Why is it a difficult thing to call for negotiations? This letter isn't even saying cut off the military aid. So we think this is something that all members of Congress should be supporting. And the fact that they're not is quite astounding and really reflects that we don't have a movement in this country that is strong enough right now to change the tide.

And that's why we're on a 50-city speaking tour. We're calling on people to invite us to their communities. We're calling on people to do house parties, read the book, show the video. This is a turning point in history. We've talked about the potential of nuclear war. Well, we are the ones that are going to have to stop it by getting our elected representatives to reflect our desire for peace talks immediately to end this conflict, before we start seeing a nuclear war.

AMY GOODMAN: Medea Benjamin, we want to thank you and Nicolas Davies, co-authors of the book *War in Ukraine: Making Sense of a Senseless Conflict*.