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Guest: Jeffrey Sachs, economist, director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University and president of the U.N. Sustainable Development Solutions Network.

AMY GOODMAN: Russia has accused Ukraine of using drones to attack two air bases hundreds of miles inside Russia and an oil depot near the Ukrainian border. One of the air bases reportedly houses Russian nuclear-capable strategic bombers. While Ukraine has not publicly taken responsibility, a senior Ukrainian official told *The New York Times* the drones were launched from inside Ukrainian territory with help from Ukrainian special forces on the ground near at least one of the Russian bases. Russia responded to the drone strikes by firing a barrage of missiles across Ukraine. This comes as millions of Ukrainians are bracing for a winter without heat or electricity due to Russian strikes on Ukraine's civilian infrastructure. Meanwhile, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov recently accused the U.S. and its NATO allies of becoming directly involved in the war by arming and training Ukrainian soldiers.

We turn now to look at calls for negotiations to end the devastating war. Last week, during a state visit to the United States, French President Emmanuel Macron repeatedly said negotiations are the only way to end the fighting.

PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON: The only way to find a solution would be through negotiations. I don't see a military option on the ground.

AMY GOODMAN: That was French President Macron on *60 Minutes*. He also told ABC negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin are still possible.

PRESIDENT EMMANUEL MACRON: He knows very well Europe, the U.S. and so on. He knows his people, and I think he made mistakes. Is it impossible to come back at the table and negotiate something? I think it's still possible.

AMY GOODMAN: Last week, President Macron held a joint news conference with President Biden at the White House during which Biden said he would consider sitting down with Putin to end the war.

PRESIDENT JOE BIDEN: I'm prepared to speak with Mr. Putin if in fact there is an interest in him deciding he's looking for a way to end the war. He hasn't done that yet. If that's the case, in consultation with my French and my NATO friends, I'll be happy to sit down with Putin to see what he wants, has in mind. He hasn't done that yet.

AMY GOODMAN: A day after President Biden spoke, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke to Vladimir Putin for an hour by phone.

To talk more about the war in Ukraine and calls for negotiations, we're joined by Jeffrey Sachs. He's the director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University and president of the U.N. Sustainable Development Solutions Network. He has served as adviser to three U.N. secretaries-general. His latest [piece](#) is headlined "A Mediator's Guide to Peace in Ukraine." He's joining us from Vienna, Austria.

Professor Sachs, welcome back to *Democracy Now!* Why don't you lay out your thesis, your proposal for how this mediation can happen? We see there's a serious shift here. I mean, Macron with Biden at the White House, it was the first state visit to the White House under the Biden administration of any world leader, and clearly this was the major subject of their talks, both Macron being a back channel to Putin but also then President Biden himself saying he would speak with Putin. What do you think needs to happen?

JEFFREY SACHS: I think both sides see that there is no military way out. I'm speaking of NATO

and Ukraine on one side and Russia on the other side. This war, like von Clausewitz told us two centuries ago, is politics by other means, or with other means, meaning that there are political issues at stake here, and those are what need to be negotiated.

What President Macron said is absolutely correct, that President Putin wants political outcomes that, in my view, absolutely can be met at the negotiating table. Just to quote what Macron said in another interview, he said, “One of the essential points we must address” — meaning we, the West — “as President Putin has always said, is the fear that NATO comes right up to its doors, and the deployment of weapons that could threaten Russia.” Much of this war has been about NATO enlargement, from the beginning. And, in fact, since NATO enlargement to Ukraine and Georgia were put on the table by President George W. Bush Jr. and then carried forward by the U.S. neocons basically for the next 14 years, this issue has been central, and it’s been raised as central. But President Biden, at the end of 2021, refused to negotiate over the NATO issue.

But now is the time to negotiate over the NATO issue. That’s the geopolitics at stake. There are other issues, as well, but the point is, this war needs to end because it’s a disaster for everybody, a threat to the whole world. According to European Union President Ursula von der Leyen last week, 100,000 Ukrainian soldiers have died, 20,000 civilians. And the war continues. And so, this is an utter disaster, and we have not searched for the political solution.

What’s interesting, Amy, and I would emphasize it, is that inside the U.S. we’re finally hearing about this. President Biden’s statement was very consequential, but the week before that, perhaps as notable was the statement of the chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Mark Milley, who said, “Now is the time to negotiate.” What we see is a big debate inside the administration between the neocons on the one side and, I would say, those who see reality on the other side. Victoria Nuland, probably our neocon-in-chief in the administration, who’s been part of this NATO enlargement from the start, said, “No, can’t negotiate.” But others are saying, you know, it’s really time. So, this is a debate within the U.S. as much as it is a question of a sitting down between the United States and Russia.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: And, Jeffrey Sachs, you’ve mentioned that there are four core issues that you believe need to be negotiated. You have written about these, not only the issue, obviously, of NATO enlargement, but also the issue of protecting Ukraine’s

sovereignty and security, and also the fate of Crimea and the future of the Donbas. Could you talk a little bit about those other issues, especially the fate of Crimea, because most Americans and the media in this country do not really cover the historic relationship of Crimea to Russia and its military importance to Russia?

JEFFREY SACHS: Yeah, Juan. Thank you very much. From the beginning — and from before the beginning, from 2021, when Putin made clear what the political issues at stake were — but I happen to know this goes back, in many ways, back to 1990, '91. I was at that point an adviser to the economic team of President Gorbachev, and then, later, President Yeltsin, and Ukrainian President Kuchma, so I've watched this from the start. There have been a few very important political issues at stake. One is the NATO enlargement. I think it is really the dominant issue, but three others are extremely important.

Of course, I should say, equally important is Ukraine's sovereignty as a sovereign country and in need of security arrangements. But NATO as Ukraine's security doesn't work. It's an explosive brew. So, one needs to find, as President Zelensky himself said earlier this year, before backing off from it, that there needed to be a non-NATO way to secure Ukraine. And there can be. So, that's another crucial issue, is Ukraine's sovereignty and security in a non-NATO manner.

The third issue that is very consequential is Crimea. Crimea, the peninsula, people can look on the map, the peninsula in the Black Sea, has been the home to Russia's naval fleet in the Black Sea, and therefore completely consequential for Russia's economic and foreign policy and military security since 1783. So, this is, from Russia's point of view, an absolutely core issue. And incidentally, in 2008, when George W. Bush Jr. was very unwisely pushing NATO enlargement, President Putin said specifically to President Bush in Bucharest at the time of the NATO-Russia meeting, that "If you push NATO enlargement, we retake Crimea." This was already explicit. And the point is that, for Russia, this is vital.

Now, after what happened, of course, in 1954, in a symbolic action, because there was a Soviet Union at the time, not separate nations, Nikita Khrushchev, the chairman of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the chairman of the Soviet Union, transferred Crimea

from Russia to Ukraine. It didn't mean much. It was a celebration, a 300th anniversary of a treaty that Khrushchev celebrated by the this administrative transfer. It became consequential after the end of the Soviet Union and the independence of Russia and Ukraine.

There was a delicate balancing act for many, many years, especially in the early 2010s. Then-President Viktor Yanukovich was negotiating with Russia to give, essentially, a long-term lease to Crimea to satisfy Russia's security desires and needs as a balancing, as a delicate balancing. But the United States, very unwisely and very provocatively, contributed to the overthrow of Mr. Yanukovich in early 2014, setting in motion the tragedy before our eyes. And that ended that delicate balance. Russia said, "Crimea has to be ours, because we just saw that we can't depend on a long-term arrangement with Ukraine. The United States contributed to the overthrow of a Ukrainian president who was negotiating with us over this core issue."

So, my view is that — and almost everybody that discusses this in private understands — Crimea has been historically, and will be in the future, effectively, at least *de facto* Russian. And this cannot be the cause of World War

III
. We have to understand the centrality of this. We have been told about the centrality of this, basically, explicitly since 2008.

The last issue on the table is a real issue, and that is the ethnic divisions within Ukraine itself, given the complex history of this region and the piecing together of all of the countries of this region from various times in history. Ukraine itself is ethnically divided. On the western part, it's ethnically Ukrainian, but complicated there, too. But on the east, which is the Donbas, Luhansk and Donetsk, the two regions that are the center of this war, these are predominantly Russian, ethnic Russian, Russian-speaking, Russian Orthodox, and, after Yanukovich's overthrow, the place where paramilitaries demanded independence of these regions or joining Russia. And Russia supported those paramilitaries, and autonomous or independent states were declared.

What happened — and this is crucial to understand — is that, in 2015, there were agreements to solve this problem by giving autonomy to these eastern regions that were predominantly ethnic Russian. And these are called the Minsk agreements, Minsk I and Minsk II. And in particular for Minsk II, the Europeans, especially France and Germany, said, "We will be guarantors of that." But then, Ukraine, under the post-Yanukovich two presidencies, Poroshenko and Zelensky, refused to implement the Minsk II agreement, saying, "They're dead. We don't accept them. We don't accept autonomy." Russia said, "Well, you had a diplomatic agreement, and now this is violated." And this became another cause of this war. And we need a resolution of the Donbas issue, as well.

Ukrainian sovereignty, no NATO enlargement, *de facto* Russian control over Crimea, some kind of solution like Minsk II, some kind of autonomy, some solution for the Donbas — these are the four pieces that can save Ukraine, spare Russia, save the world from what is a growing disaster. And this is why we need a pragmatic approach.

JUAN GONZÁLEZ: Jeffrey Sachs, if I can, if you could briefly talk about how — we're hearing virtually every week of a new announcement of more U.S. military aid and economic aid to Ukraine. How is this constant stream of weapons and buttressing of the Ukrainian government either helping to end the war or helping to prolong it?

JEFFREY SACHS: It is prolonging it, definitely. And I think both sides miscalculated. Putin calculated that the initial invasion would push Ukraine to the negotiating table, and these political issues would be resolved. And frankly, in March, after the February invasion, there were negotiations. There were exchanges of documents. The mediators, the Turkish government, said, "We're coming close to an agreement." Indeed, both sides, both Russia and Ukraine, said, "We're coming close to an agreement."

Then the Ukrainians walked away from negotiating table. We don't know the full story to that. My own guess is that the U.S. and U.K. said, "You don't have to compromise in that way." There was a U.S. project for more than a decade to expand NATO, and I think there were forces in the administration that did not want to give up that project. And so Ukraine backed away from the negotiations, and the war went on.

Now, on the U.S. side, the calculation was that NATO weaponry, the HIMARS and others, combined with very tough economic sanctions, combined with freezing hundreds of billions of dollars of Russia's assets, combined with what the United States expected to be a worldwide agreement to isolate Russia, believed that this would bring the Russian economy to a state of collapse so that Russia could not continue to prosecute the war. This was also a serious miscalculation. Most of the world did not go along with the Western sanctions. Even in these votes in the United Nations, if you weight by the country populations involved, it's 20% of the world or 25% of the world that has voted against Russia, but most of the world not. The economic transactions of Russia with China, with India, with many other parts of the world have continued. The Russian economy has absolutely not collapsed. Russia has not run out of armaments. We have even reports today that some of these missile attacks have been identified by intelligence experts as newly manufactured, so this is not only the old stockpiles. So, the Western calculation was wrong, as well. Russia did not collapse. Neither side

collapsed. We entered a war of attrition.

To simply pump more money into this in an open-ended way right now is disastrous. It just means tens or hundreds of thousands of people killed more, in addition to the 100,000 or more already dead among Ukrainian forces. It means continued disruption to the world economy, which is taking its toll all over the world. It's clear we need a political outcome. Neither side is going to win militarily the way they expected. The costs of this war are brutal. And what the administration is trying to do is put in another \$40 billion without any real debate, because it wants to put it in an omnibus piece of legislation at the end of this year that has to be voted up or down, not on the Ukraine issues but on the overall keeping government open issues. So, we're not having that debate in Congress that we really need, because the opinion surveys are showing that more and more Americans say, "Something is not right. Tens of billions of dollars, people dying, massive economic disruption. Where are the negotiations?" And that's the real debate we need in Congress. But the administration is trying to stick in another \$40 billion without that debate taking place.

AMY GOODMAN: To be clear, Professor Sachs, you've denounced Russia's invasion as violent, of Ukraine?

JEFFREY SACHS: I'm sorry, Amy. I missed the opening.

AMY GOODMAN: You've denounced Russia's invasion of Ukraine?

JEFFREY SACHS: Of course. Absolutely, this was a collision that is disastrous, and the cruelty of the Russian invasion is enormous. But the foolishness, recklessness of the U.S. neoconservatives to push to this point is also something that needs accounting.

AMY GOODMAN: Finally, Professor Sachs —

JEFFREY SACHS: Because — sure.

AMY GOODMAN: Who would negotiate? Who would be the mediator that you're talking about, or mediators? We have 30 seconds.

JEFFREY SACHS: Clearly, the Turks are extremely skilled. This is their region. They've been deeply involved. Pope Francis, the U.N. secretary-general, the U.N. Security Council, of course, which includes all of the major actors, all of these can play a role. But I would say Turkey, as a leader in the Black Sea region, who knows all the participants, can do this. But this is not negotiation between Ukraine and Russia. This must be between the United States and Russia over the NATO issue, as well as Ukraine and Europe over the security issues that are so much at stake and, of course, Ukraine's core interests.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, Jeffrey Sachs, we want to thank you so much for being with us, economist and director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, president of the U.N. Sustainable Development Solutions Network. His many books include *The Ages of Globalization* and

A New Foreign Policy: Beyond American Exceptionalism

. We'll link to his new

[piece](#)

headlined "A Mediator's Guide to Peace in Ukraine," as well to the last

[interview](#)

we did with him, also in Austria, at [democracynow.org](https://www.democracynow.org).