

James Jatras

## The Evolution of NATO in the Post-Soviet Period

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Allow me to say at the outset how honored I am to be invited to take part in this very august discussion about the very dangerous situation the world finds itself in right now with respect to European security and the situation in Ukraine. Frankly, one of the hazards of having a conference like this is, anything we might say could literally be rendered obsolete five minutes later, given how fast things are moving with the charges and counter-charges that are coming from both sides in the Ukraine situation.

I think one of the problems we have in discussing this is, so many of us are limiting the discussion to Ukraine. Will Putin invade Ukraine, or will he not invade Ukraine? That’s the question. And our media in the West, of course, is full of this, which really obscures the issue.

### A Larger Framing

I think one way to try to approach framing it in a somewhat larger and more informative way is to note that the Polish Foreign Minister recently was in Moscow, and met with Mr. Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister. During those remarks, Mr. Lavrov referred to the withdrawal of the OSCE [Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe] mission in Donbas; something that was simply done spontaneously, it seems, by the countries that make up the members of the mission.

Mr. Lavrov drew an analogy of that to what happened in Kosovo in 1999, after the so-called Račak Massacre, which was the pretext, the trigger that was used to unleash the NATO war against Serbia. He

pointed out that the withdrawal of the mission set the stage for hostilities—that once you pull the mission out, it basically opens the door to all sorts of allegations as to what may or may not be going on in the zone of intended conflict, because, who’s there to verify it? That’s even assuming you could trust the people who were part of the mission in the first place. But at least, supposedly, there would be some neutral responsible eyes to say who’s doing what in the conflict zone that we could rely

on.

Instead, what we have right now is these charges and counter-charges coming from both sides, and interestingly, each side accusing the other of preparing a false flag [operation] that would open up hostilities. This is itself somewhat interesting, because up until now, even the suggestion of false flags—whether it was Serbian mortars alleged in Bosnia, or Qaddafi arming his soldiers with Viagra and committing mass rapes, or gas attacks in Syria—just the mere suggestion that countries do such things was treated as a conspiracy theory, something that never happens. Now it seems that Washington has “discovered” that false flags do in fact occur, and given how much U.S. and British intelligence services seem to specialize in such things, it’s nice to hear them finally admitting that they do occur.

I think a lot of the focus on Ukraine specifically obscures the deeper question here. That is, the Russian demand for security guarantees regarding the expansion of NATO, and that the process of NATO expansion will be shut, there will be no more countries admitted to NATO, expanding that alliance toward Russia’s borders.

### The Need for a New European Security Architecture

Just in the last day or so, Russia has responded to the American response to their demand for security guarantees, which basically told them the same thing that President Biden said in his remarks at the begin-

ning of the week: No way! No way are we going to discuss that with the Russians. We'll talk about secondary issues, we'll talk about confidence-building measures, we'll talk about what forces may or may not be deployed and verification and things of this sort. But on the core demand that Moscow has about NATO expansion, Washington is saying, "Absolutely not! It's not even up for discussion." In the response, the Russians said that they essentially now have no choice but to resort to what they referred to as "military-technical measures" to ensure their own security against the unwillingness of the West to address those security concerns.

We're waiting now to see, I think we're in a kind of a *sitzkrieg*, waiting to see what the next step is going to be from either side. One of my concerns as this whole crisis has unfolded, is the prospect that however much time the Russians take before they come back with their next measures, this leaves the door open to some kind of a provocation, some kind of a false flag in eastern Ukraine, where it will be then claimed that Moscow has begun its assault on Ukraine, that there is now an invasion, the long predicted Russian invasion of Ukraine.

In fact, I think too many neutral observers, or even some who are somewhat favorable toward Moscow, have been a little too quick to start chortling, "Oh well, look how they got sort of wrapped up in their own propaganda, predicting an invasion. Well, Wednesday has come and gone; the invasion hasn't happened." Let's wait and see what happens. I think we're going to see a little bit more ebb and flow between the two sides before something happens. But I think we're looking at the likelihood that something rather drastic will occur, unless diplomacy really pulls a rabbit out of its hat here, which really means that the Western powers have to come off their high horse and address Moscow's concerns. They don't show any signs of doing that.

I think, in order to fully appreciate how we got to where we are today, we really have to go back to the time of the break-up of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, and the assurances that Moscow was given that NATO would not expand further east. Of course, it's become very fashionable in the Western media and in Western circles to say, "No such assurances were given"; or, "The Russians did not ask for such assurances." Of course, there's plenty of material out there to

show that such assurances were given, certainly in a way that the Russians took as a gentlemen's agreement that this was not going to be done.

In fact, let's remember, at the time of the reunification of Germany, there was even the question of whether NATO would extend into the former East Germany, within the new German borders. That was a major concession on Moscow's part, to say, "Yes, a united Germany would be fully within NATO, and there would no question about that." When you make that concession, it's understood to start with, that yes, that's where it ends. Plus, whatever other language was given to them at the time about further expansion.

Then, we saw during the Clinton administration that Bill Clinton saw it was going to be good politics, in Illinois in particular among the Polish community, to promise NATO expansion. Because he was also afraid that Bob Dole, the Republican candidate (who was no less of a war monger than anyone else in either party), was fully willing to play that card. So, he decided to do it himself, so Czechia and Poland and Hungary were admitted to the alliance.

### **The Pretense of NATO as a Defensive Alliance Is Over**

It was at that point that I think we can say that any pretense NATO had of being a defensive alliance ended. Let's remember the words of the former chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, Dick Lugar of Indiana, that NATO had a choice to go either out of area, or out of business. The right choice would have been out of business. The reason for NATO no longer existed; there was no longer a Soviet Union, no longer a Warsaw Pact, no real defensive need against anybody in the East. The door was open for a reintegration of the European continent that had not existed since August of 1914. The long war of 1914 to 1945 was finally over; the Cold War was finally over. We could get back into a Europe that was united and putting itself finally back on the road of progress.

That did not happen. What we saw instead was that people in Washington from both parties saw the opportunity for what amounts to global domination, to this kind of Trotskyite, quasi-Bolshevik mentality that we are the vanguard of all of the rest of humanity. And we will impose the one and only true doctrine, instead of "peace, progress, and socialism" as the Soviet Union

had it, it was “democracy, human rights, and free markets as we interpret them,” and you’re going to get it whether you like it or not.

That was the attitude that was dominant in Washington, and it really got its test run in the Balkans in the mid-1990s. Partially in Bosnia, but more fully in Kosovo in 1999. You might say, that’s when the NATO death star became fully operational. And of course, they never looked back. When we hear that NATO is a defensive alliance, we think not only of Kosovo, we think about what happened in Libya, Iraq—which was not technically a NATO mission, but certainly was most of the same countries. And of course, the countries that have been tearing Syria apart for the past few years. And then they wonder why nobody in Moscow takes seriously the protestations of “Why don’t you trust us? We’re a defensive alliance.”

### **What Happens Next in Ukraine?**

So, this is where we are now. I think the question will be, what happens next in Ukraine? I have to believe that the Russians prepared for a rejection of their key demands when they issued them in the first place. They could have had no realistic sense that they would be met. The question would be, how far would the other side be willing to go to preserve their fading dominance in Europe?

For several years now, we’ve been talking about the emergence of a new global order, of a multi-polar world, where not only the United States and our allies—or satellites if you prefer—are the dominant force in the world, but Russia, China, the Eurasian powers, even other powers like India, Iran perhaps, are beginning to assert their own spheres, and these need to be respected. Perhaps this is most vividly illustrated in Eurasian integration, the Belt and Road Initiative, something that has the perspective, or the prospect of pulling together all of Eurasia in a very positive program of development that would include Europe as well. I think, in a sense, that is the real target here.

There was a piece written recently, I forget by whom, that the real issue here is not Ukraine, it is Germany, to make sure that Germany—and the rest of Europe by extension, but Germany being the power-

house European economy—that there is no integration of Europe and Germany into the broader Eurasian development scheme. And that anything that could be done to stop that, to initially trigger a new Cold War and a division of Europe, not at an inter-German border but at an inter-Ukraine border, if war does occur there and Ukraine is carved up as a sacrificial lamb. That will basically limit how far Eurasian integration can get into Europe.

Of course, we notice how adamant President Biden has been by saying, “Yes, Nord Stream 2 will be shut down.” And he states this unilaterally to the face of the German Chancellor, as though it were the Americans’ decision to shut down this project rather than Germany’s, or presumably Russia’s.

I think we’re waiting with baited breath right now. I think it’s important for everybody to speak out about the prospect of war. How much we have to be concerned that Western statements—I’m not saying the Russians are blameless, but I think in comparison, the real problem is on the Western side, particularly in the United States and the United Kingdom, who seem very eager to trip off a conflict in Ukraine, because they believe it will help exclude Russia from Europe, and cause a new Cold War, and force the Germans and the French, who have made signs of wanting to come to some accord with Moscow, to come back under the American umbrella and never look back.

We know that when NATO was started, what was the catch phrase? “Keep the Russians out, the Americans in, and the Germans down.” In a way, that hasn’t changed at all, and one way to ensure that, at least for another generation, would be to blow up Ukraine. At least that’s what some of these people in the West seem to think.

That is the real danger here in my opinion. I wish we had the transmissions belt, the democratic means to force these people to come to account. We see the Republicans are piling onto Biden for not being war-mongering enough. That’s really the coin of the realm in Washington these days. So, let’s hope for the best here. I hope the Russians have a plan to make their point politically, to show them the military realities in Europe without a whole lot of loss of life. But right now it’s anybody’s guess what happens next.