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## NATO: Seeking Russia's Destruction Since 1949

By Gary Leupp  
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In 1990, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, U.S. president George H. W. Bush through his secretary of state James Baker promised Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev that in exchange for Soviet cooperation on German reunification, the Cold War era NATO alliance would not expand “one inch” eastwards towards Russia. Baker told Gorbachev: “Look, if you remove your [300,000] troops [from east Germany] and allow unification of Germany in NATO, NATO will not expand one inch to the east.”

In the following year, the USSR officially dissolved itself. Its own defensive military alliance (commonly known as the Warsaw Pact) had already shut down. The Cold War was over.

So why hasn't NATO also dissolved, but instead expanded relentlessly, surrounding European Russia? Why isn't this a central question for discussion and debate in this country?

### **NATO: A Cold War Anti-Russian Alliance**

Some challenge the claim that Bush's pledge was ever given, although Baker repeated it publicly in Russia. Or they argue that it was never put in writing, hence legally inconsequential. Or they argue that any promise made to the leadership of the Soviet Union, which went out of existence in 1991, is inapplicable to subsequent U.S.-Russian relations. But it's clear that the U.S. has, to the consternation of the Russian leadership, sustained a posture of confrontation with its Cold War foe principally taking the form of NATO expansion. This expansion hardly receives comment in the U.S. mass media, which treats the entry of a new nation into NATO much as it does the admission of a new state into the UN—as though this was altogether natural and unproblematic.

But recall the basic history. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was formed in April 4, 1949, initially consisting of the U.S., Canada, U.K., France, Italy, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Portugal, as a military alliance against the Soviet Union, and principally the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

It was formed just four years after the Soviets stormed Berlin, defeating the Nazis. (As you know, Germany invaded Russia six months before Japan attacked Pearl Harbor; the U.S. and USSR were World War II allies versus the fascists; the key victories in the European war—Moscow, Stalingrad, Kursk—were Soviet victories over the Nazis; that U.S. soldiers only crossed the Rhine on March 22 as the Red Army was closing in on Berlin, taking the city between April 16 and May 2 at a cost of some 80,000 Soviet dead. If you don't know these things, you've been denied a proper education.)

In the four-year interim between Hitler's suicide and the formation of NATO, the two great victors of the war had divided Europe into spheres of influence. The neighboring Soviet Union had contributed disproportionately to the fascist defeat: over eight million military and over 12 million civilians dead, as compared to the far-off U.S., with losses of around 186,000 dead in the European theater and 106,000 in the Pacific.

It might seem strange that the lesser hero in this instance (in this epochal conflict against fascism) gets all the goodies in the battle's aftermath: the U.S. created a bloc including Britain, France, Italy, most of Germany, the Low Countries, Portugal, and most of Scandinavia, while the Soviets asserted hegemony—or tried to—over their generally less affluent client states. But the Soviets were not in any case interested primarily in drawing the richest nations into their fold; were that the case, they would not have withdrawn their troops from Austria in 1955.

Rather Russia, which had historically been invaded many times from the west—from Sweden, Lithuania, Poland, France, and Germany multiple times—wanted preeminently to secure its

western border. To insure the establishment of friendly regimes, it organized elections in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and elsewhere. (These had approximately as much legitimacy as elections held under U.S. occupation in Iraq or Afghanistan in later years, or at any point in Latin America). They brought the Eastern European “people’s republics” into existence.

The U.S. and British grumbled about the geopolitical advances of their wartime ally. In March 1946 former British Prime Minister Churchill while visiting the U.S. alluded to an “iron curtain” falling across Europe. (Perhaps he was unwittingly using the expression that Josef Goebbels had used just thirteen months earlier. The German propaganda minister had told a newspaper that “if the German people lay down their weapons, the Soviets...would occupy all of Europe...An iron curtain would fall over this enormous territory...” Very scary.

But the U.S. was working hard at the time to consolidate its own bloc in Europe. In May 1947 the U.S. CIA forced the Italian and French governments to purge Communist members of cabinets formed after electoral successes the previous year. (The U.S. had enormous clout, bought through the \$ 13 billion Marshall Plan begun in April 1947, designed to revive European capitalism and diminish the Marxist appeal.)

The CIA station chief in Rome later boasted that “without the CIA,” which funded a Red Scare campaign and fomented violent, even fatal clashes at events, “the Communist Party would surely have won the [Italian] elections in 1948.” (Anyone who thinks Soviets rigged elections while the U.S. facilitated fair ones as a matter of principle is hopelessly naïve.)

Meanwhile—before the establishment of NATO in April 1949—the U.S. and Britain had been fighting a war in Greece since 1946 on behalf of the monarchists against the communist-led forces that had been the backbone of the anti-fascist movement during the World War II. The Communists had widespread support and may well have won the civil war if the Soviets had only supported them. But observing the understanding about spheres of influence agreed to at Yalta and Potsdam, Stalin refused appeals for Soviet aid from the Greek (and Yugoslav) Communists. The Greek partisans surrendered in Oct. 1949, six months after the formation of NATO. (But NATO was in fact not deployed in this military intervention in Greece, seen as the first Cold War U.S. military operation under the broadly anticommunist “Truman Doctrine.”)

Just a month after NATO was formed, the pro-U.S. leaders in west Germany unilaterally announced the establishment of the Federal Republic of Germany. (The pro-Soviet German Democratic Republic was declared only six months later. As in Korea, the Soviets promoted reunification of occupied sectors. But the U.S. was intent on establishing client states, and dividing nations if necessary to stem Soviet inroads. This was also the case with Vietnam.)

Four months after the creation of NATO the Soviets conducted their first successful nuclear test. The Cold War was underway in earnest.

NATO was thus formed to aggressively confront the USSR and exploit fears of a supposed threat of a westward Soviet strike (to impose the Soviet social system on unwilling peoples). That threat never materialized, of course. The Soviets cordoned off East Berlin from the west by the Berlin Wall in 1961 to prevent embarrassing mass flight. But they never invaded West

Germany, or provoked any clash with a NATO nation throughout the Cold War. (Indeed, in light of the carnage visited on Europe since 1989, from civil wars in the Balkans and Caucasus to terrorist bombings in London, Madrid and Paris to the neo-fascist-led putsch in Ukraine last year, the Cold War appears in retrospect as a long period of relative peace and prosperity on the continent.)

### **Comparing U.S. and Russian/Soviet Aggression during the Cold War**

NATO expanded in 1952, enlisting the now-pacified Greece and its historical rival, Turkey. In 1955 it brought the Federal Republic of Germany into the fold. Only then—in May 1956, seven years after the formation of NATO—did the Soviets establish, in response, their own defensive military alliance. The Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance (Warsaw Pact) included a mere eight nations (to NATO's 15): the USSR, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Albania.

Warsaw Pact forces were deployed only once during the Cold War, to crush the reform movement in Czechoslovakia in 1968. (They were not used during the suppression of the “Hungarian Revolution” of 1956, occurring five months after the founding of the alliance. That operation was performed by Soviet troops and loyalist Hungarian forces.) The Czechoslovakian intervention occasioned Albania's withdrawal from the pact, while Romania protested it and refused to contribute troops. Thus practically speaking, the Warsaw Pact was down to six members to NATO's 15. The western alliance expanded to 16 when Spain joined in 1982.

Between 1945 and 1991 (when the Warsaw Pact and the USSR both dissolved themselves), the U.S. had engaged in three major wars (in Korea, Vietnam, and the Persian Gulf); invaded Grenada and Panama; and intervened militarily in Guatemala, the Dominican Republic, Lebanon, Cuba, Cambodia, Laos, Nicaragua, Haiti and other countries.

During that same period, the Soviets invaded eastern European nations twice (Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968), basically to maintain the status quo. Elsewhere, there was a brief border conflict with China in 1969 that killed around 150 soldiers on both sides. And the Soviets of course invaded Afghanistan in 1979 to shore up the secular regime faced with Islamist opposition. That's about it. Actually, if you compare it to the U.S. record, a pretty paltry record of aggression for a superpower.

That Islamist opposition in Afghanistan, as we know, morphed into the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and the group founded in Iraq by one-time bin Laden rival Abu Musab al-Zarqawi that's now called ISIL or the Islamic State. Referred to—almost affectionately—by the U.S. press in the 1980s as the “Mujahadeen” (“those engaged in jihad”), these religious militants were lionized at the time as anti-communist holy warriors by Jimmy Carter's National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Brzezinski told the president six months before the Soviets sent in troops that by backing the jihadis the U.S. could “induce a Soviet military intervention.” The U.S., he declared, had “the opportunity of giving the USSR its Vietnam War” and could now “bleed” the Soviets as they had bled the U.S. in Vietnam.

(Linger for a moment on the morality here. The Soviets had helped the Vietnamese fight an unpopular, U.S.-backed regime and confront the horrors of the U.S. assault on their country. Now—to get back, as Brzezinski put it—the U.S. could help extreme Islamists whose minds are in the Middle Ages to “induce” Soviet intervention, so as to kill conscript Soviet boys and prevent the advent of modernity.)

The anti-Soviet jihadis were welcomed to the White House by President Ronald Reagan during a visit in 1985. Reagan, perhaps already showing the signs of Alzheimer’s disease, trumpeted them as “the moral equivalent of America’s founding fathers.” This is when the great bulk of U.S. (CIA) aid to the Mujahadeen was going into the coffers of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a vicious warlord now aligned with the Taliban. One of many former U.S. assets (Saddam Hussein included) who had a falling-out with the boss, he was the target of at least one failed CIA drone strike in 2002.

Thus the Soviets’ one and only protracted military conflict during the Cold War, lasting from December 1979 to February 1989 and costing some 14,000 Soviet lives, was a conflict with what U.S. pundits have taken to calling “Islamist terrorism.”

The Soviets were surely not facing anticommunists pining for “freedom” as this might be conceptualized in some modern ideology. The enemy included tribal leaders and clerics who objected to any changes in the status of girls and women, in particular their dress, and submission to patriarchal authority in such matters as marriage.

The would-be Soviet-backed revolutionaries faced religious fanatics ignorant about women’s medical needs, hostile to the very idea of public clinics, and opposed to women’s education, (In fact the Soviets were able to raise the literacy rate for women during the 1980s—a feat not matched by the new occupiers since 2001—but this was mainly due to the fact that they maintained control over Kabul, where women could not only get schooling but walk around without a headscarf.)

Those days ended when the Soviet-installed regime of Mohammad Najibullah was toppled by Northern Alliance forces in April 1992. Things only became worse. Civil war between the Pastun Hekmatyar and his Tajik rivals immediately broke out and Hekmatyar’s forces brutally bombarded the capital—something that hadn’t happened during the worst days of the Soviet period.

As civil war deepened, the Taliban emerged, presenting itself as a morally upright, Sharia-based leadership. Acquiring a large social base, it took Kabul in September 1996. Among its first acts was to seize Najibullah, who had taken refuge in the UN compound in the city three years earlier, castrate him, and hang him publicly, denying him a proper Muslim burial.

Just as the neocons were crowing about the triumph of capitalism over communism, and the supposed “end of history,” the Frankenstein’s monster of Islamism reared up its ugly head. There were no tears shed in western capitals for Najibullah. But the Taliban were viewed with concern and distaste and the UN seat remained with the former Northern Alliance regime controlling just 10% of the country.

## **How the Cold War Encouraged “Radical Islam”**

Surely the U.S.—which had packed up and left after the Soviet withdrawal, leaving the Pakistanis with a massive refugee problem and Afghanistan in a state of chaos—had bled the Soviets, and anyone daring to ally with them. And surely this experience contributed to the realization of Brzezinski’s fondest wish: the collapse of the Soviet Union.

But it also produced Islamist terrorism, big time, while the U.S.—having once organized the recruitment and training of legions of jihadis from throughout the Muslim world to bleed the Soviets—was and is now obliged to deal with blow-back, and in its responses invariably invites more terror.

Is it not obvious that U.S. military actions against its various “terrorist” targets in the “Greater” Middle East, including Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Libya have greatly swelled the ranks of al-Qaeda branches as well as ISIL?

And does not the course of events in Afghanistan—where the Kabul government remains paralyzed and inept, warlords govern the provincial cities, the Supreme Court sentences people to death for religious offenses, much of the countryside has been conceded to the Talibs and the militants are making inroads in the north—convince you that the U.S. should *not* have thrown in its lot with the jihadis versus the Soviet-backed secular forces thirty-five years ago?

In a 1998 interview by Jeffrey St. Clair and Alexander Cockburn Brzezinski was asked if he regretted “having given arms and advice to future [Islamist] terrorists.”

Brzezinski: What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the cold war?

Q: Some stirred-up Moslems? But it has been said and repeated: Islamic fundamentalism represents a world menace today.

Brzezinski: Nonsense! It is said that the West had a global policy in regard to Islam. That is stupid. There isn’t a global Islam. Look at Islam in a rational manner and without demagoguery or emotion. It is the leading religion of the world with 1.5 billion followers. But what is there in common among Saudi Arabian fundamentalism, moderate Morocco, Pakistan militarism, Egyptian pro-Western or Central Asian secularism? Nothing more than what unites the Christian countries.

In other words, winning the contest with Russia—bleeding it to collapse—was more important than any risk of promoting militant Islamic fundamentalism. It is apparent that that mentality lingers, when, even in the post-9/11 world, some State Department officials would rather see Damascus fall to ISIL than be defended by Russians in support of a secular regime.

## **NATO to the Rescue in the Post-Cold War World**



Since the fall of the USSR, and the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact, what has NATO been up to? First of all, it moved to fill a power vacuum in the Balkans. Yugoslavia was falling apart. It had been neutral throughout the Cold War, a member of neither NATO nor the Warsaw Pact. As governments fell throughout Eastern Europe, secessionist movements in the multiethnic republic produced widespread conflict. U.S. Secretary of State Baker worried that the breakup of Yugoslavia's breakup would produce regional instability and opposed the independence of Slovenia.

But the German foreign minister, Hans-Dietrich Genscher, and Chancellor Helmut Kohl—flushed with pride at Germany's reunification and intent on playing a more powerful role in the world—pressed for Yugoslavia's dismantling. (There was a deep German historical interest in this country. Nazi Germany had occupied Slovenia from 1941 to 1945, establishing a 21,000-strong Slovene Home Guard and planting businesses. Germany is now by far Slovenia's number one trading partner.) Kohl's line won out.

Yugoslavia, which had been a model of interethnic harmony, became torn by ethnic strife in the 1990s. In Croatia, Croats fought ethnic Serbs backed by the Yugoslav People's Army; in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs quarreled over how to divide the land. In Serbia itself, the withdrawal of autonomy of the provinces of Kosovo and Vojvodina produced outrage among ethnic Albanians. In 1995 images of emaciated Bosniak men and boys in Serb-constructed prison camps were widely publicized in the world media as Bill Clinton resolved not to let Rwanda (read: genocide!) happen again. Not on his watch. America would save the day.

Or rather: *NATO* would save the day! Far from being less relevant after the Cold War, NATO, Clinton claimed, was the *only* international force capable of handling this kind of challenge. And thus NATO bombed, and bombed—for the first time ever, in real war—until the Bosnian Serbs pleaded for mercy. The present configuration of Bosnia-Herzegovina, a dysfunctional federation including a Serbian mini-republic, was dictated by U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher and his deputy Richard Holbrooke at the meeting in Dayton, Ohio in November 1995.

Russia, the traditional ally of the Serbs, was obliged to watch passively as the U.S. and NATO remapped the former Yugoslavia. Russia was itself in the 1990s, under the drunken buffoon Boris Yeltsin, a total mess. The economy was nose-diving; despair prevailed; male longevity had plummeted. The new polity was anything but stable. During the "Constitutional Crisis" of September-October 1993, the president had even ordered the army to bombard the parliament building to force the legislators to heed his decree to disband. In the grip of corrupt oligarchs and Wild West capitalism, Russians were disillusioned and demoralized.

Then came further insults from the west. During Yeltsin's last year, in March 1999, the U.S. welcomed three more nations into: Czechoslovakia (later the Czech Republic and Slovakia), Hungary, and Poland. These had been the most powerful Warsaw Pact countries aside from the USSR and East Germany. This was the first expansion of NATO since 1982 (when Spain had joined) and understandably upset the Kremlin. What possible reason is there to expand NATO now? the Russians asked, only to be assured that NATO was not *against* anybody.

The Senate had voted to extend membership to Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia in 1998. At that time, George Kennan—the famous U.S. diplomat who’d developed the cold war strategy of containment of the Soviet Union—was asked to comment.

**“I think it is the beginning of a new cold war,”** averred the 94-year-old Kennan. “I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever... It shows so little understanding of Russian history and Soviet history. **Of course there is going to be a bad reaction from Russia, and then [the NATO expansion advocates] will say that we always told you that is how the Russians are—but this is just wrong.”**

## **NATO Versus Serbia**

In that same month of March 1999, NATO (including its three new members) began bombing the Serbian capital of Belgrade, the first time since World War II that a European capital was subjected to bombardment. The official reason was that Serbian state forces had been abusing the Albanians of Kosovo province; diplomacy had failed; and NATO intervention was needed to put things right. This rationale was accompanied by grossly exaggerated reports of Serbian security forces’ killings of Kosovars, supposedly amounting to “genocide.”

This was largely nonsense. The U.S. had demanded at the conference in Rambouillet, France, that Serbia withdraw its forces from Kosovo and restore autonomy to the province. Serbian president Slobodan Milosevic had agreed. But the U.S. also demanded that Belgrade accept NATO forces throughout the entire territory of Yugoslavia—something no leader of a sovereign state could accept. Belgrade refused, backed by Russia.

A “senior State Department official” (likely U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright) boasted to reporters that at Rambouillet “we intentionally set the bar too high for the Serbs to comply. . . . The Serbs needed a little bombing to see reason.” Henry Kissinger (no peacenik) told the press in June: “The Rambouillet text, which called on Serbia to admit NATO troops throughout Yugoslavia, was a provocation, and excuse to start bombing. Rambouillet is not a document that an angelic Serb could have accepted. It was a terrible diplomatic document that should never have been presented in that form.”

The U.S. had obtained UN approval for the NATO strikes on Bosnia-Herzegovina four years before. But it did not seek it this time, or try to organize a UN force to address the Kosovo problem. In effect, it insisted that NATO be recognized as the representative of “the international community.”

It was outrageous. Still, U.S. public opinion was largely persuaded that the Serbs had failed to negotiate peace in good faith and so deserved the bombing cheered on by the press, in particular CNN’s “senior international correspondent,” Christiane Amanpour, a State Department insider who kept telling her viewers, “Milosevic continues to thumb his nose at the international community”—because he’d refused a bullying NATO ultimatum that even Kissinger identified as a provocation!



After the mass slaughter of Kosovars became a reality (as NATO bombs began to fall on Kosovo), and after two and a half months of bombing focused on Belgrade, a Russian-brokered deal ended the fighting. Belgrade was able to avoid the NATO occupation that it had earlier refused. (In other words, NATO had achieved nothing that the Serbs hadn't already conceded in Rambouillet!)

As the ceasefire went into effect on June 21, a column of about 30 armored vehicles carrying 250 Russian troops moved from peacekeeping duties in Bosnia to establish control over Kosovo's Pristina Airport. (Just a little reminder that Russia, too, had a role to play in the region.)

This took U.S. NATO commander Wesley Clark by surprise. He ordered that British and French paratroopers be flown in to seize the airport but the British General Sir Mike Jackson wisely balked. "I'm not going to have my soldiers start World War III," he declared.

I think it likely this dramatic last minute gesture at the airport was urged by the up-and-coming Vladimir Putin, a Yeltsin advisor soon to be appointed vice-president and then Yeltsin's successor beginning in December 1999. Putin was to prove a much more strident foe of NATO expansion than his embarrassing predecessor.

### **Cooperation Meets with Provocation**

Still, recall how two years later—after 9/11, 2001, when the U.S. invoking the NATO charter called upon its NATO allies to engage in war in Afghanistan—Putin offered to allow the alliance to transport war material to Afghanistan through Russian territory. (In 2012 Foreign Minister Lavrov offered NATO the use of a base in Ulyanovsk to transport equipment out of Afghanistan.) This Afghan invasion was only the third actual deployment of NATO forces in war, after Bosnia and Serbia, and Moscow accepted it matter-of-factly. It even muted its concerns when the U.S. established military bases in the former Soviet Central Republics of Uzbekistan and Kirghizia.

But in 2004, NATO expanded again—to include Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, all of which had been part of the USSR itself and which border Russia. At the same time Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia were admitted, along with Slovakia, which had become separate from the Czech Republic. Russians again asked, "Why?"

In 2007 the U.S. began negotiating with the Poles to install a NATO missile defense complex in Poland, with a radar system in the Czech Republic. Supposedly this was to shoot down any *Iranian* missiles directed towards Europe in the future! But Moscow was furious, accusing the U.S. of wanting to launch another arms race. Due largely to anti-militarist sentiment among the Poles and Czechs, these plans were shelved in 2009. But they could be revived at any time.

In 2008, then, the U.S. recognized its dependency Kosovo, now hosting the largest U.S. Army base (Camp Bondsteel) outside the U.S., as an independent country. Although the U.S. had insisted up to this point that it recognized Kosovo as a province of Serbia (and perhaps even understood its profound significance as the heartland of Serbian Orthodoxy), it now (through

Condoleezza Rice) proclaimed Kosovo a “sui generis” (one of a kind) phenomenon. So forget about international law; it just doesn’t apply.

In this same year of 2008, NATO announced boldly that Georgia and Ukraine “will become members of NATO.” Thereupon Georgia’s comical President Mikheil Saakasvili bombarded Tskhinvali, capital of the self-declared Republic of South Ossetia that had resisted integration into the current Republic of Georgia since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991. In this instance Russia defended South Ossetia, invading Georgia. It then recognized the independence, both of South Ossetia and of the Republic of Abkhazia, from Georgia. (This may be seen as a tit-for-tat response to the U.S.’s decision to recognize Kosovo’s independence from Serbia six months earlier.)

It was a six-day war, resulting in about 280 military fatalities (including 100 on the South Ossetian-Russian side) and about 400 civilian deaths. And there has been no Russian war since. Crimea was not “invaded” last year but simply seized by Russian forces in place, with general popular support. And there’s little evidence that the regular Russian military is confronting Ukrainian state forces; ethnic Russians are doing so, receiving no doubt support from cousins across the historically changeable border. But the charge of a “Russian invasion of Ukraine” is a State Department talking point—propaganda automatically parroted by the official press sock-puppet pundits, not a contemporary reality.

Georgia’s Saakasvili perhaps expected the U.S. to have his back as he provoked Moscow in August 2008. But while he received firm support from Sen. John McCain, who declared “We are all Georgians now,” he received little help from the George W. Bush State Department wary of provoking World War III. Georgia was not yet a NATO member able to cite the NATO charter’s mutual defense clause

Saakasvili left office in 2010 and is now under indictment by the Georgian courts for abuses in office. After a brief stint at the Fletcher School of International Law and Diplomacy in 2014, he acquired Ukrainian citizenship—losing his Georgian citizenship as a result—and (as one of many examples of how crazy the current Kiev leadership including Yatsenyev and Poroshenko can be) was appointed governor of Odessa last May!

Given the debacle of 2008, countries such as Germany are unlikely to accept Georgian admission any time soon. They do not see much benefit in provoking Russia by endlessly expanding the Cold War “defensive” alliance. Still, Croatia and Albania were added to NATO in 2009, in the first year of the Obama administration—just in time to participate in NATO’s fourth war, against Libya.

Again there was no reason for a war. Colonel Gadhafy had been downright cordial towards western regimes since 2003, and closely cooperated with the CIA against Islamist terrorism. But when the “Arab Spring” swept the region in 2011, some western leaders (headed by French president Nicolas Sarkozy, but including the always hawkish Hillary Clinton) convinced themselves that Gadhafy’s fall was imminent, and so it would be best to assist the opposition in deposing him and thus get into the good graces of any successors.

The UN Security Council approved a resolution to establish a no-fly zone for the protection of civilians from Gadhafy's supposedly genocidal troops. But what NATO unleashed was something quite different: a war on Gadhafy, which led to his brutal murder and to the horrible chaos that has reigned since in Libya, now a reliable base for al-Qaeda and ISIL. Russia and China both protested, as the war was still underway, that NATO had distorted the meaning of the UN resolution. It's unlikely that the two Security Council permanent members will be fooled again into such cooperation.

We can therefore add the failed state of Libya to the dysfunctional states of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Afghanistan, to our list of NATO achievements since 1991. To sum up: Since the collapse of the USSR, the U.S. and some allies (usually in their capacity as NATO allies) have waged war on Bosnian Serbs, Serbia, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, while striking targets in Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia and elsewhere with impunity. Russia has gone to war precisely once: for eight days in August 2008, against Georgia.

And yet every pundit on mainstream TV news tells you with a straight face that Putin's the one who "invades countries."

### **What Is the Point of NATO Expansion?**

So while NATO has expanded in membership, it has showing a growing proclivity to go to war, from Central Asia to North Africa. One must wonder, what is the point?

The putative point in 1949 was the defense of "Western Europe" against some posited Soviet invasion. That rationale is still used; when NATO supporters today speak in favor of the inclusion of Lithuania, for example, they may state that, if Lithuania had remained outside the alliance—the Russians would *surely* have invaded by now on the pretext of defending ethnic Russians' rights, etc.

There is in fact precious little evidence for Russian ambitions, or Putin's own ambitions, to recreate the tsarist empire or Soviet Union. (Putin complained just a few days ago, "We don't want the USSR back but no one believes us." He's also opined that people who feel no nostalgia for the Soviet Union—as most citizens of the former USSR young enough to remember it say they do—have no heart, while those who want to restore it have no brains.)

As NATO expanded inexorably between 1999 and 2009, Russia responded not with threats but with calm indignation.

Putin's remarks about the dissolution of the Soviet Union being a "geopolitical tragedy," and his occasional words addressing the language and other rights of Russians in former SSRs, do not constitute militarist threats. As always the neocons cherry-pick a phrase here and there as they try to depict Putin as (yet) "another Hitler." In fact the Russians have, relatively speaking, been voices of reason in recent years, Alarmed at the consequences of U.S. actions in the Middle East, they have sought to restrain U.S. imperialism while challenging Islamist terrorism.

In August 2013 Obama threatened to attack Syria, ostensibly to punish the regime for using chemical weapons against its people. (The original accusation has been discredited by Seymour Hersh among others.) Deft intervention by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and the refusal of the British House of Commons to support an attack (insuring it would not, like the Iraq War, win general NATO endorsement), and domestic opposition all helped avert another U.S. war in the Middle East.

But it's as though hawks in the State Department, resentful at Russia's success in protecting its Syrian ally from Gadhafy's fate, and miffed at its continued ability to maintain air and naval facilities on the Syrian coast, were redoubling their efforts to provoke Russia. How better to do this than by interfering in Ukraine, which had not only been part of the Soviet Union but part of the Russian state from 1654 and indeed was the core of the original Kievan Rus in the tenth century?

NATO had been courting Ukraine since 1994—five years before the alliance expanded to include Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia. Kiev signed the NATO Membership Action Plan in 2008 when Viktor Yushchenko was president, but this was placed on hold when Viktor Yanukovich was elected in 2010. Enjoying the solid support of the Russian-speaking east, Yanukovich won what international observers called a free and fair election.

Yanukovich did not want Ukraine to join NATO: he wanted a neutral Ukraine maintaining the traditional close relationship between the Ukraine and Russia. This infuriated Victoria Nuland, the head of the Eurasia desk at the State Department, who has made it her life's project to pull Ukraine into NATO. This would be NATO's ultimate prize in eastern Europe: a country of 44 million well-educated people, the size of France, strategically located on the Black Sea historically dominated by the Russian Black Sea Fleet. An ethnically divided country, with a generally pro-Russian and Russian-speaking east, and a more western-oriented Ukrainian-speaking west with an unusually vigorous and fiercely anti-Russian neofascist movement—just there waiting to be used.

Nuland, a former Cheney aide whose neocon worldview drew Hillary Clinton's favorable attention, resulting in her promotion, is the wife of neocon pundit and Iraq War cheerleader Robert Kagan. (Kagan was a founding member of the notorious Project for a New American Century "think tank".) The couple represents two wings of incessant neocon plotting: those who work to destroy Russia, and those who work to destroy the Middle East, consciously using lies to confuse the masses about their real goals.

At the National Press Club in December 2013, Nuland boasted that the U.S. (through such "NGOs" as the National Endowment for Democracy) had spent \$ 5 billion in Ukraine in order to support Ukraine's "European aspirations." This deliberately vague formulation is supposed to refer to U.S. support for Kiev's admission into the European Union. The case the U.S. built against Yanukovich was not that he rejected NATO membership; that is never mentioned at all. She built the case on Yanukovich's supposed *betrayal* of his people's *pro-EU aspirations* in having first initialed, and then rejected, an association agreement with the trading bloc, fearing it would mean a Greek-style austerity regime imposed on the country from without.

From November 2013 crowds gathered in Kiev's Maidan to protest (among other things) Yanukovich's change of heart about EU membership. The U.S. State Department embraced their cause. One might ask why, when the EU constitutes a competing trading bloc, the U.S. should be so interested in promoting any country's membership in it. What difference does it make to you and me whether Ukraine has closer economic ties to Russia than to the EU?

The dirty little secret here is that the U.S. goal has merely been to use the cause of "joining Europe" to draw Ukraine into NATO, which could be depicted as the next natural step in Ukraine's geopolitical realignment.

Building on popular contempt for Yanukovich for his corruption, but also working with politicians known to favor NATO admission and the expulsion of Russian naval forces from the Crimean base they've had since the 1780s, and also including neo-fascist forces who hate Russia but also loath the EU, Nuland and her team including the ubiquitous John McCain popped up at the Maidan passing out cookies and encouraging the crowd to bring down the president.

It worked, of course. On Feb. 22, within a day of signing a European-mediated agreement for government reforms and new election, and thinking the situation defused, Yanukovich was forced to flee for his life. The neofascist forces of Svoboda and the Left Sector served as storm troops toppling the regime. Nuland's Machiavellian maneuverings had triumphed; a neocon Jew had cleverly deployed open anti-Semites to bring down a regime and plant a pro-NATO one in its place.

It seemed as though, after 14 years of expansion, NATO might soon be able to welcome a huge new member into its ranks, complete the encirclement of Russia and, booting out the Russian fleet, turn the Black Sea into a NATO lake.

Alas for the neocons and "liberal interventionists"—the new regime of Nuland's chosen Arseniy Yatsenyuk and his Svoboda Party allies immediately alienated the eastern Russian-speaking population, which remains up in arms making the country ungovernable, even as its economy collapses; and the notion of expelling the Russians from Sevastopol has become unimaginable.

But what do NATO planners want? Where is all the expansion and reckless provocation heading?

### **Russia: an "Existential Threat"?**

First of all, the NATO advocates, however often they repeat that "We're not against Russia, this isn't about Russia," do indeed posit an enduring Russian threat. Thus General Sir Adrian Bradshaw, the most senior British officer in NATO, stated last February that Russia poses "an obvious existential threat to our whole being." Gen. Joseph Votel, head of the U.S. Special Operations Command told the Aspen Security Forum in July that "Russia could pose an existential threat to the United States."

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Mac Thornberry (R-Texas) warned Obama to sign a military appropriations bill because Russia poses "an existential threat" to the

U.S. Philanthropist George Soros (who likes to finance “color revolutions”) wrote in the New York review of Books in October that “Europe is facing a challenge from Russia to its very existence.”

These are wild, stupid words coming from highly placed figures. Isn’t it obvious that Russia is the one being surrounded, pressured and threatened? That its military budget is a fraction of the U.S.’s, its global military presence miniscule in relation to the U.S. footprint?

But anyone watching the U.S. presidential candidates’ debates—and who can perceive the prevalence of paranoia about Russia, the unthinking acceptance of the “Putin as Hitler” theme, and the obligatory expression of determination to make America more “strong”—can understand why the expansion of NATO is so horribly dangerous.

People who do not think rationally or whose minds are twisted by arrogance can look at the maps of NATO expansion and think proudly, “This is how it should be! Why would anyone question the need for nations to protect themselves by allying with the United States? It’s alliances like NATO that preserve peace and stability in the world.”

(Some are able to believe that, perhaps, but the fact is the world has become less peaceful and far less stable than it was during the Cold War when the two superpowers checked one another’s moves. Thereafter the U.S. emerged as what a French diplomat has called an “hyper-puissance” or hyper-power intervening with impunity in multiple countries and producing new, often ugly forms of resistance.)

People looking at the NATO map of Europe can mentally color in Montenegro too. A tiny republic on the Adriatic with under 650,000 people, it was formally invited by NATO to submit its membership application on December 2. What other countries have yet to sign?

As mentioned, in 2008 NATO announced that Georgia and Ukraine would join. But their cases actually seem to be on hold. Belarus, wedged between Poland and Russia, has been under the self-styled “authoritarian” President Alexander Lukashenko since 1994. The regime, considered close to Moscow, was targeted by an abortive U.S.-funded “color revolution” in March 2006. The U.S. favored Mikhail Marynich, a former ambassador to Latvia and proponent of NATO membership. (He participated in a closed-door NATO “War and Peace” conference in Riga in November 2006.)

Then there is Moldova, the former Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic located between Rumania and Ukraine. To its east is the breakaway republic of

Transnistria, where ethnic Moldovans are a minority and Russians and Ukrainians make up almost 60% of the population. It is a “frozen conflict” zone. The neocon dream is to ultimately change all their regimes and draw them all into the warm embrace of NATO.

*One ring to rule them all, one ring to find them*

*One ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them*



*in the Land or Mordor where the shadows lie*

What do you do after you complete the western encirclement of Russia? Why, you destabilize the country itself, hoping to slice it up! Russia remains a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural nation. There are tensions and secessionist movements to exploit in the Caucasus particularly, but also on the Karelian Peninsula and in Siberia.

If Russia is an existential threat, its own existence is a threat, right? So why not cut it up?

Doesn't the logic of NATO expansion require an enemy, and doesn't America lead the world in defeating enemies?

*Or if not*, isn't NATO itself the real threat? (After all, didn't it, in its last major project, totally wreck the modern state of Libya, and as a result destabilize Mali?)

Shouldn't we welcome tensions within NATO, and failures of member states to devote the required 2% of GDP to military expenses? Shouldn't we welcome resistance to further expansion, complaints about U.S. arm-twisting, and calls for cooperation with Russia rather than confrontation and destruction?