

NATO Provoked Putin: Stoltenberg “Comes Clean” on the Ukraine War. “The War Started in 2014”

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For years, John J. Mearsheimer, that seemingly ageless, if somewhat chilly presence at the University of Chicago, has been a thorn of irritation to certain establishment ideas. With his pugnacious sense of realist politics, he has little time for the sentimentality that accompanies what he calls the “liberal delusions” of power. It’s all good to feel anguish and worry at the predations of power, but why encourage them when there is no need to?

This somewhat crude summation only does some justice to JJM’s thought process. But it does provide an interesting backdrop to the recent revelations regarding the Ukraine conflict, one that is falling into a horrendous, bleeding stalemate.

In his *Foreign Affairs* [assessment](#) of 2014 on the Ukraine-Russian conflict, Mearsheimer throws in the usual grenades. “US and European leaders blundered in attempting to turn Ukraine into a Western stronghold on Russia’s border.” He noted the pernicious, meddling roles played by such characters as US Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs, Victoria Nuland, who revealed in 2013 how the US had invested more than \$5 billion since 1991 to aid Ukraine achieve “the future it deserves.” This involved the spearheading efforts of the National Endowment for Democracy.

As Russian tanks moved into Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Mearsheimer [proved unrelenting](#): Russia had been needlessly provoked into “a preventive war”. While not permissible in just war theory, “Russian leaders certainly saw the invasion as ‘just’, because they were convinced that Ukraine joining NATO was an existential threat that had to be eliminated.” The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs was so enthusiastic at the views of the realistic scholar, it endorsed his 2014 Foreign Affairs contribution.

For taking such a stance, dreamy liberal humanitarians and neoconservative provocateurs came to detest Mearsheimer. The *New Statesman* [would suggest](#) that he became, as a consequence “the world’s most hated thinker.” Anne Applebaum, in her usual

neoconservative biliousness, [wondered](#) “if the Russians didn’t actually get their narrative from Mearshimer [sic] et al. Moscow needed to say West was responsible for Russian invasions (Chechnya, Georgia, Syria, Ukraine), and not their own greed and imperialism.”

Now wondering if the Russians didn't actually get their narrative from Mearshimer et al. Moscow needed to say West was responsible for Russian invasions (Chechnya, Georgia, Syria, Ukraine), and not their own greed and imperialism. American academics provided the narrative.

— Anne Applebaum (@anneapplebaum) [March 1, 2022](#)

Mearsheimer was already representative of a field filled with foreboding assessments about what an eastern strategic expansion against Russia would do, warmed by the almost throwaway assurances from US Secretary of State James Baker to Mikhail Gorbachev in 1990. At that point, the still extant Soviet Union had 380,000 troops stationed in East Germany. Baker’s [suggestion](#): Why not remove those troops if NATO did “not shift one inch eastwards from its position”?

The following day, Baker [repeated the formula](#) to West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl via letter:

“Would you prefer to see a unified Germany outside of NATO, independent and with no US forces, or would you prefer a unified Germany to be tied to NATO, with assurances that NATO’s jurisdiction would not shift one inch eastwards from its present position?”

Kohl had preferred to directly inform Gorbachev of his own assurance that no NATO bases would be established in the former East Germany.

In October 1990, the US State Department concluded in an analysis that “it is not in the best interest of NATO or the US that these states be granted full NATO membership” warning against “an anti-Soviet coalition whose frontier is the Soviet border.”

George F. Kennan’s [observations](#) seven years later are also prickly with concern. As the father of Cold War Soviet containment, he could only see trouble brewing on the horizon were a now diminished Russia provoked. The decision to expand NATO “may be expected to inflame nationalistic, anti-Western and militaristic tendencies in Russian opinion; to have an adverse effect on the development of Russian democracy; to restore the atmosphere of the cold war to East-West relations, and to impel Russian foreign policy in directions decidedly not to our liking.”

That same year, the current US President [noted](#) that, irrespective of the merits of the countries keen to participate in the alliance, an enlarged NATO would constitute the “tipping point” for Russia. His reference point then was the various Baltic States.

A number of former US ambassadors to Moscow have also warned, at stages, about the dangers. In 1997, it was Jack Matlock, [testifying](#) before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. At the time, the Clinton administration’s recommendation to enlarge NATO membership was considered “misguided. If it should be approved by the United States Senate, it may well go down in history as the most profound strategic blunder made since

the end of the Cold War.”

Eight years later, William J. Burns, then still ambassador to Russia and currently director of the CIA, shot a number of flares on the issue:

“Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin).”

In a February 2008 [memorandum](#) published by WikiLeaks, the assessment by Burns is stark:

“NATO enlargement, particularly to Ukraine, remains ‘an emotional and neuralgic’ issue for Russia, but strategic policy considerations also underlie strong opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia.”

Such strategic policy considerations included, among other things, a fear that the country could be “split in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene.” Concerns also abounded regarding the “impact on Russia’s defense industry, Russian-Ukrainian family connections, and bilateral relations generally.”

What then made September 2023 special in this overview was an unusually frank [admission](#) from the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in remarks made to the joint meeting of the European Parliament’s Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE).

That admission concerned Putin’s *unequivocal* intentions to invade Ukraine were NATO to be further enlarged:

“The background was that President Putin declared in the autumn of 2021, and actually sent a draft treaty that they wanted NATO to sign, to promise no more NATO enlargement. That was what he sent us. And was a pre-condition to not invade Ukraine. Of course, we didn’t sign that.”

Stoltenberg went on to pour scorn on this revealing point. Putin demanded the “removal of our military infrastructure in all Allies that have joined NATO since 1997, meaning half of NATO, all the Central and Eastern Europe, we should remove NATO from that part of our Alliance, introducing some kind of B, or second class membership.

We rejected that.” The conclusion is then indefatigably clear: “So [Putin] went to war to prevent NATO, more NATO, close to his borders.”

In such statements, the lines between explanation, justification and wilful blindness are not always demarcated. But here we have a stunning confession that should be minted in every historical overview of a calamitous conflict that may eventually result, in some form or rather, in the very same de facto arrangements Putin demanded in 2021. Russia will have to contend with its own problems and nightmares regarding the Ukraine War, but as such, Stoltenberg, NATO and the US imperium deserve a withering stare from history’s muse.

Addendum

Dr. Binoy Kampmark's Analysis is confirmed by the following

[On September 7, 2023, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in a presentation to the European Parliament](#), formally acknowledged that:

"the war didn't start in February last year. It started in 2014."

This far-reaching declaration confirms his earlier statement in May 2023 to the effect that the Ukraine War

"didn't start in 2022", "The war started in 2014".

Speaking on behalf of NATO, what this statement implies is that US-NATO was already at war in 2014. It also tacitly acknowledges that Russia did not "initiate the war" on Ukraine in February 2022.

"The purpose of this is to prevent war"

In a twisted irony, in his presentation to the European Parliament, Stoltenberg portrays "the purpose" of the Ukraine war, which has resulted in more than 300,000 casualties as a means "to prevent war".

Michel Chossudovsky, Global Research, November 1, 2023

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