

Putin to Biden: Finlandize Ukraine, or We Will

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Either the U.S. and NATO provide us with “legal guarantees” that Ukraine will never join NATO or become a base for weapons that can threaten Russia — or we will go in and guarantee it ourselves.

This is the message Russian **President Vladimir Putin** is sending, backed by the 100,000 troops Russia has amassed on Ukraine’s borders.

At the Kremlin last week, Putin drew his red line:

“The threat on our western borders is ... rising, as we have said multiple times. ... In our dialogue with the United States and its allies, we will insist on developing concrete agreements prohibiting any further eastward expansion of NATO and the placement there of weapons systems in the immediate vicinity of Russian territory.”

That comes close to an ultimatum. And NATO **Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg** backhanded the President of Russia for issuing it:

“It’s only Ukraine and 30 NATO allies that decide when Ukraine is ready to join NATO. ... Russia has no veto, Russia has no say, and Russia has no right to establish a sphere of influence trying to control their neighbors.”

Yet, great powers have always established spheres of influence. Chinese **President Xi Jinping** claims virtually the entire South China Sea that is bordered by half a dozen nations. For 200 years, the United States has declared a Monroe Doctrine that puts our hemisphere off-limits to new colonizations.

Moreover, Putin wants to speak to the real decider of the question as to whether Ukraine joins NATO or receives weapons that can threaten Russia. And the decider is not Jens

Stoltenberg but **President Joe Biden**.

In the missile crisis of 60 years ago, the U.S., with its “quarantine” of Cuba and strategic and tactical superiority in the Caribbean, forced Nikita Khrushchev to pull his intermediate-range ballistic missiles, which could reach Washington, off of Fidel Castro’s island.

If it did not do so, Moscow was led to understand, we would use our air and naval supremacy to destroy his missiles and send in the Marines to finish the job.

Accepting a counteroffer for the U.S. withdrawal of Jupiter missiles from Turkey, Khrushchev complied with President John F. Kennedy’s demand. Russia’s missiles came out. And Kennedy was seen as having won a Cold War victory.

Now it is we who are being told to comply with Russia’s demands in Ukraine, or Russia will go in to Ukraine and neutralize the threat itself.

The history?

When the Warsaw Pact collapsed and the USSR came apart three decades ago, Russia withdrew all of its military forces from Central and Eastern Europe. Moscow believed it had an agreed-upon understanding with the Americans.

Under the deal, the two Germanys would be reunited. Russian troops would be removed from East Germany, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania. And there would be no NATO expansion into Eastern Europe.

If America made that commitment, it was a promise broken. For, within 20 years, NATO had brought every Warsaw Pact nation into the alliance along with the former Soviet republics of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

Neocons and Republican hawks such as the late John McCain sought to bring Ukraine and two other ex-Soviet republics, Georgia and Moldova, into NATO.

Putin, who served in the KGB in the late Soviet era and calls the breakup of the USSR the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe” of the 20th century, is now saying: Enough is enough.

Translation: “Thus far and no further! Ukraine is not going to be a member of NATO or a military ally and partner of the United States, nor a base for weapons that can strike Russia in minutes. For us, that crosses a red line. And if NATO proceeds with arming Ukraine for conflict with Russia, we reserve the right to act first. Finlandize Ukraine, or we will!”

The problem for Biden?

In Ukraine and in Georgia, as we saw in the 2008 war, Russia has the tactical and strategic superiority we had in 1962 in Cuba. Moreover, while Ukraine is vital to Russia, it has never been vital to us.

When President Franklin D. Roosevelt recognized Joseph Stalin’s USSR in 1933, Moscow was engaged in the forced collectivization of the farms of Ukraine, which had caused a famine and the deaths of millions. We Americans did nothing to stop it.

During the Cold War, America never insisted on the independence of Ukraine. Though we

celebrated when the Baltic states and Ukraine broke free of Moscow, we never regarded their independence as vital interests for which America should be willing to go to war.

A U.S. war with Russia over Ukraine would be a disaster for all three nations. Nor could the U.S. indefinitely guarantee the independence of a country 5,000 miles away that shares not only a lengthy border with Mother Russia but also a history, language, religion, ethnicity and culture.

Forced to choose between accepting Russia's demand that NATO stay out of Ukraine and Russia going in, the U.S. is not going to war.

Biden should tell Putin: The U.S. will not be issuing any NATO war guarantees to fight for Ukraine.

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