

Top Western Diplomats and Leaders and Majority of the Population of Ukraine Opposed NATO Membership

By [Bharat Dogra](#)

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As the Ukraine crisis continues to escalate and the possibility of a direct confrontation between Russia and USA/NATO also increases, it is important that some facts not generally raised in western mass media should be more widely known in the west and also internationally.

The controversy over Ukraine's membership of NATO has been perhaps the most important issue leading up to the present crisis. Hence it should be better known that an important understanding reached between Gorbachev and Bush around 1990 was that the USA will not expand NATO membership eastwards close to Russian borders. **Jack F. Matlock**, then US ambassador to the Soviet Union and a leading expert on Soviet policy for years, had a ringside view of crucial talks. He has stated (February 15 2022 , Responsible Statecraft),

“Gorbachev was assured, though not in a formal treaty, that if a unified Germany was allowed to remain in NATO, there would be no movement of NATO's jurisdiction to the east, not one inch.”

However the USA soon started moving away from such assurances. 1997 was a landmark year in this context. On June 26 1997 as many as 50 prominent foreign policy experts, including former senators, retired military officers, diplomats and academicians sent an open letter to President Clinton, outlining their opposition to NATO expansion (See full statement at Arms Control Association, Opposition to NATO Expansion). They wrote,

“We, the undersigned, believe that the current US led effort to expand NATO, ... is a policy error of historic proportions. In Russia NATO expansion, which continues to be opposed across the entire political spectrum, will strengthen the non-democratic opposition, undercut those who favor reform and cooperation with the West, bring the Russians to question the entire post- cold war settlement, and galvanize resistance in the Duma to the START II and III treaties.”

This letter of 50 experts concluded—

“We strongly urge that the NATO expansion process be suspended while alternative actions are explored.” The alternatives suggested by these experts included “supporting a NATO-Russia relationship.”

Around the same time in 1997 Ambassador Matlock was asked to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. He stated that NATO expansion would be the most strategic

blunder since the end of the Cold War.

Ignoring such sage advice of ensuring peace, the US government went ahead with several waves of adding new NATO members. At the same time, the USA was also withdrawing from important arms control treaties. During Yeltsin leadership years of Russia, the USA used its strong position to push economic policies which impoverished a large number of Russians, leading even to a steep fall in life expectancy. The hopes of many Russians for economic help and accommodation of essential security concerns were neglected. In 2014 the USA intervened decisively in Ukraine, playing an important role in instigating a coup installing an anti-Russian regime.

In 2019 the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace published a study titled '30 Years of US Policy Toward Russia—Can the Vicious Circle be Broken' which expressed regret at the many problems created by hostile US policy. To break the impasse, the study concluded, the USA will have to—for its part—make several key adjustments to its Russia policy, including halting NATO expansion eastward, clarifying to Ukraine and Georgia that they should not base their foreign policy on the assumption that they will be joining NATO (while establishing robust security cooperation in other ways), reviewing and restraining sanctions policy towards Russia and leaving Russia's internal affairs to itself (not interfering in them).

Such suggestions were ignored by US policy makers who continued to indulge in provocations. Just before war broke out, Matlock posed a question (see Responsible Statecraft, 15 February 2022—I was there—NATO and the origins of the Ukraine Crisis)—Was the crisis avoidable? His answer was -Yes. He explained,

“Since Putin's major demand is an assurance that NATO will take no further members, and specifically not Ukraine or Georgia, obviously there could have been no basis for the present crisis if there had been no expansion of the alliance following the end of the Cold War, or if the expansion had occurred in harmony with building a security structure in Europe that included Russia.”

In 2008 when the USA promoted the issue of Ukraine's membership of NATO at the NATO summit at Bucharest, the leaders of two leading European countries present there, Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany and President Sarkozy of France had opposed this but they were pressurized to accept the USA position.

In Ukraine several opinion polls during 1991 to 2014 had revealed that the overwhelming majority of the people of Ukraine did not support the membership of NATO. This was admitted even in NATO documents.

Before the coup in 2014, there was a broad agreement among the leaders of the ruling party and most opposition leaders of Ukraine that a policy of neutrality is much better and NATO membership should be avoided.

These facts should be widely known so that more people realize that the agenda of NATO membership was imposed by some aggressive leaders of the USA against the advice of leaders and senior experts and diplomats who value peace.

Another question is why this agenda of NATO membership for Ukraine was pushed so much by aggressive leaders of the USA. Initially it was to encircle Russia with hostile countries and place highly destructive weapons very close to its borders. However eventually this led to

engaging Ukraine in a proxy war with Russia, with all the destructive results.

If these facts are more widely realized, hopefully this can help to get more support for a policy of de-escalation and peace which gives up the insistence on NATO membership of Ukraine and thereby one of the main hurdles in the path of peace is removed.

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***Bharat Dogra** is Honorary Convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now. His recent books include Planet in Peril, A Day in 2071 and Protecting Earth for Children. He is a regular contributor to Global Research.*

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