

NATO's Drive Into Eastern Europe

Tenth Anniversary

By [Rick Rozoff](#)

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March 12 of this year marked the tenth anniversary of NATO expanding into Eastern Europe and incorporating former members of its Warsaw Pact rival.

Nine years after the George H.W. Bush's administration's Secretary of State James Baker had assured the Soviet Union's last president Mikhail Gorbachev that "there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east," the Alliance, in the case of one of its new members, Poland, moved directly to the border of Russia's Kaliningrad territory.

On March 12, 1999 Baker's successor once-removed, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, gathered the the foreign ministers of the new inductees, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, to the Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Missouri where in NATOese she "accepted the instruments of accession to NATO of the three countries."

The speeches of all four foreign policy chiefs were larded with celebratory and self-congratulatory effusions about the end of the Cold War, with the Hungarian, Czech and Polish foreign ministers competing with each other in claiming that the beginning of the new Jerusalem and the advent of post-history - or the Eschaton - was first signaled by events in Budapest in 1956, Prague in 1968 or Gdansk in 1981.

The Polish foreign minister of the time, Bronislaw Geremek, in noting the proximity of Independence to another city of some note, observed that "Fifty-three years ago, in nearby Fulton, Missouri, Winston Churchill delivered his famous address."

Geremek was of course referring to the Iron Curtain speech of 1946 and the official trumpet blast of the Cold War. The Polish foreign minister also dutifully quoted the US president of the same time, Harry Truman, he who lent his name to the doctrine of the following year, one which was immediately implemented with the US and its Western allies intervening in civil conflicts in Greece and Korea, the latter leading to direct combat between the United States and China.

Forty full years of Western-instigated wars - conventional, colonial, counterinsurgency, proxy and civil - and military-backed coups d'etat throughout Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America would be the fruits of the policies advocated by Churchill, inaugurated by Truman and continued by his successors in history's longest self-proclaimed crusade, that of "containing communism."

It was the victory of that campaign that Madeleine Albright and her three Eastern European counterparts were celebrating ten years ago by welcoming three former Warsaw Pact

nations into what was at the time and remains today the world's only military bloc.

The Polish visitor's speech contained a line about the end of the bipolar era, meaning that of the US and Soviet led alliances.

Many in 1991, though far fewer when Geremek spoke eight years later, hoped that the alternative to a bipolar world be be non-polar or at any rate a multipolar one.

The formal accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland to NATO and events that followed close on its heels would soon dispel any such illusions. The bipolar world had given way to history's first unipolar global order.

Even at the time of the accession ceremony the contours of the evolving post-Cold War US- and NATO-dominated world were becoming incontestably clear.

The speeches at Independence were replete with words like freedom, democracy, liberty, independence and self-determination; words that have in earlier periods been noble and inspiring ones, the concepts and practices they represent causes that countless millions have lived and often died for.

However, there have been few occasions throughout human history when even the most ambitious and ruthless tyrants and empire-builders have not invoked one or more of these terms, according to their own lights and for their own purposes, to justify conquest, pillage and in the worst cases extermination.

Grand words are like coins that have become effaced by passing through too many hands, often in illicit transactions.

How sincerely the words were used by Albright and her collaborators was demonstrated even at the time of their meeting and with a savage vengeance shortly thereafter.

There was an empty seat in the Truman Library on March 12 of ten years ago: That of the foreign minister of Slovakia.

The Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland are three of the four members of Visegrad Four grouping established in 1991 to "further European integration."

The fourth is Slovakia. All four nations joined the European Union simultaneously in 2004.

The Visegrad Four group has been routinely characterized as an alliance of Central European nations; not Eastern European, as the same countries were referred to during the Cold War era.

Geography as well as terminology assume a huge degree of plasticity in the view of NATO nations' planners and both are harnessed to the cart of geopolitical and military expediency.

Even more preposterously, political leaders of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are now referring to their nations as being in Central Europe; all three countries are on the Baltic Sea and border Russia in one manner or another.

Officials in Georgia and their Western sponsors frequently speak of the nation, especially in reference to NATO membership, as "rejoining Europe." Georgia lies to the south of Turkey

and a sizeable part of the nation is to the east of the eastern-most part of Turkey, which the West considers an Asian nation.

If integration with NATO and the European Union demands as a prerequisite and enforces as a membership rule the uniform subordination to Brussels of a nation's military, security, defense industry, judicial and economic prerogatives, it also mandates that candidates and new members be whipped into line politically.

Slovakia wasn't invited to join NATO in 1999 because it was inhabited by a population that interpreted the words thrown around by Western power brokers, especially self-determination and freedom of choice, in the traditional, literal sense. That is, according to Brussels and Washington, they persistently voted the wrong way.

In federal election after federal election Slovaks gave the political party of the country's first prime minister Vladimir Meciar, the People's Party – Movement for a Democratic Slovakia (HZDS), a plurality of their votes.

And just as consistently American, European Union and even NATO officials issued the diktat that not only could the HZDS not form, it could not join, a federal cabinet.

It took five more years before NATO considered the country sufficiently tamed and broken in to join the Alliance.

The genuine, violent and horrific, meaning of what the new expansionist NATO portended for Europe and the world didn't take long to manifest itself.

Only twelve days after Albright's conclave in Missouri, with herself as arguably the prime mover, NATO launched its first sustained campaign of all-out military aggression, the 78-day Operation Allied Force onslaught against Yugoslavia.

The Czech Republic, Hungary (which then bordered Yugoslavia) and Poland hardly had time to catch their collective breath when they were plunged into the first war against a sovereign European nation since Hitler's blitzkrieg assaults of 1939-1941.

Unremittingly and with increasing ferocity NATO unleashed an almost three month attack on a small nation with 1,000 warplanes flying over 38,000 combat missions (which included the return of the German Luftwaffe to the skies of Europe for the first time since the defeat of the Third Reich) and, along with cruise missiles launched from warships and submarines in the Mediterranean, spared nothing in an aerial avalanche of cluster bombs, graphite weapons and depleted uranium: Factories, apartment complexes, broadcasting facilities, hospitals, power grids, passenger trains, refugee columns, religious processions and the Chinese embassy.

A month into the conflict the NATO 50th anniversary jubilee summit was held in Washington, DC, where the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were formally inducted into the bloc, one now at war for the first time.

There can be little doubt that the timing of the attack on Yugoslavia on March 24 was coordinated with the scheduled NATO summit on April 23-24 and that the second was planned to celebrate an anticipated capitulation by Yugoslavia and the unveiling of the new, global NATO as the world's preeminent arbiter of internal as well as international disputes,

the redrawing of national borders and the use of military force.

This in contraposition to the United Nations and international law, both of which had been circumvented, subverted and supplanted by a Western military bloc with the war against Yugoslavia with neither yet recuperating from the blow.

NATO underestimated Serbian resolve, as Hitler had done in 1941, delaying the arrival of his Wehrmacht to the gates of Moscow for several critically important weeks.

The NATO summit then, far from dragging the pennants of a subjugated nation cum conquered province through the dust and conducting a triumph reminiscent of those of the Rome of the Caesars, was on April 24 rather confronted with considering a ground invasion of the nation it had failed to bomb into submission.

The three new NATO members, none of whom had deployed troops for combat missions since World War II, were close to discovering what joining the “alliance of free nations” actually entailed.

Largely through the treachery of Finland’s Maarti Ahtisaari and the complicity of Russia’s Viktor Chernomyrdin they weren’t provided that opportunity in 1999 but neither did they have to wait long for another.

One of the catchphrases employed at the time that the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were being integrated into NATO was mutual defense; that is, by joining the world’s sole remaining military bloc the three countries would acquire powerful protectors – the United States, Britain, France and Germany most notably – in the event any or all of the three were victims of armed aggression.

This means the activation of NATO’s Article 5, which obliges all Alliance member states to offer military assistance to any other that requests it.

In 1999 Washington and Brussels had a compliant Yeltsin government in power in Russia, one that would have ceded the West anything it asked for short of Cathedral Square in the center of Moscow’s Kremlin, so it was evident that Article 5 in fact had nothing to do with defense but everything to do with joint military action of another nature.

This was two and a half years before NATO and the US seized upon the alleged war on terrorism (prior to that they were inclined in the opposite direction), so mythic threats by non-state actors couldn’t be employed as a pretext for an urgent need to take the three new members under NATO’s collective defense – and nuclear – umbrella.

Other motives were behind doing so, including moving NATO military hardware, surveillance, air patrols, training centers and operational contingencies further eastward up to the Russian border.

But NATO first implemented its mutual military assistance clause because of events and against targets in parts of the world never expected by most: The bloc used the events of September 11, 2001 in the United States to launch a full 19-member military operation in Afghanistan.

In thirty five years as members of the Warsaw Pact the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland had never been called upon to send troops to a war zone; in only 30 months as NATO

members they were pulled into what is soon to be an eight-year war in South Asia.

All three nations have troops deployed in Afghanistan and all three have suffered combat fatalities there.

The seven other Eastern European nations that followed them into NATO – Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia – and the three that are to follow the above ten – Albania, Croatia and Macedonia – also have troops stationed in the world's most dangerous war zone, and most all of them, including the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, had troops stationed in Iraq after March of 2003.

The last three countries have all lost troops there also.

Shortly after the invasion of Iraq and the deployment of a US military headquarters in Baghdad and a British counterpart in Basra, a third, middle zone around the ancient city of Babylon and Karbala was under Polish military command (consisting of 7,000 troops) with NATO assistance.

The main Polish base was called Camp Babylon in fact and was the site of desecration and destruction of some of the world's most treasured artifacts at the hands of new NATO's occupation forces.

Collectively the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland had not lost a single troop in combat operations since World War II, but now all have done so in two nations, with the Polish death toll in Iraq at 21 and in Afghanistan at 9.

Serving NATO at the expense of one's nation and people is not limited to killing and dying overseas, however, as the Alliance has endangered the three states at home in addition.

The US intends to station an X-Band radar transferred from the Marshall Islands to the Czech municipality of Brdy as part of a global missile shield system and NATO has constructed a radar installation in the city of Slavkov near the site of the Battle of Austerlitz.

There is fierce and committed local opposition to both deployments, two of many and illimitable obligations of NATO membership.

A comparable campaign exists in Hungary to stop the deployment of a NATO radar facility on Tubes Hill near Pecs.

Poland is slated for the most provocative and threatening projects: Ten US interceptor missile silos at or near the Redzikowo airport in Slupsk near the Baltic Sea coast and a Patriot missile battery not too far from Russia's Kaliningrad enclave.

Redzikowo formerly housed a Nazi German airbase, from where Luftwaffe warplanes took off to bomb Poland itself in World War II.

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A decade later the 1999 NATO accession was marked by expensive celebrations and hollow speeches in Budapest, Prague and Warsaw with Madeleine Albright condescending to visit the three capitals – recall she had summoned the foreign ministers to Missouri to recruit them ten years earlier – and Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich opening a "NATO village" on the grounds of the University of Warsaw and decking the capital with NATO flags.

The EU's Javier Solana, NATO Secretary General during the three nations' absorption, boasted of his own accomplishment while waxing enthusiastic over the prospects of the bloc moving yet further east into former Soviet space.

Ex-Czech president Vaclav Havel used the occasion to call for NATO to continue the trend by dragging in Belarus and Ukraine.

Hungarian Defence Minister Imre Szekeres was ordered to Washington during the anniversary to get his latest marching orders from Pentagon chief Robert Gates and current National Security Advisor and former NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Jones.

Ten years ago there was only one NATO state bordering Russia, Norway with a narrow corridor linking the two nations.

Now there are four new full members on Russia's borders – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland – and four former Soviet Republics with NATO Individual Partnership Action Plans also abutting Russia – Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine.

Finland, a former neutral sharing a 1,300-kilometer border with Russia, is being prepared for further NATO integration and has proven its bona fides in this respect by deploying troops under the Alliance's command in Afghanistan.

A decade after the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland were absorbed by NATO the state of the world and the landscape of Europe have changed.

Yugoslavia no longer exists, even on maps.

And other nations within or against whom NATO has attacked or conducted other military operations – Bosnia, Macedonia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Sudan, Pakistan and Somalia – may suffer the same fate.

March 12 is not an occasion for celebration but a cause for the deepest concern and a spur to oppose history's first attempt at creating a worldwide military bloc ahead of its 60th anniversary summit beginning in less than three weeks.

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