

Spotlight Ukraine: Latest Blinken-Lavrov Aftermath

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From a distance, one gets the impression that this past Friday’s face to face meeting between US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, could’ve been done over the phone. Both sides reiterated their differences and announced another meeting, with the Biden administration saying that it’ll soon provide a written answer to the Russian government’s security proposal.

The Biden-Lavrov get together in Geneva gave the two parties a setting to further highlight their respective views to a world media giving them prime coverage. As expected, the usual slants were put in place in much of the coverage. At the same time, there’s an increased acknowledgement of Russian geostrategic concerns.

On the media bright side, CGTN America featured an [informatively diverse panel](#), with Serhiy Kudelia, Anton Fedyashin, Vladimir Golstein and Lincoln Mitchell. The core views of Fedyashin and Goldstein are typically omitted in the major Western mass media venues.

Over the past weekend, Fedyashin provided excellent insight in a CNN segment. CNN nonetheless remains skewed in an anti-Russian leaning direction. In that CNN segment, Fedyashin sarcastically wonders whether British Intel is using Christopher Steele on the claim of a Kremlin plan to install a pro-Russian Ukrainian government.

I’ve some disagreement with Kudelia’s uncritical reference of a poll saying that 54% of Ukrainian citizens are pro-NATO membership. The Ukrainian NATO membership issue is discussed further down this article. Mitchell’s belief that the situation in Donbass isn’t so much a civil Ukrainian conflict as a Russia-Ukraine dispute is addressed in [my commentary of this past December 17](#).

Speaking from Lviv, Kudelia observes that the majority of Ukrainians aren’t expecting a Russian attack. US President Joe Biden and some others in the West differ. Anti-Russian leaning pro-NATO expansion advocates, tend to be the most enthusiastic believers of an impending Russian strike on Ukraine.

These individuals will use that action as a basis to expand NATO and seek to somehow end

the German initiated Nord Stream 2 pipeline. This joint Russo-German project benefits Europe. Utilizing a non-Russian alternative will be more problematical and costly.

[Lavrov's press conference](#) highlights Russia's differences with Western neocons, neolib and flat out Russia haters. In his answer to a CNN reporter, the issue is brought up of a nation having the right to choose its own military alliance at the expense of the security of another country. [On CNN](#), The New York Times' David Sanger (who is also a CNN contributor) brings up the matter of Ukrainian public opinion on NATO membership, while noting that Ukraine continues to be lacking in democracy.

When mentioned, Western mass media has tended to uncritically reference the survey putting Ukrainian pro-NATO membership support at 54%. That poll result has been [credibly challenged](#). There's also [a canvass](#) finding a Ukrainian majority opposed to NATO exercises in Ukraine.

Regardless, upon further review, the subject of Ukraine joining NATO exhibits the ongoing differences within the territory of the former Ukrainian SSR. If I'm not mistaken, Crimea (reunified with Russia in 2014) and the rebel Donbass area, weren't included in the 54% pro-NATO membership result. In majority terms, these two territories don't support the further expansion of NATO.

In Kiev regime controlled Ukraine, there're noticeable differences. Paraphrasing [Volodymyr Ishchenko](#):

The western part of Ukraine, once affiliated with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, is the most pro-NATO territory of that former Soviet republic. In central Ukraine, there's a plurality of support for NATO membership. Putting aside central Ukraine and the former Habsburg ruled western portion, the rest of Kiev controlled Ukraine is under 50% in favor of NATO membership.

Concerning the mood in Kiev, I came across [a rather interesting conversation](#).

Kiev regime controlled Ukraine signed the UN approved Minsk Protocol, which supports a negotiated autonomy for the rebel Donbass area. Since then, the Ukrainian government has openly expressed its reluctance to honor that agreement. Ukraine's democratically challenged status and censoring of pro-Russian sentiment are main obstacles to securing a more stable situation.

The British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss unintentionally gave support to the pro-Russian position in Ukraine, when [she said](#) *"Ukraine is a proud country with a long history. They have known invading forces before – from the Mongols to the Tatars."* That very same thought applies to Russia which shares a lengthy history of togetherness with Ukraine. Some Brits and others are quite ironic in their historical overview of Russia-Ukraine. That aspect prompted [Paul Robinson's rebuttal to the Scottish UK Defence Minister Ben Wallace](#).

[The same Robinson](#) says that a US State Department report on RT (released about the time of the Lavrov-Blinken meeting) lies about an article of his at that venue. The timing of the report's release appears to be a further sign of the US government looking to decrease the likelihood of improved US-Russian relations. I trust that Robinson will provide details to substantiate his comment. From the US State Department, [I'm reminded](#) of a put mildly misinformative report on the Strategic Culture Foundation and some other venues in August

of 2020.

During Lavrov's press conference, a BBC reporter presented an editorialized question, suggesting Russia was seeking a chaotic situation in Ukraine, for the purpose of coaxing it into a Russian sphere of influence. Lavrov replied by noting how some American elites question the regional alliance of others far away from America's borders in a most hypocritical way. He noted Blinken questioning the legitimacy of Russian forces being invited into Kazakhstan by the Kazakh government and a prevailing EU mindset that Russian relations in the Balkans should be limited, unlike what Brussels does there.

Lavrov also addressed what's negatively associated with the spheres of influence term. Specifically, a previous era when empires encompassed vast areas of territory now comprising independent nations.

Realist oriented folks who aren't in a diplomatic position can be less negative towards the spheres of influence term. On the matter of Lavrov's exchange with a BBC reporter, I'm reminded of this excerpt from [my commentary of this past December 24](#):

"Many Russians including Putin and other former Soviets, have a reasoned basis to oppose the level of suffering which occurred on account of how the Soviet breakup happened. This belief isn't by default synonymous with a yearning to recreate the USSR.

Among numerous Russians, the romantic recollection of the past is often balanced by a realistic understanding about the present and most probable future realities running counter to the likelihood of another Soviet Union or Russian Empire. By the way, it's not as if many mainstream thinking Russians don't acknowledge the shortcomings of the Russian Empire and Soviet Union.

A key difference is their non-acceptance of the negative inaccuracies pertaining to their nation's past and present. There're also the categories of some support and sympathy for the Russian Empire/not as much for the Soviet Union and vice versa - indicative of the diversity level among Russians.

Post-Soviet Russia has formally recognized the independence of the non-Russian former Soviet republics. Keeping in mind the EU and NATO memberships of the three former Soviet Baltic republics, this Russian recognition includes having a noticeable, but not complete sphere of influence approach. That stance is on par with how former colonial powers like France and the UK maintain close economic and/or military ties with some of its onetime colonies.

It's understandable for Russia to oppose actions which are unnecessarily anti-Russian and premised on misinformation."

A sphere of influence scenario doesn't necessarily involve a major power completely dominating others in its near abroad. The economically and militarily Russian allied Kazakh, Belarusian and Armenian governments dominate what goes on in their respective nation. These non-Russian former Soviet republics don't always agree with Russia.

The post-Soviet period has seen several high profile instances where superior military force was used by the American government on lands far away from the US. American National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said the Biden administration would take decisive action if

Russia were to deploy a military presence in Venezuela and/or Cuba.

A more balanced understanding of geopolitics is likely to limit questionable calls for provocation. Over a year ago, the Washington Post ran an [article](#) “*The Less Americans Know About Ukraine’s Location, the More They Want the US to Intervene*”. This dynamic brings into play US government efforts to demean some venues with a viably different perspective. An objectively greater knowledge of issues like the former Soviet Union poses a greater challenge to neocon-neolib leaning foreign policy elites.

[I’ve acknowledged](#) media imperfections in Russia. No one is perfect, with the “*false equivalency*” claim not always being so evident as some suggest.

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This article was originally published on [Eurasia Review](#).

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Featured image: Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken meets with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Geneva, Switzerland, on January 21, 2022. [State Department photo by Ron Przysucha/ Public Domain]

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