

# War in Ukraine: The Wise Men, Please Step Forward

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*The guns in Ukraine have not cooled down yet but the Minsk 2 peace accord is already being predictably assailed in Washington by liberal and conservative hawks alike.*

Headlines like “Vlad Putin Wins Again,” “The new Ukrainian peace deal may be worse than no deal at all,” or “Why Is Putin Smiling About Ukraine?” and the likes are all over the US media.

Never mind that the Minsk Agreement offers at least a brief, fragile window of opportunity for the world to step back from the brink of a nuclear confrontation that would destroy the entire northern hemisphere of the earth. If nothing else, at least it could save some Ukrainian lives. But who cares?

Such negative reactions from US policymakers and media are understandable since the whole Ukrainian mess was concocted to fulfill the ultimate goal of Russia’s geopolitical weakening and Putin’s regime change under the noble banner of spreading freedom and democracy. So far this goal is far from an achievement so why give peace a chance?

The saddest part of this story is that such a policy totally contradicts US long-term strategic security interests by turning a potential important ally into adversary.

It did not have to be that way. After the collapse of Communism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, both Russian elites and the overwhelming majority of the Russian people were ready to join the family of the Western alliance. It was President George Herbert Walker Bush who talked in 1990 about a “Europe whole and free,” and the new “security arch from Vancouver to Vladivostok.”

Yes, there is no written document confirming his often-quoted pledge to Gorbachev not to expand NATO to the East but there are many credible and trustworthy witnesses who present compelling evidence testifying to Washington’s reneging on key oral commitments to Moscow.

According to then-US Ambassador to Moscow Jack Matlock, who took part in both the Bush-Gorbachev early-December 1989 summit in Malta and the Shevardnadze-Baker discussions in early February 1990:

“The language used was absolute, and the entire negotiation was in the framework of a general agreement that there would be no use of force by the Soviets and no ‘taking advantage’ by the US ... I don’t see how anybody could view the subsequent expansion of NATO as anything but ‘taking advantage,’ particularly since, by then, Russia was hardly a credible threat.”

There are other reliable witnesses to these historical events. And there is no doubt that it was Bill Clinton and his administration that made the sharp turn from the movement, albeit slow, towards an US – Russia alliance, to deep division and the current dangerous state of affairs.

George Kennan, one of the most distinguished of American diplomats, later told the New York Times he believed the expansion of NATO was *“the beginning of a new cold war...I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else. This expansion would make the Founding Fathers of this country turn over in their graves.”*

Some 19 US Senators, including John Ashcroft (R-MO), Tom Harkin (D-IA), Jim Inhofe (R-OK), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-NY), Harry Reid (D-NV), Arlen Specter (R-PA) and John Warner (R-VA) voted against the bill permitting the expansion of NATO. Some of them said the expansion would *“dilute NATO’s self-defense mission, antagonize Russia, jeopardize several Russian-American arms-control negotiations and draw a new dividing line – a new Iron Curtain – across Europe.”*

*“We’ll be back on a hair-trigger,”* said Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a New York Democrat, warning that enlargement would threaten much worse than a new cold war. *“We’re talking about nuclear war.”*

This relentless record of broken promises continued when Russia was ravaged by economic crisis through the 1990s. This was a direct result of the catastrophic crash privatization urged on it by the Clinton team when Russia’s population shrank disastrously and the hardship of ordinary folks was comparable to what they had experienced during World War II.

Russia’s unexpected recovery in the 2000s from this total devastation caught its antagonists by surprise, but George W. Bush and Barack Obama followed the same failed Clinton policies by continuing NATO expansion, unleashing *“color revolutions”* on former Soviet republics from Ukraine and Georgia to Kyrgyzstan. Under their reckless leads, the United States pressed to break historical and economic ties between Russia and Ukraine going back many centuries using the same slogans of promoting Western values.



Joint press conference by Soviet Communist Party leader, Soviet Supreme Council Chairman Mikhail Gorbachev (right) and US President George Bush in Malta.(RIA Novosti / Yuriy Abramochkin)

The Ukrainian people have not benefited from this policy which the February 2014 violent coup in Kiev and the openly manipulated sham of a democratic election then imposed upon them. The new rump government of President Petro Poroshenko first accepted an association agreement with the European Union under terms certain to impoverish scores of millions of Ukrainians. It has nothing to do with helping Ukraine's economic development but only dangles mythical carrots of unlimited Western aid that neither the US nor the EU in reality have the resources to provide.

Finally, some European leaders are slowly coming to their senses. Merkel and Hollande rightly want to retreat from the brink and such conservative-right leaders like former President Nicolas Sarkozy and National Front leader Marine Le Pen have both made clear their own determination to reestablish good ties with Moscow.

Yet in Washington, the only voices allowed to be heard in the mainstream media unanimously call for the rapid arming of Ukraine as quickly and recklessly as possible. Arch-hawk Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz) is predictably in the forefront of this pack, yet incredibly President Obama has allowed senior figures in his own administration and the top US generals to encourage such madness too.

During the most dangerous periods of the Cold War, the dangers were fully realized by the Eisenhower, Kennedy and Reagan administrations. However, there is not the slightest hint of such awareness and responsibility among US policymakers today, either among the incumbent Democrats or the opposition Republicans, who are trying to outdo each other by competing who is more hawkish on Russia. Needless to say that America needs a drastic change in its foreign policy.

There are a few wise men who can make a significant contribution to this cause; one is former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev, the man who did more than any other single person to end the Cold War. He must come to Washington and meet with the surviving veterans of the Reagan and George Bush, Sr. administrations he worked so courageously and constructively with back in the 1980s. Together, their voices desperately need to be heard to revive the severed lines of communication between Washington and Moscow and start the process of bringing the world back from the brink of nuclear destruction.

The huge experience and unmatched diplomatic skills of such Americans as George Herbert Walker Bush, Henry Kissinger, James A. Baker III, Brent Scowcroft, Jack Matlock, Pat Buchanan, David Stockman, Dana Rohrabacher and some others make them the obvious partners to take seats at the round table with Gorbachyov.

It is not too late for the voices of reason and sanity to be heard. But the alarms on the Doomsday Clock are already ringing.

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