

The Wall Will Fall

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Russia's Invasion of Ukraine in Perspective

vanessa beeley / 3 hours ago

Excellent analysis from [Scott Ritter](#):

After decades of ignoring Russia's national security concerns, the West is confronted with a military invasion of Ukraine which serves as a precursor for a new Cold War that will define Russia's relationship with the West for years to come.

Let there be no mistake, on Feb. 24, the world awoke to a new reality. Prior to this date, Russia was treated by the West as an annoyance, belittled by economic and even military elites as little more than a "giant gas station masquerading as a nation," to quote John McCain, the now-deceased senator from Arizona.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had been subjected to a series of sophomoric psychological profiles that trivialized Russian national concerns as little more than the psychotic whim of a troubled individual. The caricatures that emerged of the Russian state and its leadership colored the analysis of Russia's oft-stated concerns over what it viewed as its legitimate national security.

This blinded the West to the reality of what was transpiring. Because no one took Russia seriously, no one could imagine a large-scale ground war in Europe. So everyone was taken by surprise when such a conflict broke out.

How We Got Here

Ever since Nato had opened the door to membership for Ukraine and Georgia during the 2008 Bucharest summit, Russia has been making its vehement opposition known.

William Burns, the former US Ambassador to Russia and now director of the CIA, captured the Russian sentiment in a February 2009 memorandum: "Nyet means nyet: Russia's Nato enlargement red lines." Russia, Burns noted, viewed "farther eastward expansion as a potential military threat," giving rise to Russian fears that "the issue could potentially split the country [Ukraine] in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene."

One need only to look at what has transpired in Donetsk and Luhansk, and Russia's current military operation in Ukraine, to understand how prescient Burns' cable was.

Burns, however, was ignored. So, too, was Putin, who had been lecturing the West ever since his landmark speech at the 2007 Munich Security Conference, where he famously called out the US for having "overstepped its national borders in every way." Putin declared, "This is visible in the economic, political, cultural and educational policies it imposes on other nations. Well, who likes this? Who is happy about this?" He was greeted by silence.

"I am convinced," Putin told the assembled leadership of the Western world, "that we have reached that decisive moment when we must seriously think about the architecture of global security. And we must proceed by searching for a reasonable balance between the interests of all participants in the international dialogue."

At Munich, the Russian president warned that Western policies "stimulate an arms race." He repeatedly warned the US and Nato that President George W. Bush's precipitous decision to withdraw from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty and then to deploy anti-missile defense systems in two Nato countries, Poland and Romania, posed a direct threat to Russian national security.

In 2018, Putin unveiled new types of Russian strategic nuclear weapons designed to defeat US missile defenses. "No one has listened to us," Putin declared at the time. "You listen to us now."

Putin's 2018 nuclear announcement should have alerted the West to a critical aspect of the Russian president's personality. "You will have to assess that new reality and become convinced that what I said today isn't a bluff ... trust me," Putin said at the time.

Nyet means nyet. It was a simple message laid out in uncomplicated terms. Russia was not bluffing. Yet the US and Nato brushed off the Russian concerns, operating under the premise that their principle of an "open-door" policy regarding Nato membership somehow trumped Russian concerns about its national security.

Perception management overtook reality, as Nato tried to sell Russia on the notion that it had nothing to fear, since Nato was ostensibly a defensive alliance. The US and Nato shrugged off Russia's narrative, which cited Nato's bombing of Belgrade in 1999, deployment to Afghanistan in 2001, and intervention in Libya in 2011 as prima facie evidence that post-Cold War Nato had morphed into an offensively oriented military alliance whose presence on Russia's borders constituted an existential threat.

Nato membership remained on the table for Ukraine and Georgia. Moreover, Nato began arming and training the militaries of these former Soviet republics, integrating them into

formal Nato exercises that transformed the Ukrainian and Georgian militaries into de facto Nato proxies. Indeed, Ukrainian and Georgian troops deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan were under the Nato flag.

Russian sensitivities were heightened following the Maidan Revolution of 2014, which saw a pro-Russian president replaced by a decidedly pro-Western Ukrainian government that made Nato membership a legal mandate.

As Burns had predicted, Ukraine's push for Nato membership pushed Russia into a corner, prompting a demand by Russia, submitted to the US and Nato in December 2021, calling for written security guarantees that Ukraine would never join Nato. This Russian demand was ignored. Russia warned that failure to provide the demanded security guarantees would result in "military-technical" responses — a euphemism for war, which Russia implemented in full on Feb. 24.

Where We Are Going

The major takeaway from this unfolding situation should be that Russia's president does not bluff, and that the West would do well to listen closely to what he has to say. As Russian troops poured across the Ukrainian border, Western diplomats and pundits proclaimed shock and dismay. But Russia had been clear about [what it wanted](#), and what the consequences of failing to get that would be. This war was predictable, if only the West had listened.

The fighting rages in Ukraine. How this war will end is uncertain. The old military adage that no plan survives initial contact with the enemy applies in full. What is known is that the US and Europe are imposing a second tranche of hard-hitting sanctions designed to punish Russia.

It is important to point out that anyone who believed this second round of sanctions would compel a change in Russian behavior will be disappointed. Russia's course of action has incorporated the full range of sanctions planned by the West — not a difficult task, since there had been wide speculation about their scope since sanctions were first threatened in spring 2021.

The problem isn't the sanctions, but what follows. These sanctions exhaust the options the US, Nato and the EU have for responding to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. They have no follow-on plan. Russia, on the other hand, has such a plan. It has been very clear about what the future holds. Again, however, the West has not been listening.

Russia will not take this second [tranche of sanctions](#) laying down. Putin has made clear that Russia will respond in kind, using symmetrical (i.e., countersanctions) and asymmetrical (i.e., cyberattacks) actions designed to disrupt the economies of targeted nations and entities. Russia has made no secret that this is its intended course of action, but as with its "military-technical" solution for Ukraine, the West shrugged off the Russian threat. Russia, however, does not bluff.

Russia has also made clear that its security guarantees go beyond preventing Ukraine from joining Nato and include the return of Nato's military infrastructure to pre-1997 levels. In short, all Nato forces deployed into Eastern Europe must be returned to their home bases, and the two missile defense sites in Poland and Romania dismantled.

This is the demand that will drive future Russian relations with the West. Rather than acceding to Russia's demands, Nato has been doubling down on the reinforcement of its eastern flank, dispatching additional forces to Poland, Romania and the Baltics.

In response, Russia will create an analogous situation to what transpired in Belarus, namely the forward deployment of powerful Russian military formations in what will be, for all practical purposes, a militarized buffer zone separating Nato from Russia proper, with the exception of the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad.

The resulting standoff will closely resemble the Cold War, where Nato and Soviet-led Warsaw Pact forces faced off across the frontier separating East and West Germany. This is the new reality that the world woke up to on Feb. 24 — a Cold War that the West neither wanted, predicted nor is prepared to undertake.

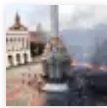
Scott Ritter is a former US Marine Corps intelligence officer whose service over a 20-plus-year career included tours of duty in the former Soviet Union implementing arms control agreements, serving on the staff of US Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf during the Gulf War and later as a chief weapons inspector with the UN in Iraq from 1991-98.

February 26, 2022 in Ukraine. Tags: Ukraine

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