

Submitted as a Community Perspective to the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner

I am very concerned about the bellicose, inflammatory approach the Biden administration is taking toward the situation in Ukraine, and echoed by mainstream media. The situation there is much more complicated than one could glean from most news reports. There is a long history behind the current crisis we find ourselves in.

Ukraine has traditionally been Russia's breadbasket. Russia's only warm-water ports are in Crimea in eastern Ukraine, with the Russian Navy based there for the past two and a half centuries. The U.S. has widely disseminated the claim that Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014 and annexed Crimea. What they leave out is that Russian troops never invaded Crimea from Russia; it had troops legally stationed at its naval base there authorized by long-standing treaties. Not one shot was fired; and the Crimean people voted in a referendum to rejoin Russia before the official annexation took place. We must also remember that this took place immediately after a coup that replaced the Ukrainian leadership with a strongly anti-Russian one. Our CIA was heavily involved in the coup, giving money and support to neo-Nazi factions to pull it off. The ensuing government has not been kind to Ukrainian citizens of Russian descent living in the eastern part of the country.

Ukraine and Russia have been intrinsically linked since the time of Catherine the Great. One can understand Russia feeling threatened at the prospect of NATO weaponizing its closest neighbor. When Soviet missiles were installed in Cuba, the US felt threatened. Putin moving his troops to his own border is a cautious and conservative stance. Putin doesn't want to invade Ukraine. Let us not push him into it.

NATO expansion and aggression is at the root of the problem. NATO was formed to offset the power of the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact. Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, there has been no reason for its continued existence, resulting in a moribund NATO today. As part of the negotiations leading to the reunification of Germany, George H. W. Bush promised Gorbachev that NATO would not expand "one inch eastward." That promise is well documented, although it was never put in writing. It didn't take us long to break that promise after the Soviet Union broke up. Twelve eastern European countries have joined NATO since then. In 2016 NATO conducted a military maneuver involving 31,000 troops within a few miles of the Russian border. Subsequently, NATO has conducted up to 40 smaller military exercises per year close to the Russian border.

NATO expansion appears to be primarily driven by the defense industry and its allies, including major oil companies and others that benefit from having more nations to sell expensive fuel-intensive weaponry to. Not only does this make the whole world awash in deadly weapons, but in the process destabilizes whole regions. It's becoming apparent that our nation doesn't really care much about spreading democracy around the world, but is much more concerned about finding markets for our weaponry. Congress is considering spending \$500 million for new weapons for Ukraine. The \$768 billion in the bloated National Defense Authorization Bill that they passed in December isn't enough? Where was all that money when "Build Back Better" was being negotiated?

Declaring a moratorium on NATO expansion is a necessary first step for a long-term solution. This should be an easy concession for the U.S. to make, since neither France nor Germany

will let Ukraine join NATO anyway. If US/NATO aggression continues, it's easy to imagine a scenario in which nuclear weapons become involved. That will be a war that cannot be won. We need to shift our policy from prioritizing corporate profit to prioritizing world peace and security.

Submitted to the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner on February 3, 2022 by Alan Batten

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