[**Ukraine diplomacy**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1679551/ukraine-diplomacy)

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THE US owes a heavy responsibility to save Ukraine from destruction at the hands of Russia’s President Vladimir Putin. He is reckless but the West had led Ukraine up the garden path. Would it really have intervened if Ukraine was a member of Nato? For long, Americans and Europeans have discussed the efficacy of Nato’s guarantee. Would the US indeed risk nuclear annihilation to save Italy? And now the expanded Nato?

The legendary PM, Jim Hacker, had to confront this agonising dilemma in the BBC’s Yes Prime Minister serial when he met the government’s chief scientific adviser Isaac Rosenblum. He was merciless in questioning the PM on the futility of the nuclear deterrent and on defining the “last resort” when the nuclear button had to be pressed. He asked, “So what is the last resort? Piccadilly? … The Reform Club?” America’s nuclear strategists have long wrestled with this question — risk America’s annihilation while saving Italy? Or Ukraine?

This misses an important point. The Nato guarantee itself is of questionable worth and Nato’s expansion was a dangerous folly. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 says: “The parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that … each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the party or parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”

The Nato guarantee is of questionable worth.

Explaining Article 5 to a Senate Foreign Relations Committee, secretary of state Dean Acheson said: “This … does not mean that the [US] would be automatically at war if one of the other signatory nations were the victim of an armed attack. … The obligation of this government under Article V would … be to take promptly the action it deemed necessary to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. That decision would, of course, be taken in accordance with our constitutional procedures. The factors which would have to be considered would be the gravity of the attack and the nature of the action which this government considered necessary to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.”

In other words, there is no guarantee of automatic help under the treaty. Each party has a discretion on how to perform its obligation.

Acheson was asked by committee chairman: “Is there or is there not anything in the treaty that pledges us to an automatic declaration of war in any event?” He replied in the negative. Asked again, “Those are matters still residing in the discretion and judgement of the Government and the Senate?”, Acheson replied, “That is true”. The chairman asked: “Even after the occurrence of events, we would still have that freedom, would we not?” “That is true,” emphasised Acheson.

Far weaker were subsequent treaties like the ones with Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines and in SEATO. Pakistan needs no edification on the worth of US pledges. The only case of an unqualified pledge was the Pact of Steel between Hitler and Mussolini on May 22, 1939. But neither under the UN Charter nor under international law does a victim of aggression need a treaty to solicit or obtain military aid for its defence. America’s refusal to supply planes to Ukraine is indefensible. Would it have intervened if Ukraine was a Nato member?

A few days ago, the Kremlin spokesperson published Russia’s surrender terms: Ukraine to lay down arms, alter its constitution to enshrine neutrality, acknowledge Cri­mea as Russian territory and Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states.

President Joe Biden assisted by Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelensky must meet President Vladmir Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Geneva to hammer out a compromise. Force unrelated to achievable political ends is sterile diplomacy. Khrushchev said in March 1959: “History teaches us that conferences reflect in their decisions an established balance of forces resulting from victory or capitulations in war or similar circumstances.”

The foreign ministers of Russia and Ukraine have met. On March 8, Ukraine said it was no longer pressing for Nato membership and was open to ‘compromise’ on the status of the two breakaway territories. On March 9, the Russian foreign ministry spokesperson said “some progress” had been made in the talks. Russia did not seek regime change in Ukraine.

The progress is significant. The agenda must also cover Russian reparations for the damage it has inflicted on that hapless country. Matters have gone too far. They can be resolved only by a Biden-Putin summit. There is need for an immediate ceasefire.

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