**The Ukraine crisis: Truth and delusion**

By [Asghar](https://nation.com.pk/amp/author/asghar/) on February 26, 2022

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| The Ukraine crisis was not born in one day. It brims with a myriad of truth and delusion that plunged the world into war and the credit goes to global players’ insidious diplomacy that threw a spanner in the works of global peace. The trust deficit between Russia and the NATO allies remains a pivot for all adversaries, playing an anchoring role in the eruption of the Ukraine-Russian war. Through global diplomacy underpinned by superpowers, trust building measures could have been bolstered, but hegemonic ambitions did not let the peace prevail once again. |

Russia believes that in 1990, during the Berlin unification, an assurance was given that NATO would never extend to one inch to the Eastern side of Europe. Contrary to this, the deal-makers of Berlin unification denied a formal guarantee on the limits of NATO expansion post-1990.

Later, in 1999, years after German reunification and the withdrawal of all Soviet troops from Eastern Europe, NATO roped in three former Warsaw Pact countries: Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. So much so that in 2007, it was planned to make Georgia and Ukraine members of the EU and NATO. The NATO enlargement fuelled further issues in Russia. In defence, Russian President Putin unleashed a war in Georgia in 2008 to dispel NATO expansion. Russia took over two cities of Georgia. It was technically a warning to NATO. Since the western powers did not budge an inch in terms of incorporating Ukraine into NATO, Russia took control of Crimea, a peninsula jutting into the Black Sea south of Ukraine in 2014. Finally, on February 21, Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Russian forces to enter two regions, the pro-Moscow rebel areas of Luhansk and Donetsk of Eastern Ukraine after recognising them as independent.

Looking back at history, it is revealed that then Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and then German Chancellor Helmut Kohl exchanged fountain pens after signing a contract in Bonn in November 1990. Ten years later, in an interview with the German newspaper Bild, Gorbachev complained that the West had tricked Moscow. “Many people in the West were secretly rubbing their hands and felt something like a flush of victory—including those who had promised us: ‘We will not move 1 centimetre further east,’” he was quoted as saying.

Casting the issue into the spotlight, many Western scholars held opinions that the issue revolved around “myths and misperceptions”. One “myth” in particular kicked off a furious debate in email threads, chat rooms and on Twitter: “Russia was promised that NATO would not expand.”

Nikolai Sokov, a former Russian diplomat who served in the Foreign Ministry in Moscow between 1987 and 1992, disagrees. He said it sounded to be a piece produced by “the Ideology Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union”, he told the media.

One of media outlets, rferl reported on the issue that “at no point in the discussion did either James Baker (Former US Secretary of State) or Gorbachev bring up the question of the possible extension of NATO membership to other Warsaw Pact countries beyond Germany,” according to Mark Kramer, director of the Cold War Studies Project at Harvard University’s Davis Center. “Indeed, it never would have occurred to them to raise an issue that was not on the agenda anywhere, not in Washington, not in Moscow, and not in any other Warsaw Pact or NATO capital,” Kramer wrote in an April 2009 journal article.

While, according to Steven Pifer, a former US ambassador who was serving at the State Department at the time, the United States, France, and Britain, along with Germany, agreed not to deploy non-German NATO forces in the former East Germany.

Russia’s first president, Boris Yeltsin, was wary about NATO expansion but did not oppose it, according to declassified memos. “We understand, of course, that any possible integration of East European countries into NATO will not automatically lead to the alliance somehow turning against Russia,” Yeltsin wrote in a September 1993 letter to US President Bill Clinton. “But it is important to take into account how our public opinion might react to that step.”

But Yeltsin also cited what he cast as assurances given to Soviet officials during the negotiations on German unification, writing that “the spirit of the treaty on the final settlement…precludes the option of expanding the NATO zone into the East.”

Four years later, in an effort to assuage Moscow’s concerns, NATO and Russia signed the NATO-Russia Founding Act, a political agreement stating, among other things, that “NATO and Russia do not consider each other as adversaries.” In 2002, NATO and Russia agreed to set up a joint consultative council, ostensibly as a venue to resolve disagreements. But the council was seen as ineffectual. Then, two years later, NATO underwent the largest expansion in its history, admitting seven more Eastern European countries, including the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which had been republics of the Soviet Union and chafed under Moscow’s rule. While it wasn’t the first time a NATO member bordered Russia or the Soviet Union, now a NATO member’s troops could potentially be located just 625 kilometres from Moscow.

In 2007, at the Munich Security Conference, an annual high-level gathering of officials, diplomats, and experts from both sides of the Atlantic, Putin unleashed a broadside against NATO, as well as the United States, accusing the alliance of duplicity and of threatening Russia.

“I think it is obvious that NATO expansion has no relation with the modernisation of the alliance itself or with ensuring security in Europe. On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust,” he said.

“What happened to the assurances our Western partners made after the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact? Where are those declarations today?” Putin asked—a remark that prompted some head-scratching, because the debate has focused almost exclusively on remarks made before the Warsaw Pact fell apart. “Where are these guarantees?”

Among those who have gave rise to Russian claims of a promise was the last US ambassador to the Soviet Union, Jack Matlock, who has repeatedly insisted, both in congressional testimony and more recently, that Gorbachev had received assurances that if Germany united, and stayed in NATO, the borders of NATO would not move eastward.

But Wolfgang Ischinger, a former German ambassador and deputy foreign minister, said that agreements on German reunification, including the 1990 treaty known as the 2+4 Treaty, which formally paved the way for the two countries to become one again, made no mention of NATO enlargement.

To my opinion, if diplomacy is given a broader chance keeping aside all misgivings, the Ukraine crisis may be resolved with affability.