**Why cannot NATO and Russia talk?**

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The Western Julian calendar year 2023 is still young, and so is indeed the Chinese Lunar year, which is celebrated this week. A year can change the world. If somebody had told us a year ago that there would be a war in Europe, and now it has gone on for over eleven months since 24 February 2022, few would have believed it. We thought it would be impossible that Russia would actually invade Ukraine. True, there had already been a war-like conflict in the east of Ukraine for over a decade, with Russia claiming provinces and areas with sizeable Russian-speaking populations, and later they annexed them, ratified by the ‘Duma’, the Russian parliament, albeit illegal according to international law. There is still severe fighting in the areas as Ukraine claims the land back.

In 2014, Crimea on the Black Sea was annexed by Russia because of its strategic military location for the Russian navy. NATO, the world’s largest military alliance led by America with a total of twenty-eight member countries plus other partners, had crept dangerously close to the Russian border, which Russia found unacceptable. (In North America, there is a parallel, namely the Monroe Doctrine of 1823, not allowing foreign countries to settle near the US borders. It was activated in 1962 when the Soviet Union’s planned close cooperation with Cuba, leading to the Cuban Crisis.)

['India expanding settler-colonial project in IIOJK by grabbing Kashmiris' land'](https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Feb-2023/india-expanding-settler-colonial-project-in-iiojk-by-grabbing-kashmiris-land)

It is said that Russia had expected a short war in Ukraine, or Special Operations, as they call it, having annexed Crimea, going on to annex Luhansk, Donetsk and other areas in the eastern provinces into Russia, and in addition planning to take the Ukrainian capital Kyiv and other key cities and areas. Some also say it was Russia’s plan to eradicate Ukraine from the map as an independent state, making it a part of Russia again. Yet, since Ukraine gained independence from Russia in 1991, soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, almost all Ukrainians want to be an independent state. But it is a fact that Ukraine was an important part of the Soviet Union in the fields of agriculture, technology, science, and more.

President Boris Yeltsin, who ruled Russia from 1991-1999, seems to have been quite naive and optimistic, or even erratic, about the future of the former Soviet republics and other Eastern Bloc countries and their cooperation with both Russia and the West. The lack of solid grounds for independence can explain some of the current problems, indeed for Ukraine. We should remember that the political spirit was different in the early 1990s than it became during the Putin-Medvedev rule from 1999 till date.

[President felicitates Iran on 44th anniversary of Revolution](https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Feb-2023/piaf-rejects-hike-in-power-gas-tariffs-fears-increased-energy-rates-to-damage-economy)

We should also recall that in April 2008, President Putin warned Western leaders, at a meeting in Romania, over NATO’s expansion eastward, stressing that any further expansion would be seen as a ‘direct threat’ to Russia. Furthermore, the West is evasive about having made any promises about NATO expansion at the time of the fall of the Soviet Union, but it is shall have been documented, according to reliable sources. When the Eastern Block military alliance, the Warsaw Pact, was dissolved, NATO should also have limited and reorganised its military alliance. It seems arrogant that the West in 2008 did not take President Putin’s warning seriously. Perhaps America and the West simply expected that all other countries should just be in line behind the only remaining superpower.

Ukraine could and should have become a neutral country, also Georgia. Over the years, both countries have had leaders who tread carefully for their Russia relations. In Ukraine, President Viktor Yanukovych, in power from 2010-2014, was Russia-friendly but was ousted. The current President Volodymyr Zelensky, in power since 2019, seems to have been more pragmatic about Ukraine’s Russia relations before the invasion a year ago. He even said that he thought it would be impossible to get Crimea back unless there was a regime change in Russia. Now, he insists that there can be no peace talks unless all Ukrainian territories occupied by Russia, are freed. That is a tall order for Russia, and it is probably whispered in Zelensky’s ear by America.

[Folk singer Bashir Baloch passes away in Quetta](https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Feb-2023/folk-singer-bashir-baloch-passes-away-in-quetta)

NATO, too, takes many orders from the USA, the alliance’s largest member country. The USA is today by far the largest supplier of weapons and equipment to Ukraine’s resistance war. Also, before the war started, the USA and the West assisted Ukraine in its military build-up. Thus, in many ways, the war has become a proxy war, including the Western European countries, with major supplies of equipment, weapons, ammunition, and training, as well as humanitarian aid. Ukraine itself is a major arms manufacturer. It is a sad fact that Russia uses drones and other bombs against civilian and military targets in Ukraine in areas geographically far from the Eastern and Southern conflict areas, including the capital Kyiv. Kyiv and other larger cities have recently been targeted, as was also the case at the beginning of the war.

Ukraine has strong support from its people for standing up against the Russian invasion, aiming at staying a free and independent country, or rather, becoming a Western country, but still having much Russian cultural heritage. Ukraine has until now managed to stand up against Russia, the second largest military force in the world – and the largest nuclear power. It seems to be Russia’s tactic to wait for the Ukrainian people not to accept the cost of the war and the many losses of soldiers and civilians. Russia is also waiting for the EU and the West to become split over costly military support to Ukraine and receiving refugees. It is important for NATO not to be a direct part of the war but to make each member country provide support to Ukraine. The distinction is a thin line, but thus far Russia has accepted it.

[PPP to participate in bye-elections after intra-party consultation: Kaira](https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Feb-2023/ppp-to-participate-in-bye-elections-after-intra-party-consultation-kaira)

Russia’s former president Dmitry Medvedev, now deputy chair of the Russian Security Council, has several times alluded to the use of nuclear weapons, or ‘small nuclear weapons. The West would consider that crossing a red line and it would lead to a build-up and dangerous spread of the war. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, and other Western leaders, often stress that the war must not be won by Russia, creating a precedent that it is acceptable that a big country can actually invade a smaller country.

In the title of today’s article, I ask why NATO and Russia don’t talk so that the war could end soon. The question should be expanded to: why did they at all allow the war to erupt? It was Russia that invaded Ukraine, but Russia was also provoked by the West for many years. I believe historians will not be kind to the USA, NATO and the West, and also not to Russia and Ukraine itself, over the terrible war. It is impossible to see that Russia will leave Crimea. The areas in Eastern and Southern Ukraine could for an interim period have some kind of joint jurisdiction, with UN oversight. It is inexplicable that the war goes on and that the West and Russia do not engage in talks – unless they want to reduce Russia to a smaller and weaker power. But in the future, Russia, too, must be part of the West in trade and democratic politics, and work with China and other countries.

[Shahid Abbasi says, “will go to home if Maryam awarded party Presidency](https://www.nation.com.pk/12-Feb-2023/shahid-abbasi-says-will-go-to-home-if-maryam-awarded-party-presidenc)

(For further analysis, I refer to Professor Jeffery Sachs, a former World Bank chief economist and adviser to Eastern European countries after the fall of the Soviet Union. His recent lectures and interviews can be found on YouTube.)