



Three Major Steps Washington Made to Poison Relations With Russia

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March 10, 2016

In the post-Cold War era, US leadership has treated Russia as a "third-rate power," whose opinion on and concerns over Washington's key foreign policy initiatives in Europe were consistently disregarded as insignificant and manageable, former US Defense Secretary William James Perry told the Guardian.

Perry named three major steps that poisoned the relations between the two countries, leading to the lowest point in bilateral ties in two and a half decades. These include NATO's enlargement to the East, Washington's ballistic missile defense shield in Eastern Europe and Western backing of the so-called color revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia.

NATO's decision to absorb Central and East European countries was made at a time when Russia was "beginning to get used to the idea that NATO could be a friend rather than an enemy," Perry recalled. Nevertheless, the Russians "were very uncomfortable about having NATO right up on their border and they made a strong appeal for us not to go ahead with that."

History shows that those were legitimate concerns.

Perry, who served as the US defense chief from 1994 until 1997, opposed NATO's swift expansion eastwards.

"Basically the people I was arguing with [in the Clinton administration] when I tried to put the Russian point... the response that I got was really: 'Who cares what they think? They're a third-rate power.' And of course that point of view got across to the Russians as well," he narrated.

Experts have always warned that the closer NATO moved to Russia's borders, the more suspicious of the bloc's true intentions Moscow would become.

"Extending security commitments to nations in Russia's geopolitical 'back yard' virtually invites a challenge," Ted Galen Carpenter of the Cato Institute asserted. "Even the most peaceably inclined

Russian leader would find it difficult to tolerate a US-dominated military alliance perched on his country's western frontier."