



# Vladimir Putin’s Munich Warnings Ring Loudly As US-Led NATO ‘Plays With Fire’ In Ukraine – Analysis

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**The warnings Russian President Vladimir Putin issued during his Munich address 15 years ago about the dangers of NATO expansion continue to reverberate across Europe, especially in light of the alliance military buildup that has helped fuel the crisis in Ukraine, experts told Sputnik.**

On February 10, 2007, Putin delivered a landmark speech at the Munich Security Conference during which he criticized NATO’s post-Cold War push eastward as a serious provocation that risked fueling an arms race and violated Western promises not to expand.

Putin during the speech pointed to a statement made in 1990 by then-NATO General Secretary Manfred Woerner who said the fact the alliance was not prepared to place an army outside of German territory gave the Soviet Union a firm security guarantee. Putin, during the same speech, then asked: “Where are these guarantees?”

Fifteen years later Moscow is still raising the same question. In December, Russia unveiled draft proposals that sought to prevent NATO’s further enlargement in addition to enhancing US-Russian arms control arrangements. Although progress has been made in negotiations on some issues, Moscow feels the US has largely ignored its most critical demands, such as pushing NATO’s military infrastructure to the position of 1997 and a guarantee that Ukraine will never join the alliance.

## **BROKEN PROMISES**

The US has not only ignored Moscow’s demands but has even deployed more troops to Europe in recent weeks, claiming that Russia is preparing to invade Ukraine. Moscow has not only denied the allegations but has accused the West of stoking these fears to justify sending more arms and forces to the region.

“Putin’s warnings, including in his 2007 speech to the Munich Security Conference, about NATO’s eastward expansion resonate loudly today,” Cato Institute Senior Fellow Ted Galen

Carpenter told Sputnik. “The current crisis could have and should have been avoided. The US and its NATO Allies deserve most of the blame.”

Carpenter said Washington and its allies’ actions in Ukraine in recent years have constituted “major provocations.”

“In addition to the arrogance of expanding a powerful military alliance to Russia’s border, they meddled in Ukraine’s internal affairs to help unseat an elected president and make the country a Western political and military client,” Carpenter said.

Brookings Institution Senior Fellow Michael O’Hanlon believes that by 2007 the US and its allies should have realized it was time to rethink NATO’s further expansion. He said he is a strong critic of NATO’s “open door” policy as commonly understood.

“When we started thinking about bringing in large and/or faraway countries that were hard for us to defend and very near to Moscow’s heart historically and otherwise, we were playing with fire,” O’Hanlon told Sputnik.

O’Hanlon pointed to a recent op-ed he co-wrote which suggests NATO is required to invite only those states that would enhance regional security – not countries like Ukraine whose membership would actually increase the risk of a conflict.

However, although never a big fan of NATO enlargement, O’Hanlon indicated that adding Ukraine is different than extending membership to independent countries that had been under Moscow’s “yoke” through no choice of their own, such as Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, and the Baltic states.

## **REGIONAL COMPLEXITIES CONSTRAIN US**

In his 2007 speech, Putin predicted that if Russia and Ukraine were ever at odds all European consumers would “sit there with no gas” – a comment eerily prescient given countries in the region face this very prospect amid the US opposition to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline.

The US has been scrambling in recent days to line up alternative energy sources in case the situation in Ukraine escalates and sanctions are imposed targeting the pipeline project.

Although the Russian president at Munich warned about the threat posed by unipolarity, he also observed that the world was becoming more multipolar, foreshadowing some of the present day geopolitical complexities.

This has been most evidenced by Germany’s recent reluctance to take marching orders from Washington. For example, Ukraine has repeatedly criticized Germany for denying it weapons and blocking lethal arms exports by NATO allies. Berlin, for its part, has insisted that Germany does not allow weapon exports to war zones.

Carpenter acknowledged that while the world is more multipolar, the US still has prominent influence in transatlantic relations. That said, the expert also argued that regional complexities have constrained Washington’s hand.

“European – especially German – resistance to any use of force regarding Ukraine has caused the Biden administration to take that option off of the table,” Carpenter said.

Germany has said it is working with the US on possible sanctions should Russia invade Ukraine, although Berlin has been reluctant to explicitly mention Nord Stream 2.

Carpenter believes tensions between the US and its partners may escalate further over this very issue. “The main fight may come if Washington pushes for additional economic sanctions at some point,” Carpenter warned.