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Not In My Back Yard, But In Yours

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Russia and Ukraine are at war. So is the U.S., effectively. The Biden administration has shifted from seeking to help Kiev defend itself to using Kiev to defeat Moscow.

Having attacked its neighbor without justification, Russia *ought* to lose. However, the sanctimonious tirades spewed by U.S. officials ignore Washington's role in triggering Moscow's invasion. By violating post-Cold War assurances and expanding NATO, as well as turning the alliance into an aggressive organization that attacked Serbia and Libya, the West encouraged Russia to respond violently. The current conflict almost certainly would not have occurred but for U.S. policy. Indeed, American officials' arrogant recklessness may have made the conflict inevitable.

Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky, recently made that point when questioning Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Paul emphasized that Washington's culpability did not excuse Vladimir Putin's murderous decision, which already has killed thousands and displaced millions. But, as Paul noted, "while there is no justification for Putin's war on Ukraine, it does not follow that there's no explanation for the invasion."

Of course, Blinken disclaimed any responsibility for the disastrous consequences of his policies. After all, U.S. officials routinely deflect blame for any and all foreign policy disasters occurring on their watch. Nothing is ever their fault. Over the last two decades, the Washington war party's policies have killed hundreds of thousands of people and turned millions into refugees. Understandably, this has made America's warrior wannabes touchy when anyone seeks to hold them accountable.

For instance, *Rolling Stone's* Jack Crosbie penned an [article](#) entitled "Rand Paul Brings Putin's Core Argument Against Ukraine to Congress." Crosbie contended that, in making the unassailable factual point that Putin warned allied governments that Moscow perceived U.S. policy to be hostile, "Paul denies the self-determination of a country of people who did not ask for war."

But, of course, that is not what Paul did. Rather, he suggested that in the real world sovereign nations sometimes must exercise restraint or risk losing their independence. In the case of Ukraine, war might have been avoided if Kiev had acknowledged that

being next to a great power inevitably imposed some limits on Ukraine's policies. War might also have been avoided if NATO had admitted that it did not intend to fight for Kiev. Of course, we will never know what would have happened, since Blinken and the rest of the Biden crew preferred to fight the Russians to the last Ukrainian.

Accepting some limits might not have been Ukraine's preferred outcome, but as President Jimmy Carter noted long ago, life is unfair. The Cold War highlighted the case of Finland, which fought the Soviet Union bravely and then submitted to avoid occupation. There also was Austria, which accepted neutrality to end its division. Americans were not willing to ignite World War III to liberate either one—or Poland, East Germany, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, when the people of those countries rose against their communist overlords.

There are similar examples today. Nepal lies between China and India. Who believes that it acts how it wants without considering its neighbors' views? Who expects America to intervene so that it can do so? Or Mongolia, situated between China and Russia (and before that, the Soviet Union). Was Ulan Bator entitled to declare how much it hated communism? Of course. Should Washington have gone to war on its behalf to protect its right to do so? Only a nut or madman, like the late John McCain, would say yes.

At the risk of being accused of whataboutism, how about Latin America? Has the U.S. ever believed that its neighbors were entitled to exercise their sovereignty without limit? The only proper answer is gales of laughter. Ask them.

As Mexican dictator Porfirio Diaz once lamented of his nation, which lost half its territory to an imperialistic U.S. invasion, "so far from God, so close to the United States." Similar are Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Panama, Grenada, Venezuela, and Colombia, and others. They all suffered Washington's not-so-tender "embrace." Of course, this does not justify Russia's criminal attack on Ukraine. However, no one should be fooled by the pious U.S. posturing and endless American sanctimony. Washington's utter ruthlessness, and its continuing willingness to invade countries and starve peoples whose governments offend it, remains on display to the world.

Putin was not initially hostile to the U.S. In fact, he offered his cooperation after 9/11. He even told Germany's Bundestag that "no one calls in question the great value of Europe's relations with the United States. I am just of the opinion that Europe will reinforce its reputation of a strong and truly independent center of world politics soundly and for a long time if it succeeds in bringing together its own potential and that of Russia."

However, NATO's continuing advance, despite multiple assurances otherwise, changed his opinion. Upon disclosing declassified allied documents, George Washington University cited "a cascade of assurances about Soviet security given by Western leaders to Gorbachev and other Soviet officials throughout the process of German

unification in 1990 and on into 1991.” The allies continued to similarly sweet talk the Yeltsin government. Then they violated all their promises.

Defense Secretary William Perry, who served under President Bill Clinton, criticized Putin’s recent behavior, but admitted that “in the early years I have to say that the United States deserves much of the blame.” He explained: “Our first action that really set us off in a bad direction was when NATO started to expand, bringing in eastern European nations, some of them bordering Russia.”

A very different sounding Putin spoke at the 2007 Munich Security Conference. He denounced the U.S. for the “almost uncontained hyper use of force” and “plunging the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts.” (Remember that little debacle in Iraq?) He also cited NATO putting “its frontline forces on our borders,” which, he added, “reduces the level of mutual trust.”

If Blinken had any questions about Putin’s position, the former need only have consulted CIA Director William Burns, who earlier served as U.S. ambassador to Russia. In 2008 Burns wrote Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, then serving under President George W. Bush: “Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin). In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players...I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests.” In the same year, national intelligence officer Fiona Hill, who later served in the Trump National Security Council, warned Bush that adding Ukraine and Georgia was “a provocative move that would likely provoke pre-emptive Russian military action.”

Officials more honest than Blinken admitted the peril that Washington’s policy posed to America (and Ukraine). Journalist Zach Dorfman reported: “Over the years, the debate over NATO expansion—and worries about Russia’s reaction to it—has roiled the highest levels of the U.S. government.” A former CIA official told Dorfman that “if we took a serious step toward admitting either country to NATO, we were 100% convinced that the Russians would find some reason to declare war in the intervening between us announcing they were going to get in and them actually getting in.” The CIA understood that Moscow viewed Ukraine differently than other Eastern European states and considered it to be a red line. Noted the informant: “By last summer, the baseline view of most U.S. intelligence community analysts was that Russia felt sufficiently provoked over Ukraine that some unknown trigger could set off an attack by Moscow.”

In December, Burns allowed: “I would never underestimate President Putin’s risk appetite on Ukraine.” Yet Washington blew Putin off, refusing to close NATO’s door even though the allies had no intention of allowing Kiev to enter. Given the warnings of Burns and others, the administration’s decision was criminally reckless. Equally bad was Washington’s ostentatious hypocrisy, which so often undermines the moral principles that Americans assert so routinely and confidently. No one, at least no

serious person, believes that the U.S. would accept in the Western hemisphere what American officials expected Russia to welcome in Europe.

Imagine China or Russia expanded an anti-American alliance in South America; sought to redirect Central American trade south, away from the U.S.; promoted “color revolutions” in states friendly to Washington; and followed with a street putsch against the elected, pro-U.S. government of Mexico. After which this not-so-friendly power offered alliance membership to the new governments, noting that it was up to them and only them to decide whether they wanted to join.

The result in Washington would be mass hysteria, with wailing and gnashing of teeth followed by a tsunami of denunciations and cascade of threats. The idea that *any* U.S. administration would have turned the other cheek while cheerfully affirming other nations’ “self-determination” is beyond fantasy. Washington would do what it repeatedly did in the past throughout Central America and the Caribbean: Stomp on any disrespectful, uppity, traitorous neighbors.

Of course, this still doesn’t justify Moscow’s actions. Its invasion of Ukraine was criminal. Nor does Russia appear interested in finding a political *modus vivendi* to end the conflict—hence a fight that could descend into a lengthy but bloody stalemate, devastating what Putin claims as a brother people.

However, Paul was right to remind those who contributed to Europe’s terrible conflagration of their responsibility. Blinken claimed that the administration “took very seriously” Russian arguments over NATO expansion, but this is simply false. Derek Chollet, counselor to Blinken, admitted that officials refused to discuss what he termed a “non-issue.” This made war Putin’s only option to force the issue. Blinken’s response, that NATO aspirants have the right “to decide their future and their own destiny,” was nonsense. They have no right to an American security guarantee, while the U.S. had the right, even responsibility, to say no to handing out defense commitments like candy. Indeed, given the tragic consequences evident today, Kiev probably wishes Washington had been forthright.

Rand Paul deserves credit for reaffirming what should be obvious. Maybe history doesn’t repeat itself, but bad decisions do. And many more innocent people will suffer and die unless members of the infamous Blob finally learn from the past.

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