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The Ukraine catastrophe and how we got here

Chronicle of War Foretold

By Chris Hedges

I was in Eastern Europe in 1989 reporting on the revolutions that overthrew the ossified communist dictatorships that led to the collapse of the Soviet Union. It was a time of hope. NATO, with the breakup of the Soviet empire, became obsolete. President Mikhail Gorbachev reached out to Washington and Europe to build a new security pact that would include Russia. Secretary of State James Baker in the Reagan administration, along with the West German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher, assured the Soviet leader that if Germany was unified NATO would not be extended beyond the new borders. The commitment not to expand NATO, also made by Great Britain and France, appeared to herald a new global order. We saw the peace dividend dangled before us, the promise that the massive expenditures on weapons that characterized the Cold War would be converted into expenditures on social programs and infrastructures that had long been neglected in order to feed the insatiable appetite of the military.

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There was a near universal understanding among diplomats and political leaders at the time that any attempt to expand NATO was foolish, an unwarranted provocation of Russia that would obliterate the ties and bonds that happily emerged at the end of the Cold War.

How naive we were. The war industry did not intend to shrink its power or its profits. It set out almost immediately to recruit the former Communist Bloc countries into the European Union and NATO. Countries that joined NATO, which now include Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, Montenegro, and North Macedonia were forced to reconfigure their militaries, often through hefty loans, to become compatible with NATO military hardware.

There would be no peace dividend. The expansion of NATO swiftly became a multi-billion-dollar bonanza for the corporations that had profited from the Cold War. Poland, for example, just agreed to spend $6 billion on M1 Abrams tanks and other U.S. military equipment. If Russia would not acquiesce to again being the enemy, then Russia would be pressured into becoming the enemy. And here we are. On the brink of another Cold War, one from which only the war industry will profit while, as W. H. Auden wrote, the little children die in the streets.

The consequences of pushing NATO up to the borders with Russia — there is now a NATO missile

The asterisk notes Ochakiv, the site of a Ukrainian Navy command center built on its Black Sea Coast by U.S. Navy Seabees in 2017. See p. 2.

base in Poland 100 miles from the Russian border — were well known to policy makers. Yet they did it anyway. It made no geopolitical sense. But it made commercial sense. War, after all, is a business: a very lucrative one. It is why we spent two decades in Afghanistan although there was near universal consensus, after a few years of fruitless fighting, that we had waded into a quagmire we could never win.

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‘Double standards:’ Western Coverage of War on Ukraine Criticized

Social media users accuse the media of hypocrisy in its coverage of Russia’s war on Ukraine compared with other conflicts.

By Al Jazeera English Staff, Feb. 27, 2022

As the Russian invasion of Ukraine continues ... an outpouring of support for Ukrainians has been witnessed across much of Europe, Australia, and the West in general.

The war began on [Feb. 24] after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his forces to enter Ukraine, following months of a heavy military buildup on the border.

Ukraine’s health minister said at least 198 Ukrainians, including three children, have been killed so far during the invasion. The United Nations says more than 360,000 Ukrainians have fled the country, with the majority crossing the border into neighboring Poland.

The war has triggered swift condemnation by several countries, immediate sanctions by the United States and other countries targeting Russian banks, oil refineries, and military exports, and marathon emergency talks at the UN Security Council.

On social media, the speed of such an international response — which includes the exclusion of Russia from some cultural events and treatment of it as a pariah in sports — has raised eyebrows at the lack of such a reaction to other conflicts across the world.

Media pundits, journalists, and political figures have been accused of double standards for using their outlets to not only commend Ukraine’s armed resistance to Russian troops, but also to underlying their horror at how such a conflict could happen to a “civilized” nation.

CBS News senior correspondent in Kyiv Charlie D’Agata said on [Feb. 25]: “This isn’t a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan that has seen conflict raging for decades. This is a relatively civilized, relatively European — I have to choose those words carefully, too — city where you wouldn’t expect that, or hope that it’s going to happen.”

His comments were met with derision and anger on social media, with many pointing out how his statements contributed to the further dehumanization of non-white, non-European people suffering under a conflict within mainstream media.

D’Agata later apologized, saying he spoke “in a way I regret.”

On Feb. 26, the BBC hosted Ukraine’s former deputy general prosecutor, David Sakvarelidze.

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