How to end the Ukraine crisis and redirect military spending towards climate, health and prosperity:

Europe needs to form its own Non-Aligned Movement

By Dr. Ian Davis, NATO Watch

This briefing argues for the creation of a European grouping of stable and successful militarily non-aligned states in the space between NATO and Russia, that would include both Ukraine and Georgia. It calls on leading neutral states, like Ireland and Austria, to begin such a process.

Behind the diplomatic deadlock between Russia and the West is President Vladimir Putin's key demand—a guarantee that Ukraine will never be allowed to join NATO. Putin stated at a news conference in December that "You promised us in the 1990s that [NATO] would not move an inch to the East. You cheated us shamelessly". The United States insists that neither President George H.W. Bush nor any other Western leader made such a promise. The wound was left open to fester.
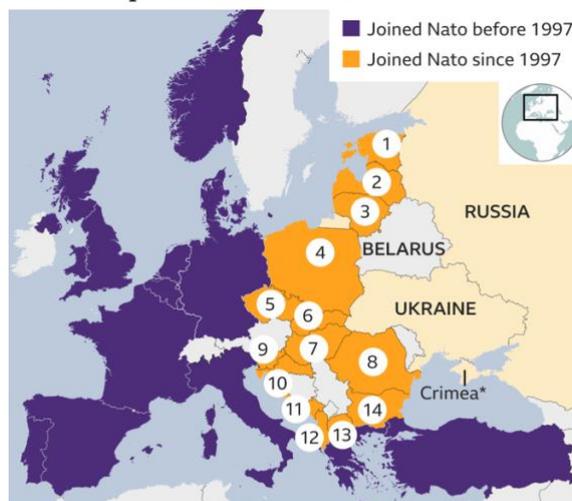
The evidence suggests that the truth lies somewhere in between. While US Secretary of State James Baker assured Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev that NATO would not expand "one inch" east of Germany, Gorbachev later agreed to withdraw from East Germany in exchange for financial concessions, in a treaty that did not limit the future expansion of NATO.

Fast-forward 30 years and the NATO Secretary

General Jens Stoltenberg claims that NATO is the "foundation for peace and stability" in Europe and that it is working hard to engage in dialogue with Russia and find a political solution to the current tensions. Yet, with Europe reportedly facing its gravest threat in decades it hardly feels very peaceful and stable, and Moscow's key demand continues to be snubbed. "The key question was ignored – how the United States and its allies intend to follow the principle of security integrity … that no one should strengthen their security at the expense of another country's security" a Russian official said.

Rather than displaying any 'cognitive empathy' (understanding how other governments see the world, sometimes also referred to as 'strategic empathy') most Western leaders and analysts equate Russia's demands with an attempt to recreate ideas of the former Soviet empire. In a commentary for the London-based Royal United Services Institute (RUSI), for example, a Ukrainian analyst argues that Russia "is seeking recognition of its right to intervene, including militarily, in countries that Moscow believes remain its colonies". With no sense of irony, another RUSI analysts enthuses (under

Nato's expansion since 1997

Joined Nato before 1997
Joined Nato since 1997

RUSSIA
BELARUS
UKRAINE
Crimea*

① Estonia   ⑤ Czech Republic   ⑨ Slovenia   ⑬ North Macedonia
② Latvia   ⑥ Slovakia   ⑩ Croatia   ⑭ Bulgaria
③ Lithuania   ⑦ Hungary   ⑪ Montenegro
④ Poland   ⑧ Romania   ⑫ Albania

*Russia annexed Crimea in 2014

BBC

the heading 'Global Britain Strikes Back') that the UK is having "a good crisis" having delivered 2000 anti-tank weapons to Ukraine, alongside additional British Army advisers. (Another RUSI analyst suggests that the UK sending these weapons to Ukraine will neither alter the military balance nor moderate Russia's behaviour).

It is not that this analysis of Putin's intentions is wrong per se. He is an authoritarian leader who has annexed Crimea, supported separatists in Ukraine and Georgia, stifled dissent within Russia and allegedly sanctioned the poisoning of political enemies and critics within Russia and abroad. But there is also a lack of self-awareness that major Western powers (such as the UK and France) are also clinging to notions of imperial grandeur and militarism. The United States is top of that tree with a 20-year failed Global War on Terror, failed military interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, about 750 military bases in 80 countries and military spending that exceeds that of the next 10 countries combined. Moreover, if the boot was on the other foot, and Russian allies were deploying military forces close to the US border (circa the 1962 Cuban missile crisis), the United States would not go quietly into the night.

Further, the US and NATO are mistaken in their belief that they have a toolbox filled with options that will deliver "massive consequences" to Russia should Russia invade Ukraine. These 'tools' include military options, such as the reinforcement of NATO's eastern flank with additional US troops, and economic options, such as closing the NordStream 2 pipeline and removing Russia from the SWIFT banking system. All these options are said to have the undivided support of US European allies and partners. But as former US weapon inspector Scott Ritter has written, the toolbox is empty. There is no viable military option, and the sanctions option is likely to boomerang on Western economies and exacerbate an existing energy crisis.

As some of America's most celebrated foreign policy thinkers argued in the 1990s, NATO expansion has come at a price. To the West, NATO's open-door policy is a statement of autonomy; to Russia, it is seen as a threat, because NATO (by its own admission) is the most successful military alliance in history, it operates out of area, and clearly has a policy of self-determination that translates (in Moscow at least) as wresting control from Russia. Moreover,

in the case of Ukraine and Georgia, NATO continues to adhere to a principle that has no chance of being applied any time soon since it does not have the unanimous buy-in of all 30 member countries. Indeed, many NATO member states have opposed Ukraine's membership, in part because it doesn't meet the conditions to join. This has left Ukraine in a very weak position: an applicant for an alliance that isn't going to accept it and will not protect it, while vexing a hostile neighbour.

How then to reconcile the issue of the sovereign-right of nations to choose their own security path and the fact that the NATO dominated post–Cold War order includes no stake for Russia? What is needed is a shift in the European security paradigm away from highly militarised and 'securitised' responses towards a new approach based on participatory and accountable governance, human rights, non-violence, diplomacy and mediation and environmental sustainability. Hence, the answer lies in developing a European security architecture that includes a more prominent place for militarily non-aligned and neutral states, and that promotes common security (as championed by the OSCE) rather than collective security (as championed by NATO).

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) that originated in the 1950s and currently has a membership of 120 mainly developing nations was an effort to avoid the polarized world of the Cold War (although in reality some of the members were quite closely aligned with China or the Soviet Union). In the post-Cold War era the NAM has reassessed its identity and refocused on developing multilateral ties within the Global South and challenging the economic inequalities in the global order. Its record of achievement is mixed, not least because of its size and diverse membership, but it remains a significance force for peace, cooperation and friendship among nations. In Europe, however, only Cyprus, Malta, the former Yugoslavia and Belarus were ever NAM members (Belarus remains a member), despite the presence of 11 European countries or principalities with some form of declared neutrality (Austria, Finland, Ireland, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco, Moldova, San Marino, Serbia, Sweden and Switzerland).

Currently these 'neutral' countries have very different perceptions and degrees of neutrality,

from close NATO-cooperation by Sweden to officially neutral Austria. And what is being proposed here is not true neutrality, in the legal sense of not cooperating with any party in a military-type conflict, but NAM-like military non-alignment. The idea of non-alignment does not signify that a state ought to remain passive or even neutral in international politics. On the contrary, it should give a voice to such countries and encourage their concerted action in global affairs. And if ever there was a time for the voices and principles of the European neutral states to be heard, it is now. The ball could be set rolling by Ireland or Austria calling for a summit of European militarily non-aligned states. These are two countries that have played a prominent role in humanitarian arms control initiatives in recent years: both countries have signed and ratified the nuclear ban treaty (and were part of the core group of states championing it), while Ireland is also leading an international political process to protect civilians in urban warfare.

An Irish or Austrian-led summit could address three key topics: how to establish an organisational framework and a set of principles governing membership of a European Non-Aligned Movement (akin to the NAM's ten Bandung principles of 1955); how to encourage Ukraine and Georgia to be part of that grouping; and how the international community might be able to recognise and codify support for the non-aligned status of member states. Russia, the United States, NATO, the EU and NAM, as well as civil society representatives, could be invited to the summit as observers. Nuclear-armed observer states could also be invited to consider providing negative security assurances. NATO could formally recognise the validity of non-alignment and redraft its Membership Action Plan accordingly. Russia and the United States would also be expected to endorse the principle. All of these things could be set out in a political declaration on military non-alignment in Europe, which countries could either sign up to or endorse.

The rights and responsibilities of a European NAM member might include, for example, agreement not to become a member of a military alliance (thus ruling out NATO membership), but allowing EU membership, as well as foreign deployment of military forces to UN peacekeeping missions. It might even specify the conditions that might allow limited participation in certain international military exercises (potentially involving either Russia or NATO), such as for counterterrorism or cyber defence. The case for Georgia and Ukraine formally joining such a grouping might be strengthened, for example, by making it conditional on recognition and codification of their non-aligned status by the UN Security Council. This might also include replacing Russian troops in the disputed territories of Donbas, Abkhazia and South Ossetia with UN-authorized peacekeepers from the European NAM states, alongside fresh mediation and reconciliation efforts. Ultimately, some form of guaranteed autonomy for the Donbas within Ukraine, and Abkhazia and South Ossetia within Georgia, are the only possible way of resolving those disputes peacefully.

This idea—of creating stable and successful non-aligned states in the space between NATO and Russia—builds on established thinking. A small, closed-door working group of former American and British ambassadors and experts on Russia and Ukraine convened by the Quincy Institute on 17 January, proposed offering Ukraine a treaty of neutrality, while Michael O'Hanlon at the Brookings Institution has also argued for a new concept for future European security in Eastern Europe that would involve permanent neutrality for Ukraine and Georgia. To facilitate a period of negotiation to such an end, another suggestion at the Quincy Institute meeting was that NATO could offer a moratorium on further expansion for a period sufficiently long (10-20 years) to reassure Russia. Although Russia has indicated that a temporary moratorium would be unacceptable, if it were to be provided within the context of a broader European security re-alignment, it is likely to be more tolerable. Additional military de-escalation and arms control proposals that have been suggested by the European Leadership Network, among others, could be developed in parallel within the OSCE.

However, this new thinking will not materialise without states, commentators and civil society activists being willing to champion it. I am therefore calling for a meeting of interested parties to discuss the idea further.