

Has Putin Won Round One in Ukraine?

When NBC's Lester Holt asked President Joe Biden what might prompt him to send U.S. troops to rescue Americans fleeing Ukraine, Biden replied: "There's not. That's a world war when Americans and Russia start shooting at one another."

"It's not like we're dealing with a terrorist organization. We're dealing with one of the largest armies in the world. ... Things could go crazy quickly." Biden was saying Americans are not going to fight Russians in Ukraine, even to protect or extract imperiled U.S. troops, diplomats or citizens.

Speaking last week on the Senate floor, Sen. Ted Cruz echoed Biden: "I want to be clear and unequivocal. ... Under no circumstances should we send our sons and daughters to die to defend Ukraine from Russia."

The question the Biden and Cruz comments immediately raise?

Has not Russian President Vladimir Putin pretty much already realized his principal goal in this crisis—that Ukraine never become a member of NATO? For if Biden and Cruz are unwilling to send U.S. troops to Ukraine to repel Russian invaders, how could the U.S. bring Ukraine into NATO, where, under Article 5, it would be both our moral and legal obligation to do so?

After meeting with Putin, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said of Ukraine's admission to NATO: "Everyone must step back a bit here and make it clear to themselves that we just can't have a possible military conflict over a question that is not on the agenda." The Germans seem to be saying Ukraine's membership in NATO is not even on the table for discussion and decision. It is a nonissue.

Again, if Putin has been given private assurances that Ukraine will never be a member of NATO, he would appear to have gotten his nonnegotiable demand, as long as he does not crow about

his victory. And if Ukraine is not going to be a member of NATO, Georgia, a far smaller and far less populous nation, even farther east than Ukraine, is not going to become a NATO member either.

Who in the West, outside of Kyiv, is now demanding it?

The next items on Putin's menu appear to be the rebellious provinces of Luhansk and Donetsk in eastern Ukraine. Tuesday, the Duma, the Russian parliament, voted to ask Putin to recognize the breakaway regions as "sovereign and independent states." Thursday, artillery fire was reported from the pro-Russian rebel side. Recognition of Luhansk and Donetsk as independent republics would end the Minsk peace process that foresees their reunification with Ukraine, but with Kyiv granting the two regions greater autonomy.

But if Putin has gotten assurances Ukraine will not be a member of NATO, and if he is about to make his next move, with 160,000 Russian troops still on the borders of Ukraine, it seems premature to declare Biden the victor in the crisis. For who is demanding that Ukraine be brought into NATO now? Who is calling for military action to keep Ukraine a de facto ally?

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has challenged Russia's announcement that it was returning some troops to their bases, saying satellite imagery suggested the opposite was happening. "They have increased the number of troops and more troops are on their way. So, so far, no de-escalation," Stoltenberg said. "The new normal is that Russia has demonstrated that it ... is willing to contest some of the fundamental principles for our security, the right for every nation to choose its own path."

Putin does not threaten any vital interest of the United States and does not want war with the United States. But, as a great power, Russia claims a right to secure, peaceful and friendly borders, free of military alliances designed to circumscribe, contain and control it.

And the protests Moscow is making are not without validity.

Now that the Soviet Empire is dead, the Soviet Union is dead. Communism is dormant, and the USSR has devolved into 15 nations; why did we move our Cold War alliance onto Moscow's front porch? Would we tolerate this?

For what is "NATO enlargement," other than a lengthening series of U.S. war guarantees to fight Russia on behalf of nations farther and farther away from us, and of ever-diminishing importance to the United States?

On March 1, 1917, the story broke of a secret cable from German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann to his minister in Mexico City, to make an offer to the government. If war erupted between Germany and the U.S., the Zimmermann Telegram read, and Mexico sided with Germany, a victorious Second Reich would support the return of "the lost territory in Texas, New Mexico and Arizona." Enraged at Germany's offer to make Mexico its ally and to support the breakup of our country, the U.S., five weeks later, declared war on Germany.

Can we not understand the rising rage in Moscow as we convert all its former Warsaw Pact allies and ex-republics of the USSR into member states of a military alliance established to contain and control Russia?

—

COPYRIGHT 2022 CREATORS.COM

Pixabay