Beat: Politics

Top Five Russian Myths Debunked

NATO

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USPA NEWS - Since Russia began its aggressive actions against Ukraine, Russian officials have accused NATO of a series of threats and hostile actions. This article sets out the facts.

Top Five Russian Myths Debunked

Myth 1: NATO promised Russia it would not expand after the Cold War

Fact: Such an agreement was never made. NATO's door has been open to new members since it was founded in 1949 – and that has never changed. This "Open Door Policy" is enshrined in Article 10 of NATO's founding treaty, which says "any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic" can apply for membership. Decisions on membership are taken by consensus among all Allies. No treaty signed by the United States, Europe and Russia included provisions on NATO membership.

The idea of NATO expansion beyond a united Germany was not on the agenda in 1989, particularly as the Warsaw Pact still existed. This was confirmed by Mikhail Gorbachev in an interview in 2014: "The topic of 'NATO expansion' was not discussed at all, and it wasn't brought up in those years. I say this with full responsibility. Not a single Eastern European country raised the issue, not even after the Warsaw Pact ceased to exist in 1991. Western leaders didn't bring it up, either."

Declassified White House transcripts also reveal that, in 1997, Bill Clinton consistently refused Boris Yeltsin's offer of a 'gentlemen's agreement' that no former Soviet Republics would enter NATO: "I can't make commitments on behalf of NATO, and I'm not going to be in the position myself of vetoing NATO expansion with respect to any country, much less letting you or anyone else do so…NATO operates by consensus."

Myth 2: NATO is aggressive and a threat to Russia

Fact: NATO is a defensive alliance, whose purpose is to protect our members. NATO's official policy is that "the Alliance does not seek confrontation and poses no threat to Russia." NATO didn't invade Georgia; NATO didn't invade Ukraine. Russia did.

NATO has reached out to Russia consistently and publicly over the past 30 years. NATO an Russia worked together on issues ranging from counter-narcotics and counter-terrorism to submarine rescue and civil emergency planning – even during periods of NATO enlargement. However, in 2014, in response to Russia's aggressive actions against Ukraine, NATO suspended practical cooperation with Russia. NATO did not seek confrontation, NATO couldn't ignore Russia breaking international rules, undermining NATO stability and security.

In response to Russia's use of military force against Ukraine, NATO deployed four multinational battlegroups to the Baltic States and Poland in 2016. These units are not permanently based in the region, are in line with Allies' international commitments, and amount to around 5,000 troops. They do not pose a threat to Russia's 1,000,000 strong army. Before Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, there were no Allied troops in the eastern part of the Alliance.

NATO remains open to meaningful dialogue with Russia. That is why NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has invited all members of the NATO-Russia Council to a series of meetings to discuss European security, including the situation in and around Ukraine, NATO-Russia relations, and arms control and non-proliferation.

Myth 3: Ukraine cannot join NATO

Fact: NATO Allies welcome Ukraine's aspirations to join NATO and they stand by the decision made at the 2008 Bucharest Summit that Ukraine will become a member of the Alliance.

Decisions regarding NATO membership are up to each individual applicant and the 30 NATO Allies. No one else. Russia has no right to intervene and cannot veto this process.

Like every country, Ukraine has the sovereign right to choose its own security arrangements. This is a fundamental principle of European security, one that Russia has also signed up to, including through the Helsinki Final Act (1975), the Charter of Paris (1990), the NATO-Russia Founding Act (1997) and the Charter for European Security (1999).

Myth 4: NATO is encircling and trying to contain Russia

(map)
Fact: NATO is a defensive alliance, whose purpose is to protect NATO member states. NATO exercises and military deployments are not directed against Russia – or any other country.

This myth also ignores geography. Only 6% of Russia's land borders touch NATO countries. Russia has land borders with 14 countries. Only five of them are NATO members.

Outside NATO territory, the Alliance only has a military presence in Kosovo and Iraq. The KFOR peacekeeping mission is carried out with a United Nations Security Council mandate.

NATO's non-combat mission in Iraq contributes to the fight against terrorism and is carried out at the request of the Iraqi government, with full respect for Iraq's sovereignty. In contrast, Russia has military bases and soldiers in three countries – Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine – without the consent of their governments. Russia also has amassed over 100,000 troops on Ukraine's border and is threatening to invade Ukraine.

Myth 5: NATO's interventions in the former Yugoslavia, Kosovo and Libya prove that the Alliance is not defensive

Fact: The former Yugoslavia did not break up because of NATO. The Alliance did not use military force to change borders in the

former Yugoslavia. From 1992-1995, NATO conducted several military operations in Bosnia, including enforcing a no-fly-zone and providing air support for UN peacekeepers. These activities were mandated by the United Nations Security Council, of which Russia is a member. NATO air strikes against Bosnian Serb positions in 1995 helped pave the way for the Dayton peace agreement, which ended the war in Bosnia that had killed over 100,000 people. From 1996 onwards, NATO led multinational peacekeeping forces in Bosnia, which included troops from Russia. The European Union took over that mission in 2004.

The NATO-led operation in Libya in 2011 was launched under the authority of two UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR), 1970 and 1973, neither of which was opposed by Russia. UNSCR 1973 authorized the international community "to take all necessary measures" to "protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack". This is what NATO did, with the political and military support of regional states and members of the Arab League.

NATO's operation in Kosovo in 1999 followed over a year of intense diplomatic efforts by the UN and the Contact Group, of which Russia was a member, to end the conflict. The UN Security Council repeatedly branded the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and the mounting number of refugees as a threat to international peace and security. NATO's mission helped to end large-scale and sustained violations of human rights and the killing of civilians. KFOR, NATO's ongoing peacekeeping mission in Kosovo, has a UNSC mandate (UNSCR 1244) and is supported by both Belgrade and Pristina.

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