The History of Russian Diplomatic Opposition to

NATO Expansion into the Baltics, Ukraine, and Georgia

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**Abstract**

While Russia may have been less perturbed by certain other NATO expansions, and accordingly may have expressed less concern about them, it has continuously and emphatically communicated that NATO expansion to the Baltics, Ukraine, and/or Georgia would gravely impinge upon Russia's interests, and thus that Moscow was/is strongly opposed to such expansion. These communications began in the early 1990s, but the US dismissed and rejected this opposition — in some cases, quite consciously and deliberately. Drawing on official US and Russian sources, this article demonstrates that Russia's public stance on NATO's Baltic/Ukrainian/Georgian expansion was/is clear — it simply was not accommodated.

**Keywords**

Russia, USA, NATO, NATO expansion, Baltics, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Ukraine, Georgia

Even after 2008, 2014, and 2022, there remains considerable disagreement and confusion about the extent to which Russia properly warned the West to refrain from NATO expansion. Indeed, if anything, perceptions of Russian positions and statements in the 1990s and 2000s are probably blurring as those decades recede.

For instance, Russia supposedly has altogether "acquiesced to and even supported NATO expansion".[[1]](#footnote-1) Or it at least had a largely "accepting attitude" towards expansion, in the period from Putin's accession to the presidency until the mid-2000s.[[2]](#footnote-2) While Russia "continued to dislike" NATO enlargement, it still "accepted" Baltic expansion "with ease".[[3]](#footnote-3)

Amongst those who claim an absence of proper warning from Russia, many do so in service of the argument that Russia's more recent, more successful, and more 'kinetic' opposition to NATO expansion is driven not by a consistent realpolitik-based fear of expansion, but rather by paranoia, an effort to preserve the Russian 'regime', and so on.

For instance, Steven Pifer claims that Russia, "acquiescing" to expansion in 1999 and 2004, had only opposed enlargement for "more than a decade" prior to his article's publication in 2020.[[4]](#footnote-4) Kimberly Marten claims that Russian opposition appeared only just before the 2008 war: "Putin's sudden fury against NATO enlargement…was launched to the Western community's great surprise, since it seemed to come out of the blue, at the Munich Security Conference…in February 2007".[[5]](#footnote-5) And Michael McFaul claims that, in all of the conversations between the Obama Administration and the Russians in 2009-2014, he "cannot remember NATO expansion ever coming up" at all.[[6]](#footnote-6)

However, when Marten writes that Russian statements against NATO expansion "have not been completely consistent", she points specifically to two things: Yeltsin's 1993 expression of acquiescence to Polish accession, and Putin's 2002 description of Baltic accession as "no tragedy".[[7]](#footnote-7) Leaving aside Yeltin's likely inebriation during the 1993 incident[[8]](#footnote-8) — as well as the actually ambiguous nature of Putin's rhetoric (addressed below), and the fact that his 2002 statement was in any case made at the height of Russia's alignment with the US’s War on Terror — NATO expansion should not necessarily be treated as a single thing, nor should specific expansions be treated as necessarily equal to one another. In fact (as I will explain in forthcoming work), NATO's expansion into the Baltics, Ukraine, and Georgia was far more threatening to Russia than was expansion to the Visegrad-4, let alone expansion to e.g., Slovenia.

It is thus unsurprising that, as this article finds, Russia has been strongly and almost entirely consistently opposed to NATO expansion into the Baltics, Ukraine, and Georgia, regardless of its attitude towards expansion into certain other states, and contrary to claims of Russian ambiguity (which often naively or disingenuously rely upon confusing Russia's positions regarding Baltic/Ukrainian/Georgian expansion, regarding other expansion, and regarding expansion in general).

Russia continuously and emphatically communicated that NATO’s expansion — and certainly its expansion into the Baltics, Ukraine, and/or Georgia — would gravely impinge upon Russia's interests, including upon its security, and that it therefore was/is strongly opposed to such an expansion. This opposition was clearly expressed in Russia's official national security and foreign policy doctrines (Sec.1). It was conveyed to, and acknowledged by, the US in 1993-1999 (Sec.2). It continued in statements by Putin regarding Baltic accession in 2000-2004 (Sec.3) — which were overwhelmingly negative (Sec.3.1) contrary to US misperceptions (Sec.3.2), excepting a brief period of tactical ambiguity that was likely driven by Russian recognition that diplomacy could not stop the Baltic expansion (Sec.3.3). And this opposition was also clearly expressed regarding Ukraine and Georgia, including in 2005-2008 (Sec.4). Thus, overall, Russia's position was clear, and yet the US dismissed and rejected this opposition — in some cases, quite consciously and deliberately (Sec.5).

# Russia's national security and foreign policy doctrines

The simplest and most authoritative communication of Russia's position is provided by Russia's national security and foreign policy doctrines, which almost unanimously express moderate to extreme hostility towards NATO expansion, especially expansion up to Russia's borders and/or expansion specifically to Ukraine and Georgia.

Of these doctrines, the first, Russia's 1993 Foreign Policy Concept, did not explicitly identify NATO's eastward expansion as threatening and/or unacceptable to Russia. Rather, it (or at least the draft version that is publicly available) stated that Russia "will actively oppose any attempts to increase other states' military-political presence in Russia's neighbors", but would do so "using the potential of partnership with the world's leading democratic countries", implying that the threat was not seen as coming from the West/NATO.[[9]](#footnote-9)

And the most recent doctrine, the 31 March 2023 Foreign Policy Concept, more generally spoke of:

…threats to the security, territorial integrity, sovereignty, traditional spiritual-moral values, and socio-economic development, of Russia and its allies and partners, that are posed by unfriendly European states, NATO, the EU, and the Council of Europe.[[10]](#footnote-10)

But all other documents clearly identified NATO expansion, in particular, as a threat:

National Security Concept, 17 December 1997:

The possibility of NATO's eastward expansion is unacceptable to Russia, as it represents a threat to her national security. ... The retention or creation of powerful groupings of military forces, in regions adjacent to Russia's territory, by major powers or their coalitions, remains a threat to Russia's national security. Even in the absence of aggressive intensions regarding Russia, such groupings constitute a potential military danger. NATO's eastward expansion, and its transformation into the dominant military-political force in Europe, create the threat of a new division of the continent…[[11]](#footnote-11)

National Security Concept, 10 January 2000:

Fundamental international threats are generated by the following factors: … the strengthening of military-political blocs and alliances, foremost the expansion of NATO eastward; the possibility of foreign military bases and major military contingents appearing in the immediate vicinity of Russia's borders…[[12]](#footnote-12)

Foreign Policy Concept, 28 June 2000:

Russia maintains a negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Foreign Policy Concept, 15 July 2008:

Russia maintains a negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO, including specifically towards plans for the admission of Ukraine and Georgia, and generally towards the approach of NATO military infrastructure to Russia's borders. The latter violates the principle of equal security, and it leads to the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe…[[14]](#footnote-14)

National Security Strategy, 13 May 2009:

The decisive factor in relations with NATO will remain the unacceptability to Russia of plans for advancing the alliance's military infrastructure to Russia's borders.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Foreign Policy Concept, 12 Feb 2013:

Russia's relations with NATO will be constructed with consideration of the degree to which the alliance is prepared…for all of its members to fulfill their obligations, per the Russia-NATO Council, to refrain from ensuring their security at the expense of others' security… Russia maintains a negative attitude towards the expansion of NATO, and towards the approach to its borders of NATO military infrastructure, as actions that violate the principle of equal security and that lead to the appearance of new dividing lines in Europe.[[16]](#footnote-16)

National Security Strategy, 31 Dec 2015:

…the continued expansion of the alliance [NATO], and the approach of its military infrastructure towards Russia's borders, create a threat to national security.[[17]](#footnote-17)

Foreign Policy Concept, 30 Nov 2016:

…systemic problems — expressing themselves in the geopolitical expansion of NATO and the EU, and in their unwillingness to begin realizing their political statements about the formation of a common European system of security and cooperation — have caused a serious crisis in relations between Russia and Western states. ... Russia's relations with NATO will be constructed with consideration of the degree to which the alliance is prepared…for all of its members to fulfill their obligations, per the Russia-NATO Council, to refrain from ensuring their security at the expense of other states' security… The expansion of NATO, the approach of its military infrastructure to Russian borders, and its increased military activity in regions bordering Russia, are viewed by Russia negatively, as actions that violate the principle of equal and indivisible security and that lead to the deepening of old dividing lines in Europe and to the appearance of new ones.[[18]](#footnote-18)

National Security Strategy, 2 Jul 2021:

Military dangers and military threats to Russia are strengthened by…the buildup of NATO's military infrastructure near Russian borders…[[19]](#footnote-19)

In sum, between 1997 and 2021, nine Russian doctrines expressed varying degrees of hostility to NATO expansion — especially to the Baltics, Ukraine, and Georgia, which were either named explicitly (2008) or implied through reference to NATO expansion up to Russia's borders (all but 2000).

# Russia's position, 1993-1999

However, Russia began communicating this position years before 1997, and various internal US communications reveal that the US certainly received the message.

For instance, a 5 October 1993 cable from (Assistant Secretary of State) Robert Gallucci to (Secretary of State) Warren Christopher noted Yeltsin's position that only in the context of "NATO's transformation or integration into a ‘truly pan-European security system’" could Russia "accept NATO expansion and perhaps become a member itself". Otherwise, Yeltsin would continue to cite

the treaty on German reunification signed in 1990, claiming that its provision[,] prohibiting the stationing of foreign troops in the territory of the former East Germany[,] "excludes by its meaning the possibility of expansion of the NATO zone to the East".[[20]](#footnote-20)

A 1 October 1994 cable from the Secretary of State to US Embassy Riga reported that "the UK see[s] the Baltics and Balkan countries as [being] far from possible NATO membership", partly because "inclusion of the Baltics would be unacceptable [to] the Russians [for] the foreseeable future".[[21]](#footnote-21) Similarly, "a number of southern European allies wanted to keep the candidacies of Slovenia or Romania as separate as possible from the Baltic issue" since "Russian opposition to the Baltic states joining NATO was well known".[[22]](#footnote-22)

In 1996, senior US officials referenced (Foreign Minister) Yevgeniy Primakov's pledge that "Russia would violently oppose Ukrainian or Baltic membership in NATO";[[23]](#footnote-23) his statement that "Russia could never accept NATO membership for Ukraine and the Baltic states";[[24]](#footnote-24) his explanation to (US Ambassador to Russia) Thomas Pickering that the Russians "feel the same way about having them [the Baltics] move into NATO" as the US would feel about them joining "the CIS defense structure";[[25]](#footnote-25) and his averral to (Secretary of State) Christopher that "as you yourself have acknowledged, Chris, we will never, now or in the future, condone the expansion of NATO".[[26]](#footnote-26) Asmus would later write that Primakov had, in spring 1996:

hinted that Moscow could perhaps tolerate a limited first round of enlargement, so long as new allies did not allow foreign military forces on their soil, and [so long as] countries like Ukraine and the Baltic states were excluded from consideration of eventual membership.[[27]](#footnote-27)

On 28 August 1996, Talbott warned (Secretary of State) Christopher of a Russian effort, in negotiations over the NATO-Russia Charter, to "establish the principle that NATO enlargement can occur only after the Alliance and Russia have come to terms" and to "rule out forever Baltic or Ukrainian eligibility for NATO".[[28]](#footnote-28)

And in April 1998, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) assessed that:

NATO enlargement may be viewed by Russian elites as the clearest sign yet that the West is not really interested in an equal partnership with Russia… One area of particular concern may be a possible second wave of NATO enlargement to include the Baltic states… ...President Yeltsin said to members of the Russian parliament on May 19, 1997 that if the Baltic states are admitted to NATO, Russia could revise its policy of cooperation with the alliance.

The report was left to hope that Russia — weak, and dependent upon a hegemonic West — would have to swallow NATO expansion, no matter how much it might oppose expansion: "…even if Russian elites draw a negative conclusion from enlargement, it may not have the catastrophic effects on Russia’s relations with the West often forecast by Russian officials and analysts." According to the CRS, the Russian economy depended upon Western business and Western-controlled financial institutions. And, "in its currently weakened state, Russia lacks the resources to start a new Cold War with the West; and it would find very few allies to support a confrontational stand." [[29]](#footnote-29) (Indeed, Russia's attempts to resist NATO expansion really would be limited — for precisely as long as its ability to resist was limited. Once the balance of power shifted in Russia's favor, the European security order — based not upon the accommodation of its most powerful member, but upon somehow perpetuating that member's "currently weakened state" — naturally and almost inevitably collapsed.)

Thus, as demonstrated by this non-exhaustive selection of US communications, the US government was, at least by 1993, aware that Russia was opposed — even "violently" opposed — to the expansion of NATO, especially to the Baltics or Ukraine. (Georgia was not yet under consideration.)

# Putin on Baltic expansion, 2000-2004

And this communication of Russian opposition continued under Putin, including specifically regarding the Baltics, to whose accession Putin is often claimed to have acquiesced. In fact, Putin was almost entirely consistent in expressing opposition to Baltic expansion (3.1), the indicator of his acquiescence that was most frequently cited in the US did not actually indicate acquiescence (3.2), and his (and the rest of the Russian government's) limited ambiguity in 2002 was likely a tactical move prompted precisely by the realization that diplomatic opposition was accomplishing nothing (3.3).

## Analysis of Putin's statements

Because Putin's statements on Baltic expansion vary in their strength and even (to a much lesser extent) in their 'polarity', analyzing them in totality requires their categorization on the basis of clear criteria. Such an analysis is conducted in this subsection, revealing that Putin's statements were consistently overwhelmingly opposed to Baltic expansion, except for when they became more muddled in the second half of 2002.

A search for the term 'нато' ('nato') on the *Kremlin.ru* website returns 30 statements by Putin, on the subject of NATO expansion to the Baltics, made between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2004. (See Appendix: Putin Re. NATO in the Baltics). Within this corpus, several distinct positions can be identified. Ranging from fully hostile (-3) to noncommittal (0) to entirely sanguine (+3) — i.e., from what should be most to least concerning for US expansion plans — these positions are:

* Russia is opposed; Russia will take measures in response (quantification of -3)
* Russia is threatened — indicates Russian opposition and/or countermeasures (-2)
* Russia is not able to stop expansion; expansion is [ useless / a mistake ] — *implies opposition without actually stating it* (-1)
* states should be able to choose their own alliances; Russia does not have the right to determine which states accede to the alliance — *implies acquiescence, but does not necessarily prove it (and, indeed, sometimes accompanies opposition)* (+1)
* Russia is not threatened — presumably a statement of acquiescence, although it does not actually rule out Russian opposition or a Russian response (and, indeed, in some cases it is stated that Russia is not threatened precisely because it has taken or will take countermeasures) (+2)
* Russia is not opposed — clear statement of acquiescence (+3)

See Figure 1 below.

Every single one of the thirty statements contains some expression of opposition, if only implied/weak opposition.

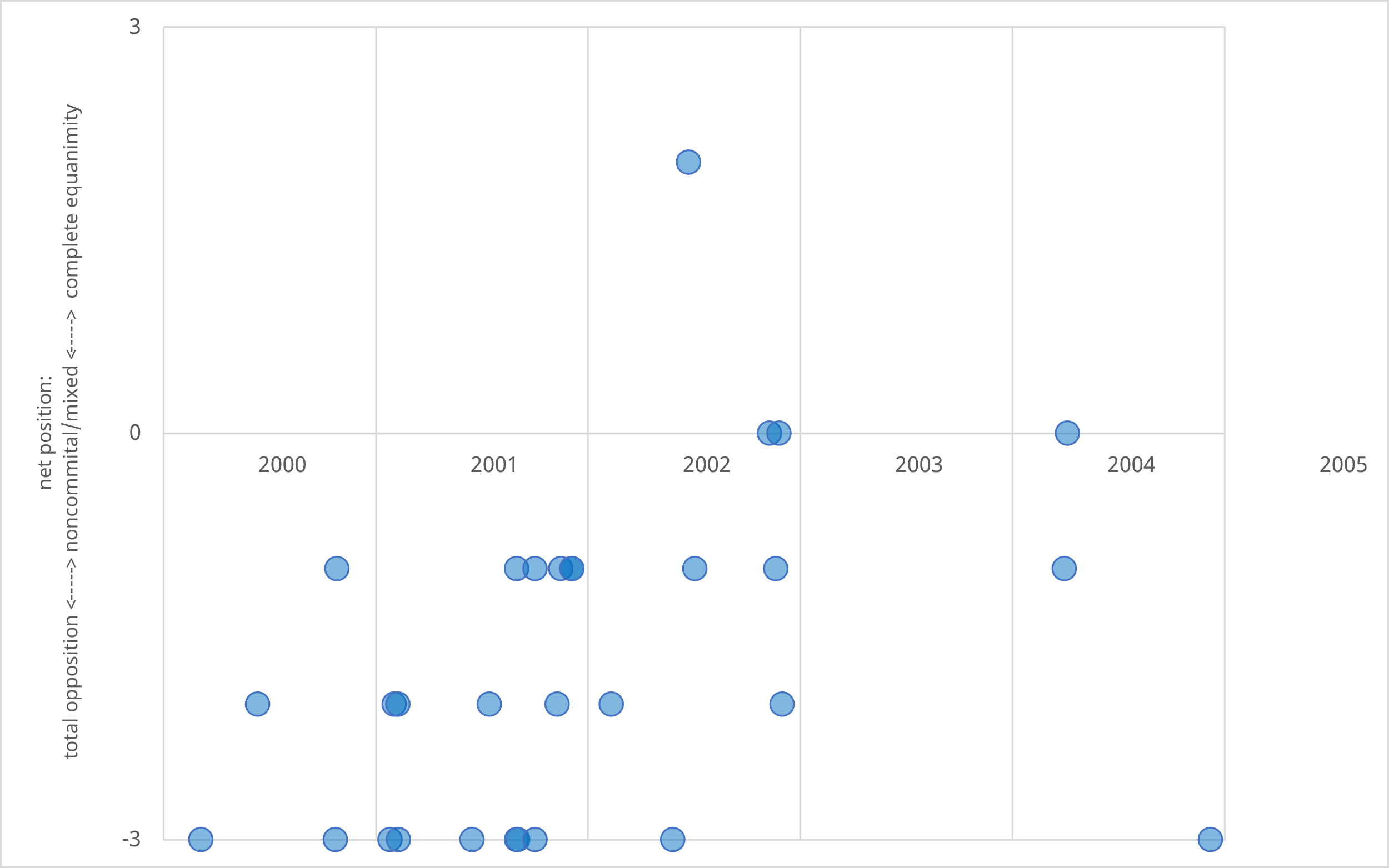
Their 'net' positions can be quantified by calculating the value of the strongest expression of acquiescence (if there is one) in the statement, minus the value of the strongest expression of opposition in the statement. See Figure 2 below.

Thus, almost all — 26 of 30 — statements were mostly or fully oppositional. Three net-neutral statements were made at the end of 2002 and beginning of 2004. The only mostly-acquiescent statement was made on 24 June 2002, when Putin said:

If Estonia wants to, then let it join… I don't see any tragedy here. … …Estonia has the right to do so. … The decision of any people must be respected… And Russia will respect whatever the choice of the Estonian leadership and people might be.

But Putin also said at that time that, "we don't believe that the expansion of NATO will improve anyone's security" — implying that expansion should not happen — and that "obstructing Estonia's entry into NATO" "would be absolutely incorrect, both tactically and strategically" — implying that Russian inaction is the product not of genuine acquiescence, but of present circumstances limiting its ability to productively respond.





The overall record was, therefore, one of strong and almost entirely clear and consistent opposition to Baltic expansion. Acquiescence could be extracted from this record only by extremely selective cherry-picking.

## Misinterpretation of Putin in the US government

However, many US officials did just that, honing in on a single statement made by Putin, and then distorting it to the point that it appeared to indicate acquiescence to the Baltic expansion of NATO.

Claims of Russian acquiescence became particularly numerous in spring 2003, when the CRS, Senators, and various senior US officials repeated variants of the notion that Russia/Putin had, after 9/11, essentially acquiesced to expansion. [[30]](#footnote-30) Only one specific event is identified, within these claims, as providing their basis: the time that Putin went to Brussels, in October 2001, and apparently said something along the lines of "who NATO brings into NATO is NATO's business".

The *New York Times* titled its article on the matter as "Putin softens his stance against NATO expansion", and reported that:

President Vladimir V Putin of Russia…indicated today that he might show flexibility over NATO expansion… … "If NATO takes on a different shape and is becoming a political organization, of course, we would reconsider our position with regard to such expansion, if we are to feel involved in the process," Mr. Putin said. "They keep saying that NATO is becoming more political than military," Mr. Putin added. "We are looking at this (and) watching this process. If this is to be so, it would change things considerably," he said. [[31]](#footnote-31)

Similarly, *The Washington Post*'s reporting, under the headline "Putin eases stance on NATO expansion; closer security ties with West pursued", began with the sentence:

President Vladimir Putin declared today that Russia is prepared to reconsider its opposition to NATO expansion into states of the former Soviet Union as part of a transformation in its security relationship with Europe.[[32]](#footnote-32)

This story was also repeated by Talbott, who wrote in his memoir that:

On October 3, Putin visited Brussels…and met with… [the] NATO secretary-general, George Robertson… Speaking publicly after his talks with Robertson, Putin considerably softened Russia's opposition to NATO enlargement, including, he hinted, the admission of the Baltic states at the alliance's next summit in Prague in 2002.[[33]](#footnote-33)

In reality, the relevant section of Putin's statement ran as follows:

With regard to the expansion of NATO, it would be possible to look at this problem/topic entirely differently, if the ideas repeatedly heard in Europe are realized — ideas to the effect that NATO is transforming, that NATO is taking on a new complexion/hue and becoming a more political organization. Of course, we would change our position on the subject of expansion if we felt that we were not on the sidelines of the process [of transformation]. What this process [of transformation] should look like will be a subject for our common discussion, and upon which certain agreements are to be reached.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Note that the line "if we felt that we were not on the sidelines of the process" ("если бы сами чувствовали себя не в стороне от этого процесса”, translated by the Kremlin as "if we did not feel sidelined from this process"), was outright mistranslated by the *New York Times* as "if we are to feel involved in the process". The real statement reiterated the conditions under which Russia might/would be more accepting of expansion. (Conditions that would never materialize.) The mistranslation was phrased as if Putin was giving a reason that Russia should/will reconsider its position. ("If we are to achieve *x*, then we must do *y*.")

Moreover, when asked whether Russia might join NATO as a result of the transformation about which he had spoken, Putin responded:

It is not I who said that NATO is transforming — that is what they now say in Europe. In NATO itself they say that it is already more of a political organization than a military one. We are simply aligning ourselves with that assessment. We think that, if this process really does take place in that fashion, then that would change a lot.[[35]](#footnote-35)

Thus, far from giving Russian acquiescence to NATO expansion into the Baltics, Putin said that Russia's position would change, if NATO reformed to become less of a military alliance, more of a political organization, and more inclusive of Russia — thus indicating that Russia's position on expansion at the time remained one of opposition. This was, in fact, not even a new stance: as noted above, as early as 1993, the Russians had said that they could accept NATO expansion if — and only if — NATO were to become less of a military alliance and more of an inclusive, pan-European political entity. Something that the Americans were entirely opposed to, and something that never happened.

Thus, US claims of Russian acquiescence were based not only on cherry-picking, but on outright distortion (intentional or not) of the cherry-picked material. Putin's 3 October 2001 statement was mistranslated, misreported, mistitled, misunderstood, and/or misrepresented, and this unrecognizable distortion would be referenced by US officials for years to come as something along the lines of 'Putin said that NATO expansion is NATO's business'.

## The likely reason for actual ambiguity in 2002

However, while Russian opposition to general/Baltic NATO expansion remained clear in the immediate wake of 9/11 — including in Brussels in October 2001 — it actually did become rather muddled in the second half of 2002, as can be seen in the above chart of Putin's rhetoric. But, given the decade of clear opposition that preceded this muddling, given the clear opposition to NATO expansion (now specifically to Ukrainian/Georgian expansion) that returned soon after this muddling, and given the limited degree to which Russian statements actually changed in late 2002, it appears that this muddling did not represent any true acquiescence to NATO expansion. Instead, it was a calculated move by the Russian government to minimize the domestic and international costs of the impending NATO expansion to the Baltics. While the Russian government had previously sought to prevent such expansion, by mid-2002 it was clear that diplomacy was incapable of accomplishing this.

In 2008, the US faced major reluctance from its allies on the issue of Membership Action Plans (MAPs) for Ukraine and Georgia, ultimately managing to (abortively) push the MAPs forward, but at a much slower pace than it would have liked.[[36]](#footnote-36) In that context, clear and public Russian opposition to Ukrainian/Georgian expansion had a good chance of providing real benefits, by maintaining NATO allies’ wariness of carrying out such expansion rapidly or at all. (Although military action ended up instead playing the decisive role.)

In contrast, by mid-2002, it had become clear that most of the US's allies — including the UK, Norway, Denmark, Poland, and (crucially) Germany — were willing to grant outright membership to the Baltics, Russian opposition notwithstanding:

* 28 January 2002: The *Financial Times* reports that "military planners and diplomats said [that] a majority of the 19 NATO countries want to include the Baltic states…at NATO's summit in Prague in November".[[37]](#footnote-37)
* 11 February 2002: The Baltics announce that Germany (which would be the crucial skeptic of NATO expansion in 2008) has "confirmed continuous active support…to the accession of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania to the EU and NATO" [[38]](#footnote-38)Although the German Foreign Minister himself tries to remain publicly less committal,[[39]](#footnote-39) this effort is rather undercut by the 29 April 2002 announcement that the *de facto* NATO-subordinated German-Danish-Polish Multinational Corps Northeast "will invite the three Baltic states to establish missions at its headquarters, a possible prelude to NATO membership", a move that the Poles explicitly liken to the invitation that they had received shortly before their own NATO accession in 1999.[[40]](#footnote-40)
* 26 February 2002: During a visit to Latvia, the UK Defence Secretary says that "Britain wants to see Latvia as a full member of NATO".[[41]](#footnote-41)
* 28 May 2002: The (entirely symbolic) NATO Parliamentary Assembly adopts Resolution 320, which "urges member governments and parliaments of the North Atlantic Alliance to invite Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia to start accession talks".[[42]](#footnote-42) (In contrast, in October 2007, when the Assembly calls for Albanian, Croatian, and North Macedonian membership (of which the former two would be granted within a year, while the latter would be held up for a decade by Greece), the Assembly does not call for Ukraine and Georgia to be issued MAPs,[[43]](#footnote-43) reflecting the reluctance of major NATO members like Germany and France.)
* 8 June 2002: The Norwegian and Danish Ministers of Defense say, respectively, that they want "to help the three Baltic countries to become members of NATO" and that "we are working very hard to have an enlargement of NATO and the EU and it is no secret that the Baltic countries are [close to] our heart… …we really feel that we have a future together in NATO…"[[44]](#footnote-44)

In this context, the Russian government likely concluded that continued emphatic public opposition to NATO expansion would likely fail and, having failed, accomplish nothing more than undermining Russian credibility abroad and the Russian government's popularity at home. The US had succeeded in its efforts (see Sec.5 below) to make clear to the Russians that diplomacy was futile, that NATO expansion was "going forward with or without them"; [[45]](#footnote-45) that, regardless of their opposition, "they could not derail expansion". [[46]](#footnote-46) Consequently, a shift towards more muffled and muddled opposition — to claims that expansion is not so bad, because it will not threaten Russia; that expansion is not a defeat for Russia, because Russia does not oppose it — was seen as a way to minimize the costs of expansion that did not relinquish any real chance of impeding it (because no such real chance existed).

For the Russian government, there still was a downside to this tactic. It preserved the Russian government's credibility from the damage that would be inflicted by a very public demonstration of Russian impotence, but it also undermined the Russian government's credibility by giving the impression that its ten years of opposition to NATO expansion were never that genuine — or were, at least, subject to change. That said, those ten years of opposition had done little to arrest NATO expansion, regardless of however much credibility Russia's opposition might have had. Thus, the 2002 rhetorical shift likely made little difference either way, as it was becoming increasingly apparent that diplomatic means would not, under any circumstances, be sufficient to halt NATO expansion.

It is perhaps more important to note that — given the US's zero-compromise approach and its efforts to impress upon Russia the futility of diplomacy (again, see Sec.5 below) — it is baseless and outright disingenous to then cite the eventual (and quite brief) weakening of Russia's public stance on the matter as proving its genuine acquiescence. And it would be quite dangerous for the US to interpret this product of its zero-compromise approach, enabled only by temporary Russian impotence, as indicating genuine and sustainable Russian acquiescence.

# Russia's position, 2005-2008

In any case, after becoming somewhat muddled in late 2002 and muted in 2003, open Russian opposition to NATO expansion soon returned in full force. It was expressed quite publicly, and both internal and public US documents confirm that the message was received.

As noted above, Russia's July 2008 Foreign Policy Concept proclaimed a "negative attitude" towards NATO expansion and identified the process as divisive and threatening. Before then, though, Putin issued statements in which Russian opposition was not ambiguous in the slightest. Most famously, at the 10 February 2007 Munich Security Conference, he said:

…NATO expansion has nothing to do with the alliance's modernization or with Europe's security. To the contrary, it's a seriously provocative factor that reduces mutual trust. And we have the right to ask frankly: against whom is this expansion directed? And what happened to the assurances given by our Western partners after the Warsaw Pact's dissolution?[[47]](#footnote-47)

And, in fact, he issued an even starker statement on 4 April 2008, after the meeting of the Russia-NATO Council in Bucharest:

The appearance on our borders of a powerful military bloc, whose members' actions are regulated *inter alia* by Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, will be understood by Russia as a direct threat to our country. And we cannot be satisfied by statements that the process is not directed against Russia. National security is not built on promises. Especially given that we already heard such claims prior to earlier waves of the bloc's expansion.[[48]](#footnote-48)

Later, in response to a journalist's question, he continued:

Regarding expansion. Today I heard about how expansion is not against Russia. … [Bismarck] said that in such affairs it is not intentions that matter, but capabilities. After all, no one has repealed Article 5 of the Washington Treaty.[[49]](#footnote-49)

Again, the US was well aware of this position. For instance, on 8 February 2008, US Ambassador to Russia William Burns described Ukrainian entry into NATO as "the brightest of all red lines for the Russian elite (not just Putin)" and warned that even 'mere' MAP offers to Ukraine or Georgia could lead to things like "Russian meddling in Crimea and eastern Ukraine" and "Russian-Georgian armed conflict". [[50]](#footnote-50) He similarly warned President Bush in early 2008 that:

On certain issues, especially MAP for Ukraine (and to a lesser extent Georgia), Putin will not give an inch. There is simply no way that Putin (or any other conceivable Russian leader) would view a MAP offer for Ukraine at this stage as anything other than a direct strategic challenge. …the question of Ukraine and NATO is of a whole different order of magnitude for the Russian elite.[[51]](#footnote-51)

On 12 March 2008, the CRS published a report (as prophetic as its predecessor cited above) that acknowledged "Russia's strong objection to [Georgian and Ukrainian] eventual membership" and predicted that:

In addition to changes in its military posture, Russia could react in several other ways to the prospect of NATO membership for Ukraine… It could try to stir up regional conflicts between eastern and western Ukraine. Russia could encourage pro-Russian groups to intensify anti-NATO campaigns and stir up conflict by pushing for use of Russian as an official language in eastern and southern Ukraine. Russia could even encourage those favoring more autonomy for these regions or even their separation from Ukraine, particularly in the case of the Crimean peninsula. [[52]](#footnote-52)

On 18 March 2008, Defense Secretary Robert Gates — who already saw the pursuit of Ukrainian and Georgian membership as "truly overreaching", and Ukrainian membership as "an especially monumental provocation" — was told by Lavrov that Ukrainian or Georgian accession "would destroy bilateral relations between our two countries". [[53]](#footnote-53) Even Vice President Cheney understood that "Putin viewed [Georgian accession to NATO] as a direct threat to Russia inside what he considered Russia's sphere of influence". (Cheney supported Georgian membership anyway).[[54]](#footnote-54)

Marten, too, acknowledges that "Putin and other leading Russian commentators certainly made it clear that NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia would be considered a direct military threat to Russia".[[55]](#footnote-55) However, she then claims that no such threat actually existed, because MAPs were not granted at Bucharest due to Franco-German opposition. In reality, the US had still made progress at Bucharest, and Russia might rationally view the entire process as likely to culminate in full expansion sooner or later. In fact, in the very cable cited by Marten, Ambassador Burns wrote that a "strategic framework document is doable", at Bush's upcoming April 2008 meeting with Putin, "if we are not at the point this year of a MAP offer for Ukraine and Georgia" (emphasis added), implying that if MAPs were not acquired in 2008, they would be soon after. [[56]](#footnote-56) Which was true, since the US had by July 2008 apparently pressured Germany into agreeing to committing in December 2008 to granting MAPs in 2010.[[57]](#footnote-57)

In sum, long before 2022, 2014, or 2008, the US could not have been — and in fact was not — ignorant of the Russian position.

# The US's explicit rejection of Russian opposition and its policy of zero-compromise

However, the US did not try to find a way to accommodate Russia's opposition. Instead, the US rejected that opposition outright, adopting an explicit policy of zero-compromise expansion from the very outset, as revealed by internal US communications and US officials' memoirs.

For instance, Strobe Talbott told Secretary of State Christopher on 11 December 1994 that:

Russia has interests that won't always[,] or even often[,] be identical to ours; its pursuit of those interests will require us to negotiate mutually acceptable arrangements across the range of issues before us. This is the essence of normalcy in international relations.

But, incongruously, he then immediately added that the Russians "should interpret our NATO policy the way [that] we interpret it, rather than superimposing their own alarmist reading on it..[[58]](#footnote-58) He made a similar point a month later:

…we keep saying that Russia is no longer a threat to the West. Therefore there's a degree of logic in the Russians trying to get us [to formally] repudiate containment/deterrence[,] and to alter the charter of NATO. But there's also a significant degree of mischief, or at least unrealism, in what they're up to here. In any event, it's not on. This proposal…would be the compensation Russia might seek for the addition of new members to the Alliance. But we're not in the business of having to 'compensate' Russia or buy it off. Russia is not doing us a favor by allowing NATO to expand.[[59]](#footnote-59)

And years later, Talbott characterized the "US negotiating position" regarding NATO enlargement (and Kosovo) as:

…simple, unbending[,] and, largely for that reason, successful. ‘Table and stick’[,] we'd called it: go straight to your bottom line and stick with it; wait until the other side bends. We'd been able to look the Russians in the eye and tell them that we were going forward with or without them.[[60]](#footnote-60)

Obviously, what Talbott is describing is not actually a negotiation at all. Talbott's boss, Christopher, similarly described the US approach as uncompromising:

Russian opposition to NATO expansion was a given. … Our firm approach on NATO enlargement was vindicated by subsequent events. Only when the Russian leaders understood that they could not derail expansion did they give serious attention to building a constructive relationship with NATO.[[61]](#footnote-61)

The US did make certain offerings to mollify Russia — most prominently the 1997 NATO-Russia Charter and the 2002 NATO-Russia Council — but these were functionally vacuous, and the US was utterly determined that they not at all interfere with NATO expansion. For instance, the US recognized that, in negotiations on the Charter, Russia sought to "rule out Baltic and Ukrainian membership in NATO", and the US sought to instead:

persuade [the] Russians that enlargement is a fact and that blocking or splitting tactics will not work; … [and] that realism means [the Russians] abandoning or significantly modifying their coming-in goals.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Similarly, US officials and media emphatically repeated that the Council would give Russia "no veto — not even a say — over important questions" [[63]](#footnote-63) such as expansion, [[64]](#footnote-64) as the Council would give Russia the ability only to discuss matters with the alliance, and even that only if and when the alliance itself wished to discuss an issue.[[65]](#footnote-65) (Indeed, NATO outright suspended the Council when the alliance's expansion — alongside other factors — sparked conflicts in 2008, 2014, and 2022.)

In sum, the explicit rejection of compromise, laid out in the above documents, provides further evidence that Russia was not only making its position clear, but that it was successfully communicating that position to the US. However, the US was determined to altogether reject this Russian opposition — what it often called an unacceptable 'veto'.

# Conclusion

By nullifying the diplomatic option, the US fundamentally left Russia with only two other options: endure and cope with NATO expansion (as transpired in the case of the Baltics) or respond militarily (as resulted in the cases of Georgia and Ukraine).

But, as laid out in this article, Russia certainly did attempt the diplomatic route first. It expressed its opposition to NATO expansion (especially into the Baltics, Ukraine, and Georgia) through decades of national security and foreign policy doctrines, through diplomatic overtures in the 1990s that the US received but consciously rejected, through statements by Putin (regarding the Baltics) that could be interpreted as acquiescent only after extreme cherry-picking and distortion, and through opposition later in the decade (to Ukrainian and Georgian membership) that was again received but rejected by the US. Aside from nullifying these efforts, the US's explicit policy of zero-compromise also provided further confirmation that these efforts were made and that they successfully communicated Russia's position to the US.

Several other conclusions can also be drawn from these findings.

First, because of the distortions by translators, reporters, and/or readers that are inflicted upon official communications (such as Putin's October 2001 statement about the Baltics), any even-slightly-nuanced position is at risk of being completely misunderstood and/or misrepresented. A state's position, if it needs to be consistently delivered to a wide audience over many years, should avoid nuance, subtlety, hypotheticals, the subjunctive mood, logical or grammatical complexity, and any sort of unscripted statements or answers to questions.

Second, however, there are cases in which misinterpretation is no danger, because the state pursuing a policy is determined to continue doing so regardless of how it understands other states' positions. As demonstrated above, the Russian position wasmostly clear and mostly received by the US, and yet it appears to have had no effect upon US policy. This was the case even before the genuine — albeit still limited — ambiguity of 2002. (Most prominently, Putin's 24 June "no tragedy" comment.) (Moreover, much of the confusion that did/does exist, regarding Russia's position, seems more like something that has been adopted — either cynically or via motivated reasoning — to support a pre-existing expansionist policy regardless of Russia's position, rather than an actual reason that expansion was supported.)

Third, and finally, Western belief that Russian opposition was not clearly articulated is psychologically comforting, since it means that obvious warnings were not mistakenly ignored, and contributes more broadly to the notion that NATO expansion was itself not a problem and thus not a gigantic error. But such beliefs are also dangerous in a practical sense, as they facilitate similar mistakes in the future. Conversely, if Russians or others incorrectly believe that Russian opposition was unclear, this could generate erroneous confidence in the viability of diplomacy regarding the issue, as it would create the impression that diplomacy has not, in fact, been tried and found entirely impotent.

# Appendix: Putin re. NATO in the Baltics

*Note: URLs that do not begin with "http://en." lead to the Russian-language original texts. Such cases mean that no official English translation is provided, and that the translations presented here were done by the author.*

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24194

5 Mar 2000

You are aware we have been constantly voicing our opposition to NATO's eastward enlargement. [[66]](#footnote-66)

…

When we talk about our opposition to NATO's eastward expansion, we do not have in mind our special ambitions with respect to some or other regions of the world. … Our main concern is our own country, its place in the world today and tomorrow. When we are confronted with attempts to exclude us from the process of decision-making, this naturally causes concern and irritation on our part. [[67]](#footnote-67)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24202

11 Jun 2000

I am sure no state in the world would feel particularly happy about the growth of a military bloc of which it is not a member. Especially if it increases the zone of our immediate contact with the alliance. Naturally, Russia views the plans of further NATO expansion as unfriendly and prejudicial to its security. The consequences of the admission of new members bear out our conclusion: the eastward expansion of the alliance is not conducive to European stability. Look at the growing aggressiveness of some “new-comers” with regard to Russia. [[68]](#footnote-68)

As for the talk about admitting Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia into NATO, let me stress again: if NATO approached the borders of the former USSR, a qualitatively new situation would be created for Russia and Europe. It would have dire consequences for the whole security system on the continent. By the way, the references by some Baltic leaders to a “threat of Russian aggression” reveal the sort of luggage they are carrying as they knock on NATO’s doors. [[69]](#footnote-69)

Sometimes this provokes criticism of Russia for “not recognising the right of the Baltic countries to freedom”. I see a hint of such a reproach in your question. You should not simplify matters and interpret the Russian position so loosely. We believe that every state has the right to choose how to ensure its own security. [[70]](#footnote-70) But, as the European Security Charter adopted in Istanbul stresses[,] one cannot strengthen one’s own security by reducing the security of other countries. [[71]](#footnote-71)

kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21643

23 Oct 2000

Russia's position is that we are against NATO expansion. [[72]](#footnote-72)

…

But if no one awaits us there, then why should we be happy with the expansion of NATO and its approach to our borders? Of course this causes us concern. It seems to me that this is logical, understandable, and obvious. [[73]](#footnote-73)

kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21634

26 Oct 2000

We are opposed to the principle of NATO expansion, [[74]](#footnote-74) but not out of a fear of being "encircled". [[75]](#footnote-75)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21169

26 Jan 2001

Even so, we still consider the policy of NATO expansion to be a mistake [[76]](#footnote-76) and we openly reject it in our dialogue with the Alliance. [[77]](#footnote-77)

kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24378

2 Feb 2001

You know which problems worry us most of all? … Missile defense in its various forms, and the problem of the Alliance's expansion. [[78]](#footnote-78)

kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21175

8 Feb 2001

Since Russia is not being invited into NATO, Russia cannot be happy with the expansion of NATO. And, of course, it worries us. [[79]](#footnote-79) But, again, the situation in the world is changing, and in the end, a country's status should be chosen by its people, and we will respect that decision in any case. [[80]](#footnote-80)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21178

9 Feb 2001

Several days later we heard from US Administration officials that so far Russia could not become a member because the situation was not ready and there were many problems to be sorted out, etc. And this justified my response: “Well, if they don’t see us as members, then it should be clear why we oppose decisions of that organisation.” And this is still our stand. We believe that NATO expansion will set new barriers and draw new dividing lines in Europe. I think that over the past ten years Europe at least has come to understand that no threat comes from Russia or ever will come. One does not have to be a foreign policy analyst to understand that for decades ahead the Russian foreign policy priority will be to create favourable external conditions to enable it to tackle the ambitious tasks it set itself in the economic sphere and in the social sphere. Many international instruments have been created, for example, the OSCE, which can keep a close watch on the security situation. One does not have to enlarge military blocs for that. This is Russia’s policy. [[81]](#footnote-81)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21263

16 Jun 2001

But if so, we ask ourselves: is it a military organisation? It is a military organisation. Do they want us there? They don’t. Is it advancing towards our borders? It is. What for? [[82]](#footnote-82)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21286

16 Jul 2001

That is what we seek. But when NATO expands, the border does not disappear. It simply advances towards our frontiers. [[83]](#footnote-83)

We hear that NATO is more of a political organisation. But although it is becoming more of a political organisation, that does not prevent it from using force, including in Europe, in spite of UN Security Council resolutions. So, the military aspect of NATO does not go away. [[84]](#footnote-84)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21315

1 Sep 2001

NATO was born as a response to the Soviet threat. The Soviet Union no longer exists and there is no threat. We do not believe there is any objective reason for NATO expansion. [[85]](#footnote-85)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21316

1 Sep 2001

We do not see NATO as a hostile organisation, like in the times of the confrontation between the Warsaw Pact and NATO. The Warsaw Pact no longer exists, and the Soviet Union no longer exists. Democratic Russia takes a very different attitude towards NATO. I repeat, we do not consider it to be a hostile organisation, but we see no point in its expansion because there is no threat to European countries, at least not from the East, from the Russian Federation. That is an obvious fact. [[86]](#footnote-86)

So, we believe it would be proper to speak about creating a single security system in Europe. That is an issue of principle, because if there is no equal security for all, then the key element, trust, will be lacking. The mere advance of NATO borders to the East, unfortunately, does not solve that problem. [[87]](#footnote-87)

…

We see the enlargement of the European Union in a different light than the expansion of NATO. We believe it is a positive process and we support it. [[88]](#footnote-88)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21319

3 Sep 2001

You know our position regarding the expansion of NATO. We do not believe that this has been guided by the objective realities of the current international situation. No one is threatening anyone else in Europe. It could probably only occur to some sick, fevered imagination that even some acts of aggression could be launched by anyone in this region of Europe today, including Russia, primarily Russia. We recognise the independence of states and are ready to help with its development. I think only this can explain the urge of some countries, including the Baltic countries, to join the North Atlantic bloc in order to reassert their independence once more. In the final analysis it is their choice. But, I repeat, we see no objective reasons for expansion, even to include the Baltic countries. But surely this is not the point. People all over the world, all over Europe talk about the need for a favourable political climate in Europe, about the need to tear down old barriers in Europe. Does NATO’s expansion solve this problem? It certainly does not. [[89]](#footnote-89) So why deceive ourselves? The decision simply pushes NATO’s frontiers to the Russian border. The move does not create a common security space on the continent. It fails to solve the key problem. I do not think we should take advantage of this situation to launch a campaign of hysteria. That would only worsen things, but, I repeat, we are not happy with this. [[90]](#footnote-90) We consider it a mistake which will fail to solve global problems and problems of European security. [[91]](#footnote-91)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21354

3 Oct 2001

As for NATO expansion, that problem can be looked at in a different way if one proceeds from the ideas that have been repeatedly voiced in Europe, namely, that NATO is transforming and is becoming more of a political organisation. We would of course change our position on enlargement if we did not feel sidelined from this process. [[92]](#footnote-92)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21350

3 Oct 2001

Let us imagine that NATO expands. New members are admitted to the organisation. Who will feel more secure as a result? Which European country will be more secure? The people of which country will feel more secure? Ask any person in the street in Berlin or Paris or any other capital whether the NATO decision makes him or her feel more secure against terrorist threats of a scale and character that occurred in New York and Washington. The answer, I am sure, will be “no”. [[93]](#footnote-93)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21394

10 Nov 2001

As regards the possible accession of the Baltic States to NATO, I have this to say: what was NATO created for in the first place? It is a defensive organisation; it was created to enhance the level of security of at least its member countries. If you go out into the street in New York, Washington, Paris, Berlin or Rome and ask any passer-by whether he thinks his country and he himself will be more secure after the admission of the Baltic states to NATO, the answer will obviously be no. I am absolutely sure that whatever my colleagues from the Baltic countries may say, it will not enhance their own security, [[94]](#footnote-94) although of course every country has the right to choose and has to make its own choices about security, and nobody is challenging that. [[95]](#footnote-95)

…

Mechanical expansion of NATO without regard to the national interests of Russia – I don’t think that is a move in the right direction, which is why we object to it, of course. [[96]](#footnote-96)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21402

16 Nov 2001

NATO was built to counteract the Soviet Union in its day and time. At this point there is no threat coming from the Soviet Union, because there is no Soviet Union anymore. And where there was the Soviet Union once, there is now a number of countries, among them the new and democratic Russia. If — and I have already said that, and I don't mind repeating that — if we were to take to the streets of New York or to the streets of Washington, D.C., or Paris, or London, or Rome, or any and all other major capitals of the countries that are NATO members, and if we were to ask the man in the street, the ordinary person, whether he thinks that the enrollment of Estonia, with its 1,300,000 people and Latvia and Lithuania if they were to join NATO, whether or not it will increase their level of security, most likely, most probably almost everybody will say no — no, their enrollment in NATO will not increase their security. Because unfortunately, mechanical enlargements of NATO is not going to increase the level of security in the face of new threats — the threats of the 21st century. [[97]](#footnote-97)

…

Not only I am not opposed to it [expansion of NATO], I actually don't think it makes any sense. If we were to deal with increasing international security, NATO enlargement does not make sense. [[98]](#footnote-98) We of course are not in a position to tell people what to do. We cannot forbid people to make certain choices if they want to increase the security of their nations in a particular way. But I don't think that enlarging or enhancing NATO mechanically makes any sense. [[99]](#footnote-99)

kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21426

5 Dec 2001

Regarding the accession of the Baltic states into NATO. The desire of every country to strengthen its security is explicable and understandable. But we propose that this can be done very successfully by forming systems of multilateral security, in the broad sense of the term, in the Baltic region. [[100]](#footnote-100)

kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21427

5 Dec 2001

Regarding NATO and the possible expansion of NATO to the east. Our position here, at the moment, has not changed. We hold that this is a more or less useless and pointless exercise. After all, NATO was born in its own era to oppose specific threats that emanated from a specific center. And that center was the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union does not exist today. But foreign policy based on NATO-centrism continues. That is what we consider a large mistake. [[101]](#footnote-101)

I have already expressed this thesis several times, I can repeat it again. Go out onto the street of any major city of any NATO member — go to Washington, to New York, to London, to Paris, to Berlin, to Rome, or to Athens — and ask the average citizen on the street: does NATO's expansion improve his security, will he feel himself safer? The answer, I promise you, will be one and the same: no. [[102]](#footnote-102)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21498

11 Feb 2002

Every country has the right to choose the way it ensures its security. This holds for the Baltic states as well. [[103]](#footnote-103)

Secondly, and more specifically. NATO is primarily a defensive bloc. I can only repeat what I have said several times. The enlargement of the bloc is supposed to improve international security and the security of its member countries. [[104]](#footnote-104)

Ask the citizens of New York: will they feel more secure because Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia will become NATO members? I think their answer would be “no”. Anyway, many of them may simply wonder where these countries are. [[105]](#footnote-105) And if you ask Russians whether it would be good or bad for Russia, an overwhelming majority would reply that it would be bad for Russia. [[106]](#footnote-106)

*Question: Meaning that they would feel less secure?*

Конечно. Yes, of course. Because it would bring the military bloc’s infrastructure closer to our borders. [[107]](#footnote-107) Naturally, it should provoke a response. Therefore I think mechanical enlargement of the bloc is counterproductive. [[108]](#footnote-108)

…

I think that as the quality of relations between Russia and NATO changes, the problems connected with the expansion of the whole bloc will come to be seen in a different light. [[109]](#footnote-109)

…

It all depends on the quality of relations between Russia and NATO. If it is productive, trusting and if mechanisms for joint decision-making on key issues are put in place, perhaps Russia would look at enlargement differently. But it is too soon to speak about that yet, because the character of relations between us and NATO has yet to change. [[110]](#footnote-110)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21614

28 May 2002

So far as NATO expansion is concerned, you know our attitude to that question. It does not change, but this does not mean that Ukraine should stand aloof from the processes which are good for strengthening peace and security in Europe and on the Earth as a whole. [[111]](#footnote-111)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21651

24 Jun 2002

As regards the expansion of NATO, we have repeatedly made the official Russian position known, and I am ready to repeat it. [[112]](#footnote-112) We do not think that NATO expansion improves anyone’s security, be it the countries that are going to join NATO or the organisation itself. [[113]](#footnote-113)

In Western Europe I have more than once asked a rhetorical question. I can repeat it here in Moscow. If you go out into the streets of New York, Brussels, Berlin or Paris and ask people: “Will Estonia’s accession to NATO improve your security?” I very much doubt that you will get an affirmative answer. I don’t think it will make Estonia itself more secure. [[114]](#footnote-114)

At the same time, I think it would be absolutely wrong from the tactical and strategic points of view to try to prevent Estonia from joining NATO. [[115]](#footnote-115) If Estonia wants to, let it, if it thinks it would be happier that way. I see no tragedy there. [[116]](#footnote-116)

…

Would Estonia find it easier to deal with these problems if it is a NATO member? I think not. But if you feel that it will be easier, Estonia is entitled to seek NATO membership. And I don’t think that circumstance need to lead to a deterioration of the relations between Russia and Estonia. The choice of any people, including the Estonian people, must be respected. Russia will respect whatever choice the Estonian leadership and people make. [[117]](#footnote-117)

kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21624

5 Jul 2002

That does not prevent us from openly and directly speaking about our disagreement with the position of the US and other Western states on a variety of issues. For instance, while seeking the development of new forms of cooperation with NATO, we still hold that the mechanistic expansion of the bloc will not enhance the security of NATO or of those states that are determined to accede to the alliance. From the very beginning, the expansion of NATO was not dictated by any objective need. And there is no real basis for it now, either. [[118]](#footnote-118)

In any case, for any rational politician, it is now clear that acceding to the North Atlantic alliance — a military alliance with a limited number of members — cannot answer the new challenges and threats with which civilized humanity will be faced in the 21st century, as the events of 11 September 2001 illustrated especially graphically. I am convinced that the expansion of NATO cannot be the basis for strengthening European security and stability, either. [[119]](#footnote-119)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21774

11 Nov 2002

And, of course, in light of the upcoming decisions to be taken at the Prague Summit of NATO on the expansion of the Alliance, we also discussed these issues.

We hope [expect, *рассчитываем*], and this is something that we discussed also today, that no decisions or steps to be taken will undermine the military stability and security in the common European space, [[120]](#footnote-120) or damage or prejudice the national security interests of Russia. [[121]](#footnote-121) Today, I told the Secretary General that we do appreciate the existing cooperation and declarations that are being issued, but Russian military organisations take their own view of this situation and they make assessments of the possible deployment of forces to the territory that is affected by enlargement. [[122]](#footnote-122)

*NATO Prague Summit takes place on 21-22 Nov 2002*

kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21784

22 Nov 2002

Regarding our relations with NATO, I can say the following. On expansion, you know our position. We do not proceed from an understanding that expansion was started by necessity. [[123]](#footnote-123)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21793

27 Nov 2002

Our position is that in order to meet the modern threats – and the main threats today, in my opinion, are international terrorism and nuclear weapons proliferation – one does not need to expand the NATO military-political bloc. The expansion of the bloc does not address the main tasks facing mankind today. [[124]](#footnote-124) But on the other hand, every country has the right to determine its foreign policy priorities, as I said answering your previous question. [[125]](#footnote-125)

We will not regard it as a tragedy. Each country has every right to join any organisation as a sovereign state. [[126]](#footnote-126)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21798

3 Dec 2002

As regards NATO expansion, our reaction is negative. [[127]](#footnote-127) We do not see why it should expand and believe that the very fact of mechanical expansion does not strengthen international security. [[128]](#footnote-128) But, to be absolutely frank and objective, I must say that any country has the right to choose the system of its own security as it sees fit. [[129]](#footnote-129)

kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22406

2 Apr 2004

Regarding NATO, our relations with the organization are developing positively. We have not expressed any fears regarding the expansion of NATO, [[130]](#footnote-130) we have said that modern threats are such that NATO expansion will not eliminate them. [[131]](#footnote-131) If you have followed the statements of Russian officials, specifically people who deal with defense issues, then [you will have seen that] we have clearly stated that we do not have any concerns about NATO expansion from the point of view of Russia's security. [[132]](#footnote-132) But NATO drawing its military infrastructure up to our borders is, of course, carefully studied by our specialists, and we will correspondingly draw up our defense and security policies. [[133]](#footnote-133)

http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22413

8 Apr 2004

Mr. General-Secretary, you know our attitude to the problem of NATO expansion, this position is well-known, and it remains unchanged. And indeed, experience shows that this mechanical expansion does not allow us to effectively oppose the primary threats that we face today. This expansion cannot prevent, for example, terrorist acts in Madrid or help us to solve the problem of rebuilding Afghanistan. [[134]](#footnote-134) But there are also elements which we should pay attention to, and which we should agree on. Every country has the right to choose the option that it considers most effective for ensuring its own security. [[135]](#footnote-135)

kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22742

10 Dec 2004

We always took a negative view of NATO expansion [[136]](#footnote-136) because we do not believe that this expansion can help neutralise the modern threats we face. [[137]](#footnote-137)

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66. opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. opposed; threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. opposed; threatened; threatened (again) (expansion is destabilizing) [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. opposed; threatened; threatened (again) (expansion is destabilizing) [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. states should be able to choose their own alliances [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. states should not strengthen their own security at others' expense [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. not threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. opposed; threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Russia does not have the right/ability to determine which states accede to the alliance [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. opposed; threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. opposed *(to NATO expansion, in contrast to support for EU expansion)* [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Russia is not able to stop expansion; opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. opposed *(would not be if NATO became more political and if Russia were more integrated into it)* [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. states should be able to choose their own alliances [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Russia is not able to stop expansion [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. states should be able to choose their own alliances [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Russia will take measures in response [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. opposed *(will not be if NATO and Russia's relations with it change — but that has not yet happened)* [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. opposed *(will not be if NATO and Russia's relations with it change — but that has not yet happened)* [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. opposed *(position unchanged from prior opposition, as expressed* inter alia *in most recent statement on the matter on 11 February, hence qualification that this opposition "совсем не значит, что Украина должна остаться в стороне от процессов, которые идут на пользу укрепления мира и безопасности в Европе"; establishment of the NATO-Russia Council evidently not yet sufficient to bring about the change in Russian position that Putin had referred to in the past)* [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. *presumably, the official and previously-expressed position is one of opposition, but that's not explicitly stated, and is then outright contradicted* [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Russia is not able to stop expansion [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. not opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. states should be able to choose their own alliances [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. not threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. not opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Russia will take measures in response [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. states should be able to choose their own alliances [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. states should be able to choose their own alliances [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. states should be able to choose their own alliances [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. not threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. not threatened [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. Russia will take measures in response [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. states should be able to choose their own alliances [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. opposed [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. expansion is useless / a mistake [↑](#footnote-ref-137)