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## **Appeasement has been Tried, it does not Work – Response to Jack Matlock (1240 words)**

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When the former US Ambassador to the Soviet Union speaks, pundits and politicians alike should pay attention. Therefore, I read the piece by Ambassador Jack Matlock (“Ukraine: Tragedy of a Nation Divided,” *Krasno Analysis*, 2/2021), whom I deeply respect, with keen interest. However, I cannot pretend not to have been shocked to discover that his paper **conveys an array of Kremlin-centered views that are, in my opinion, far detached from reality.**

**Ambassador Matlock’s arguments directly echo the Kremlin’s talking points** designed to justify the annexation of Crimea, the continuing war in Donbass and the possible full-scale invasion of the rest of the country: **that Ukraine is not a real nation and that it is at war with itself, not a victim of Russia’s blatant aggression.**

It is true that the borders of the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, within which Ukraine was recognized by the United Nations in 1945, were formed “by outsiders.” But were not all nations of Central and Eastern Europe the subject of a great power competition that affected their borders? **Were**

**not the borders of all post-colonial states throughout the world shaped by their former colonial powers?** Does Ambassador Matlock propose revisiting the border issues between other countries – let us say in Africa? Or do his standards apply only to countries which Putin intends to invade?

Also, for an uninformed reader, Dr. Matlock's version of history may leave the impression that Ukraine was the spoiled darling child of the USSR, receiving territories as gifts, left and right, and not a nation that has suffered the losses of millions of lives as the result of the **artificial famine** of 1932-33 and other atrocities.

Ambassador Matlock also brings up the issue of **Russian speakers in Ukraine** as another piece of "evidence" that Ukraine is not a nation and presumably thinks that they ALL are pro-Russian. It is true that many Ukrainians speak Russian as their first language (let us put aside the long history of forced Russification) but in reality, the vast majority of them identify as Ukrainians, rather than Russians. Analogies are often dangerous, but I wonder if Ambassador Matlock would use the language argument to question the right for independence of nations where the language of their former colonial rulers are spoken.

Most importantly, it needs to be made clear that the **Kremlin's "historical grievances"** or the "concern" for the well-being of fellow Russians in Crimea and Donbass, as well as its alleged fear of the expansion of NATO, are just a smokescreen for Putin's project of **Making Russia Great Again**.

By the way, the enlargement of NATO did not happen as a result of coercion from Washington but because **Russia's neighbors were desperate to join the alliance**. Mr. Putin understands that NATO

cannot possibly threaten Russia's security but is rather a barrier for Russian military aggression. The only real threat posed by the West's "penetration" in Russia's vicinity brings with itself is the **spread of democracy**, which could serve as a bad influence.

Therefore, **Putin's actions are based on purely domestic considerations.** He is desperate to hang on to power indefinitely and has been using '*little wars*' here and there to keep the Russians distracted from the effects of his deeply corrupt and inefficient rule. (Russia, with its mineral and intellectual wealth, should be one of the world's richest country but currently ranks 81<sup>st</sup> in the world by GDP per capita and lags, for instance, behind South Korea in nominal GDP). Just like many of his predecessors, before trying to expand his rule outside, Putin established the "Power Vertical" at home ('governing from the top'), depriving his own people of prosperity, freedom and dignity in the process.

If anyone distrusts Russia's neighbors because we come from '*faraway countries of which most know little,*' I would suggest that they listen to what **Daria Navalnaya** had to say to the Western "pragmatists" during her speech in the European Parliament last week when she accepted the Sakharov Prize for her father, **Alexey Navalny**, Putin's personal prisoner. Navalny was luckier than **Boris Nemtsov**, or my good friend **Anna Politkovskaya**, and many other critics of the Kremlin and has survived the assassination attempts on him.

Or listen to journalist **Dmitri Muratov**, who was even luckier – he managed to turn up for his own Nobel Prize ceremony. Or watch the videos of **Boris Nemtsov**, who was gunned down right in front of the Kremlin, in which he explained so clearly why Putin's wars against Russia's neighbors serve the sole purpose of extending his grip on power and how they hurt Russia's long-term national interests.

I am not questioning Ambassador Matlock's motives and genuine concern about the growing dangers for international peace and stability. Still, what he suggests as a remedy **amounts to the appeasement of an autocratic and aggressive regime** - a remedy, which has failed every time it has been tried.

Even at the dawn of the post-Cold War era, long before NATO enlargement was an issue, there were signs of trouble such as **Russia's predatory behavior in Georgia and Moldova**. **Henry Kissinger**, himself an advocate of *Realpolitik*, made a prediction that could not have been truer: *"... Russian reform will be impeded, not helped, by turning a blind eye to the reappearance of historic Russian imperial pretensions. The independence of the new republics, recognized after all by the United Nations, must not be tacitly downgraded by acquiescence in Russian military moves on their soil."* (*Diplomacy*, 1994, p.818).

More than a decade ago, **Putin** was even given an opportunity to restart the troubled relationship from a blank slate when **President Obama** offered him a **"reset"** right after his invasion of Georgia in 2008. In response, Putin shifted his anti-Western policies into higher gear. The reason is that, like the Soviet Union, Putin's regime requires the Russians to believe that their country is a **besieged fortress** and as a result they are willing to tolerate an incompetent and corrupt government as long as it "protects" them from "outside enemies."

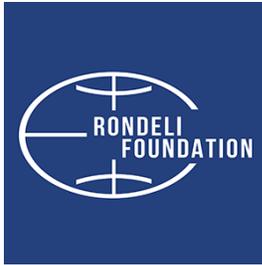
Of course, I fully agree with Ambassador Matlock that everything must be done to avoid an escalation and it is **only right to talk to Putin**, for instance, about mutual arms control measures. But if any compromises are entered into, they should not come at the expense of the freedom and independence of Russia's and Europe's shared neighborhood. After all,

**nothing emboldens an aggressor more than a display of weakness and lack of principle, whether perceived or real.**

I can understand (though not approve of) a *Realpolitik*-driven cooperation with undemocratic countries when mutual interests are aligned. But what is the rationale for allowing the autocrat in the Kremlin to crush your Eastern European allies? And **there ought to be no doubt that we are allies**; just check, for instance, Georgia's record of fighting alongside US/NATO troops in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Therefore, those who advocate a return to great power wheeling and dealing at the expense of the nations still fighting for their freedom should at least refrain from insulting us by telling us that we do not deserve independence or that compromising our freedom is for our own good. They will also have to explain to their own societies exactly what there is to gain from sacrificing the Eastern European countries (again). **The last time the policy of appeasement was tried, it failed spectacularly.**

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**Please also consult Giorgi Badridze's following papers:**

- ["The Sources of Russian Misconduct" \(2021\)](#)
- ["Georgia and NATO: A Small Country in Search of Security" \(2020\)](#)
- [Daria Navalnaya's speech in the European Parliament accepting the Sakhorov Prize on behalf of her father Alexey Navalny \(Dec. 15, 2021\).](#)

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