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RESPONSE to Jack F. Matlock’s article “Ukraine: Tragedy of a Nation Divided” (in *Krasno Analysis*, 2/2021)

900 words

Robin Knight

Far be it from me to minimize the defense of Russian behavior valiantly mounted by Amb. Jack Matlock (*Krasno Analysis*, No. 2/2021; Dec. 14, 2021). But it is both highly misleading and somewhat tendentious.

Where to begin? “Ukraine is **a state but not yet a nation.**” Well, to how many other countries in the world can this ivory-tower distinction be applied? Much of Africa, certainly. Many, if not all, of the ‘stans of Central Asia. Divided states such as the Koreas and Cyprus. It is an artificial construct that makes no sense.

Amb. Matlock goes on to introduce a second red herring – the **boundaries of present-day Ukraine.** As he must know, boundaries and control in this part of the world have changed throughout history. Lithuania and Poland at one time or another both governed what is now Ukraine. More to the point, Russian interference in Ukraine has been a constant since at least 1654 (the Treaty of Pereyaslava). Does this invalid

Ukraine's desire to stand on its own feet and make its own decisions today? Of course not.

Then we come to **Crimea** which Amb. Matlock appears to believe should by right be part of Russia having been seized by Catherine the Great in the 18th century – and therefore President Putin should not be held accountable by the West for his forcible invasion in 2014 despite Crimea being recognized as part of Ukraine by the United Nations also in 2014. That is risible.

On **language and ethnicity**, Amb. Matlock attempts to make the argument that since about a quarter of the Ukrainian population is not Ukrainian speaking, this somehow invalidates Ukraine's claim to suzerainty over the territory of Ukraine. He ignores Russia's acceptance of Ukraine's territorial (and therefore cultural) integrity as laid out in its 1991 accession to the Commonwealth of Independent States – a charter, he will recall, defined in Moscow.

Let us turn to other rather dubious claims in the article:

- **The Ukrainian revolution of 2014.** Apparently, according to the Matlock thesis, it was provocative of the U.S. and E.U. to support demonstrators seeking real democracy, and basic human rights. That implicit in such demands was closer ties with the US/EU (no one was calling for NATO membership) surely is reasonable?
- **The Russian "sphere of influence."** Is Amb. Matlock arguing that all countries with common borders with Russia must remain in "the Russian security sphere"? Why? Finland provides a perfectly viable alternative – neither in an East nor West "security sphere" yet free and independent and unthreatening to Moscow.

- **The Minsk Agreements.** Amb. Matlock puts all the blame for their non-application on Kiev. That is nonsense. The agreements are vague and imprecise, were imposed on a weak Ukraine, and potentially give Moscow a veto over Kiev's actions.
- Nowhere in the article is **Georgia, Moldova or Belarus** mentioned. Surely the long record of Russian meddling and military intervention in these countries is relevant? Can no country ever leave the Russian "security sphere" according to Moscow? Is the deployment of Russian mercenaries in Donbass irrelevant too?

As for what is happening now, the Matlock article can only give comfort to the warmongers and myth-makers who abound in the Kremlin and Russian parliament.

As this is written, Russia is gathering, very publicly, a 100,000+ strong army around the borders of Ukraine and conducting a **war of words** with the West over NATO's alleged invasion planning. Non-existent "provocations" (such as an ancient Ukrainian vessel sailing 18 miles from the disputed Kerch Strait) are played up by the Kremlin's propagandists as though the incidents are prelude to war and, therefore, justification for the weaponizing of the border. Yet as Amb. Matlock and President Putin also well know, there is not one chance in a thousand of President Biden committing US forces to Ukraine. **Without American troops on the ground, there will be no NATO intervention in Ukraine.**

How much more interesting it would have been in this article, if Amb. Matlock had attempted, given his considerable experience of analyzing the Russian mind, to assess Putin's current behavior and motives.

Since he has not done this, **here is my humble view.**

Putin is playing up a non-crisis with Ukraine to do a number of things – to get the US and Biden to treat Russia as a co-equal when it comes to dealing with global crises, excluding the likes of the EU; to spread dissension in NATO; to get a formal Russian “security sphere” recognized by the West; to force a declaration from NATO that Ukraine will never be offered membership; to put an end to NATO’s growing role in arming and training Ukrainian forces; to force the US/NATO to renegotiate existing arms control agreements; and to encourage and spread internal political and cultural division in Ukraine.

Of course, Ukraine must have, as Amb. Matlock asserts at the end of his essay, **“reasonably close and civil relations with Russia.”** Should this, though, be done at the expense of US military and economic aid to Kiev and closer Ukrainian involvement with the EU? This, surely, is for the government in Kiev to decide, not the one in Moscow. **If understanding and stability in the region has to be achieved on Russian terms, the lesson of history is that it will never be achieved.**

Robin Knight was Moscow bureau chief for US News & World Report, 1976-79 and European Editor, US News & World Report, 1985-96. He lives in London, UK.



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