

# Biden admitted in 1997 NATO expansion would cause Russian ‘hostile reaction’

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By Benjamin Norton

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Current US President Joe Biden acknowledged in 1997 that eastward NATO expansion into the Baltic states would cause “the greatest consternation,” which could “tip the balance” and result in a “vigorous and hostile reaction” by Russia.

The Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania did indeed become part of NATO in 2004. Estonia and Latvia directly border Russia, and frequently do military exercises with Western troops a mere 100 kilometers from the border.

Biden’s 1997 comments were a clear admission that Washington knew its policy of pushing the US-led military alliance right up onto Russia’s borders could force Russia to respond with force, as Moscow did by invading Ukraine in February 2022.

Biden made these remarks in a June 18, 1997 event at the Atlantic Council, NATO’s de facto think tank, and one of the most powerful organizations in Washington.

At the time of the event, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland were actively seeking to join NATO. (They later did in 1999.)

Then a senator representing Delaware, Biden enthusiastically praised NATO and criticized fellow lawmakers who opposed its expansion. Biden called for the military alliance to continue to grow into Eastern Europe.

But he conceded that this expansion could precipitate a “hostile reaction” from Moscow.

“I think the one place where the greatest consternation would be caused in the short term, for admission – having nothing to do with the merit and preparedness of the countries coming in – would be to admit the Baltic states now, in terms of NATO-Russian, US-Russian relations,” Biden said.

“And if there was ever anything that was going to tip the balance, were it to be tipped, in terms of a vigorous and hostile reaction, I don’t mean military, in Russia, it would be that,” he added.

A video clip of Biden’s comments was published on Twitter by user [@ImReadinHere](#).

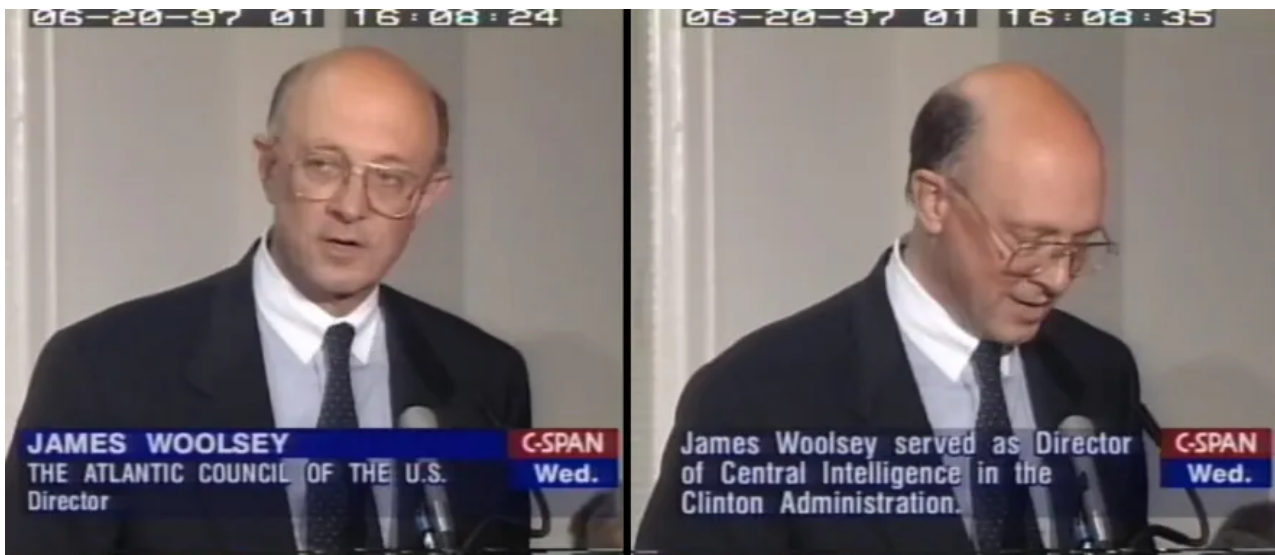
Biden in 1997 saying that the only thing that could provoke a "vigorous and hostile" Russian response would be if NATO expanded as far as the Baltic states  
[pic.twitter.com/i0yfEgIGZA](https://pic.twitter.com/i0yfEgIGZA)

— . (@ImReadinHere) [March 7, 2022](#)

When Biden made these remarks, he was the ranking member, or top Democrat, on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

Biden was introduced at the event by James Woolsey, a former CIA director who at the time served as head of the Atlantic Council.

Woolsey celebrated Biden as “one of the leading and most important senators... in both the areas of judiciary and foreign policy.”



These 1997 comments are by no means the only time that a top US government official admitted that NATO expansion could force Russia to respond.

When the Senate approved NATO expansion in 1998, it was condemned by none other than leading cold warrior George Kennan, the architect of US containment policy toward the Soviet Union. Kennan warned in prescient words published by the New York Times:

I think it is the beginning of a new cold war. I think the Russians will gradually react quite adversely and it will affect their policies. I think it is a tragic mistake. There was no reason for this whatsoever. No one was threatening anybody else. This expansion would make the Founding Fathers of this country turn over in their graves. We have signed up to protect a whole series of countries, even though we have neither the resources nor the intention to do so in any serious way. [NATO expansion] was simply a light-hearted action by a Senate that has no real interest in foreign affairs.

In a 2008 classified State Department cable published by WikiLeaks, former US Ambassador to Russia William Burns, who now serves as Biden's CIA director, likewise cautioned that NATO expansion into Ukraine would cross Moscow's security "redlines" and "could potentially split the country in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene."

Ex US Ambassador to Russia William Burns (now CIA director) admitted back in 2008 that NATO expansion to Ukraine crosses Moscow's security "redlines" and could create violence & civil war, which would force Russia to intervene

That's exactly what happened <https://t.co/8DOuuq5Og3>

— Benjamin Norton (@BenjaminNorton) February 27, 2022

Senior US, British, French, and German officials repeatedly promised the former Soviet Union in 1990 that NATO would not expand eastward after the reunification of Germany. This is an undeniable historical fact confirmed by numerous documents from Western governments.

NATO broke this promise, however, adding 14 new member states, all east of Germany.

A newly discovered document on a 1991 diplomatic meeting proves that the US, UK, France, and Germany promised the USSR that NATO would not expand east.

It's part of a growing body of evidence that the West broke its promise to Russia.

via @Multipolarista <https://t.co/KP6KHW2YyR>

— Benjamin Norton (@BenjaminNorton) February 20, 2022