

hemisphere? And we meant it!”

More pertinent was the Cuban Missile Crisis, which happened while Matlock was at the American Embassy in Moscow and translated some of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev’s messages to Kennedy.

“Cuba was a sovereign state and had the right to seek support for its independence from anywhere it chose. It had been threatened by the United States, even an attempt to invade, using anti-Castro Cubans. It asked the Soviet Union for support. Knowing that the United States had deployed nuclear weapons in Turkey, a US ally actually bordering on the Soviet Union, Khrushchev decided to station nuclear missiles in Cuba. How could the US legitimately object if the Soviet Union was deploying weapons similar to those deployed against it?” Matlock asked.

The Joint Chiefs recommended taking out the missiles by bombing, though Kennedy stopped short of that, declaring a blockade and demanding the removal of the missiles.

Matlock learned years later how close “we” had come to a nuclear exchange. He learned that, if the sites had been bombed, the officers on the spot could have launched the missiles without orders from Moscow. “It was a close call. It is quite dangerous to get involved in military confrontations with countries that have nuclear weapons. You don’t need an advanced degree in international law to understand that. You need only common sense,” Matlock warned.

In 1997, when the question of adding more members to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was raised, and Matlock was asked to testify before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he made the following statement: “I consider the Administration’s recommendation to take new members into NATO at this time misguided. If it should be approved by the United States Senate, it may well go down in history as the most profound strategic blunder made since

the end of the Cold War.”

The reason he cited was Russia’s nuclear arsenal that “matched if not exceeded” that of the United States, and the fact that “the plan to increase the membership of NATO fails to take account of the real international situation following the end of the Cold War, and proceeds in accordance with a logic that made sense only during the Cold War.”

“While there was no reason to enlarge NATO after the Soviet Union recognized and respected the independence of the East European countries, there was even less reason to fear the Russian Federation as a threat,” Matlock wrote.

After the September 11 attacks, President Putin was the first foreign leader to call President Bush and offer support. Matlock observed that it was clear at that time that Putin aspired to a security partnership with the United States.

“As President Putin pulled Russia out of the bankruptcy that took place in the late 1990s, stabilized the economy, paid off Russia’s foreign debts, reduced the activity of organized crime, and even began building a financial nest egg to weather future financial storms, he was subjected to what he perceived as one insult after another to his perception of Russia’s dignity and security.”

Then Senator Joseph Biden, during his candidacy for the presidential election in 2008, pledged to “stand up to Vladimir Putin!”

“So far as Ukraine is concerned, US intrusion into its domestic politics was deep — to the point of seeming to select a prime minister. It also, in effect, supported an illegal coup d’etat that changed the Ukrainian government in 2014, a procedure not normally considered consistent with the rule of law or democratic governance,” Matlock wrote.

During President Obama’s second term, his rhetoric became more personal, with allegations like “Russia makes nothing anybody wants,”

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**Jack F. Matlock**

Former US ambassador to USSR



Tulsi Gabbard  
@TulsiGabbard

This war and suffering could have easily been avoided if Biden Admin/NATO had simply acknowledged Russia’s legitimate security concerns regarding Ukraine’s becoming a member of NATO, which would mean US/NATO forces right on Russia’s border

11:57 AM · Feb 24, 2022 · Twitter Web App

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**Thomas Friedman**

US expert on international issues

conveniently ignoring the fact that the only way for American astronauts to get to the international space station at that time was with Russian rockets.

Matlock said that President Putin’s demand for an end to NATO expansion and the creation of a security structure in Europe that insures Russia’s security along with that of others is eminently reasonable.

“To try to detach Ukraine from Russian influence — the avowed aim of those who agitated for the ‘color revolutions’ — was a fool’s errand, and a dangerous one,” Matlock concluded.

At the time of writing the article, Matlock remained hopeful, but was later disappointed.

Sharing Matlock’s disappointment was Former Democratic Rep. Tulsi Gabbard, who tweeted on February 24

that “This war and suffering could have easily been avoided if Biden Admin/NATO had simply acknowledged Russia’s legitimate security concerns regarding Ukraine’s becoming a member of NATO, which would mean US/NATO forces right on Russia’s border.”

Appearing on a TV network earlier, she observed that “President Biden could end this crisis and prevent a war with Russia by doing something very simple: Guaranteeing that Ukraine will not become a member of NATO — because if Ukraine became a member of NATO, that would put US and NATO troops right on the doorstep of Russia, which, as Putin has laid out, would undermine their national security interests.”

Nor does this realization elude observers like Thomas Friedman, who, in his article

“We Have Never Been Here Before” (February 25, The New York Times) pointed to the balance of power that he feels was imposed on Russia after the Cold War.

“That balance — or imbalance in Putin’s view — was the humiliating equivalent of the Versailles Treaty’s impositions on Germany after World War I. In Russia’s case, it meant Moscow having to swallow NATO’s expansion not only to include the old Eastern European countries that had been part of the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence, like Poland, but even, in principle, states that were part of the Soviet Union itself, like Ukraine,” Friedman wrote.

(Check out Jack F. Matlock’s article on <https://usrussiaaccord.org/acura-viewpoint-jack-f-matlock-jr-todays-crisis-over-ukraine/>)