

**Security Council**

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Letter dated 24 February 2022 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to forward herewith the text of the address of the President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, to the citizens of Russia, informing them of the measures taken in accordance with Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations in exercise of the right of self-defence (see annex).

I would ask you to circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(Signed) Vassily Nebenzia



Annex to the letter dated 24 February 2022 from the Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

[Original: Russian]

Address by the President of the Russian Federation

24 February 2022, 0600 hours, Moscow. The Kremlin

Vladimir Putin: Citizens of Russia! Dear friends!

Today, I again consider it necessary to return to the tragic events taking place in Donbass and to the key aspects of ensuring the security of Russia itself.

I will begin with what I said in my address of 21 February this year. I spoke about what is causing us particular concern and anxiety – those fundamental threats against our country that, year after year, step by step, have been blatantly and unceremoniously created by irresponsible politicians in the West. I am referring to the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) bloc to the east and the advance of its military infrastructure ever closer to Russia's borders.

It is well known that, for 30 years, we have been persistently and patiently attempting to reach an agreement with the leading NATO countries on the principles of equal and indivisible security in Europe. In response to our proposals, we have constantly encountered either cynical deception and lies or attempts at pressure and blackmail, while the North Atlantic alliance has continued to steadily expand despite all our protests and concerns. The war machine is moving and, I repeat, is drawing right up to our very borders.

Why is this happening? Where does this insolent way of talking down from a position of one's own exceptionalism, infallibility and impunity come from? Where does the contemptuous and dismissive attitude towards our interests and absolutely legitimate demands come from?

The answer is clear. It all makes sense and is obvious. The Soviet Union grew weaker in the late 1980s and then collapsed altogether. The whole course of events that took place then is a good lesson for us today; it has convincingly shown that a paralysis of power and will is the first step towards complete degradation and oblivion. All it took was for us to lose confidence in ourselves temporarily, and the balance of power in the world was thrown off.

As a result, existing treaties and agreements became de facto void. Entreaties and pleas do not help. Anything that does not suit the hegemon, the powers that be, is declared archaic, obsolete and unnecessary. Conversely, everything that seems profitable to them is presented as the ultimate truth and is pushed through at all costs, boorishly and by any means. Those who disagree are brought to heel.

What I am saying now concerns not only Russia, and we are not the only country that is worried about this. This has to do with the entire system of international relations, and sometimes even the allies of the United States. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a de facto redivision of the world began, and the rules of international law that had been developed by then – the key, fundamental ones adopted in the aftermath of the Second World War and largely consolidating its outcomes – began to get in the way of the self-proclaimed winner of the Cold War.

Of course, changes in the global situation and in the balance of power itself should have been taken into account in practical life, in international relations and in the rules governing those relations. This should have been done professionally,

smoothly and patiently, taking into account and respecting the interests of all countries and understanding one's own responsibility. But no, there was a state of euphoria from having absolute superiority, a kind of modern-day absolutism, along with a low level of general culture and arrogance among those who prepared, adopted and pushed through decisions that were beneficial only for themselves. The situation began to develop according to a different scenario.

There is no need to look far to find examples. First, without any authorization from the United Nations Security Council, it started with a bloody military operation against Belgrade using aircraft and missiles right in the very heart of Europe. The bombing of peaceful cities and vital infrastructure continued uninterrupted for several weeks. I have to recall these facts because some Western colleagues do not like to remember those events and, when we speak about them, they prefer to point not to the rules of international law but instead to the circumstances, which they interpret as they see fit.

Then came the turn of Iraq, Libya and Syria. The illegitimate use of military force against Libya and the distortion of all United Nations Security Council decisions on the Libyan question led to the complete destruction of that State, to the emergence of a major hotbed of international terrorism and to the country being plunged into a humanitarian disaster and the abyss of a long-standing civil war that continues to this day. The tragedy that befell hundreds of thousands, even millions of people, not only in Libya, but in the entire region, gave rise to a mass exodus of migrants from North Africa and the Middle East to Europe.

A similar fate was also in store for Syria. The combat operations conducted by the Western coalition on the territory of that country without the consent of the Syrian Government or authorization from the United Nations Security Council are nothing more than aggression and intervention.

However, the invasion of Iraq, also without any legal basis, of course, stands out as a particular case. As a pretext, they chose the supposedly reliable information that the United States had about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. To prove this publicly, in front of the whole world, the United States Secretary of State shook a test tube of white powder, assuring everyone that it was the chemical weapon being developed in Iraq. And then it turned out that it was all a fabrication, a bluff: there were no chemical weapons in Iraq. Unbelievable and astonishing, but there is no escaping that fact. There were lies at the highest State level and from the high rostrum of the United Nations. And the result was a tremendous loss of life, destruction and a colossal upsurge in terrorism.

In general, it would appear that in many regions of the world, almost wherever the West comes to establish its order, it leaves bloody, open wounds and the sores of international terrorism and extremism. I have mentioned the most egregious, but by no means the only, examples of disregard for international law.

Added to this list are the promises made to our country not to expand NATO one inch eastward. I repeat – they deceived us, or, to put it in the vernacular, they simply played us. Yes, one often hears that politics is a dirty business. Perhaps, but not that much, not to that extent. After all, such con-artist behaviour is contrary not only to the principles of international relations, but above all to the generally accepted norms of morality and ethics. Where is the justice and truth here? It is nothing but complete lies and hypocrisy.

Incidentally, United States politicians, political scientists and journalists themselves write and say that a veritable “empire of lies” has been created within the United States in recent years. It is hard to disagree with that, as that is the case. But one should not be modest about this: the United States is still a great country, a

system-forming Power. All of its satellites not only humbly and obediently obey and parrot it at every opportunity, they also copy its behaviour and enthusiastically accept to play by its rules. Therefore, we can say with good reason and confidence that the entire so-called Western bloc, formed by the United States in its own image and likeness is, in its entirety, the very same “empire of lies”.

As for our country, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, with all the unprecedented openness of the new modern Russia and its willingness to work honestly with the United States and other Western partners, and in a context of virtually unilateral disarmament, they immediately tried to pin us down, to finish us off and to destroy us for good. This is exactly what happened in the 1990s and the early 2000s, when the so-called collective West most actively supported separatism and mercenary gangs in southern Russia. What sacrifices and losses it cost us, and what trials we had to go through before we finally broke the back of international terrorism in the Caucasus! We remember this and will never forget.

In fact, even until recently, there have been ongoing attempts to use us in their own interests, to destroy our traditional values and to impose their pseudo-values on us, which would corrode us and our people from within; these attitudes are already aggressively being imposed in their countries and are directly leading to degradation and degeneration as they are contrary to human nature itself. That is not going to happen. No one has ever succeeded in doing this. It will not succeed now either.

In spite of everything, in December 2021 we nonetheless tried once again to reach an agreement with the United States and its allies on the principles of ensuring security in Europe and on the non-expansion of NATO. All in vain. The position of the United States has not changed. The United States does not consider it necessary to negotiate with Russia on a matter that is critical for us; it is pursuing its own goals while disregarding our interests.

And of course, this situation begs the question: what next, what are we to expect? We know full well from history how, in 1940 and at the beginning of 1941, the Soviet Union tried in every way to prevent or at least to delay the outbreak of war. To that end, among other things, the Soviet Union tried literally, until the last minute, not to provoke a potential aggressor and did not carry out, or postponed, the most obvious preparatory actions needed to repel the inevitable attack. And the steps that were eventually taken were disastrously overdue.

As a result, the country was not prepared to fully counter the invasion by Nazi Germany, which attacked our homeland on 22 June 1941 without a declaration of war. The enemy was stopped and then crushed, but at a colossal cost. The attempt to appease the aggressor ahead of the Great Patriotic War was a mistake that cost our people dearly. In the first months of fighting we lost vast, strategically important territories and millions of people. We will not make such a mistake a second time. We have no right to do so.

Those laying claim to world domination have publicly, with impunity and, I emphasize, without any reason, declared us, Russia, as their enemy. They do indeed have considerable financial, scientific, technological and military capabilities today. We are aware of this and have a clear-eyed view of the economic threats that are constantly being made against us, and of our ability to resist this blatant and ever-present blackmail. I repeat, we have no illusions in this regard and are extremely realistic in our assessments.

On the military front, even after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of much of its capabilities, Russia today is one of the most powerful nuclear powers in the world and, moreover, has certain advantages in some of the newest types of

weaponry. In that context, no one should have any doubt that a direct attack on our country will lead to defeat and terrible consequences for any potential aggressor.

At the same time, technology, including defence technology, is changing rapidly. Leadership in this area has changed and will change hands, but the militarization of the territories adjacent to our borders, if we allow this, will remain for decades to come, perhaps forever, and will pose an ever-growing, totally unacceptable threat to Russia.

Even now, as NATO expands eastward, the situation for our country is becoming worse and more dangerous every year. Moreover, in recent days the NATO leadership has been explicitly talking about the need to accelerate and force the advance of the Alliance's infrastructure to the borders of Russia. In other words, they are hardening their stance. We can no longer continue to merely observe what is occurring. That would be completely irresponsible of us.

The further expansion of the North Atlantic alliance's infrastructure and the militarization of Ukrainian territories are unacceptable to us. Of course, the issue is not with NATO itself – it is only a tool of United States foreign policy. The problem is that on the territories adjacent to ours – I note, on our own historical territories – an “anti-Russia” hostile to us is being created, placed under full external control, intensively settled by the armed forces of NATO countries and pumped full of the most modern weapons.

For the United States and its allies, this is the so-called policy of containment of Russia, with obvious geopolitical dividends. But for our country this is ultimately a matter of life and death, the question of our historical future as a people.

And this is not an exaggeration – it is a fact. This is a real threat not just to our interests, but to the very existence of our State and its sovereignty. This is the red line that has been talked about many times: they have crossed it.

This brings me to the situation in Donbass. We can see that the forces that staged the coup in Ukraine in 2014 have seized power and are maintaining it with the help of what are essentially staged election procedures. They have definitively abandoned the path of peaceful conflict resolution. For eight years, for eight endless years, we have been doing everything possible to resolve this situation by peaceful political means. But everything was in vain.

As I said in my previous address, one cannot look without compassion at what is happening there, but all of this became simply impossible to tolerate. We had to stop this nightmare – a genocide against the millions of people living there who are pinning their hopes only on Russia, on us alone. It is their aspiration, the feelings and pain of these people that were the main motivating force behind our decision to recognize the independence of the Donbass People's Republics.

I believe it is also important to emphasize the following. Focused on their own goals, the leading NATO countries are supporting the nationalist fringe and neo-Nazis in Ukraine who will never forgive the people of Crimea and Sevastopol for freely making a choice to reunite with Russia.

They will undoubtedly bring war to Crimea just as they have done in Donbass, to kill defenceless people, just as members of the punitive units of Ukrainian nationalists and Hitler's accomplices did during the Great Patriotic War. They have also openly laid claim to a number of other Russian territories.

The entire course of events and an analysis of incoming reports demonstrate that confrontation between Russia and these forces is inevitable. It is only a matter of time. They are getting ready and waiting for the right moment. Now they are also aspiring to possess nuclear weapons. We will not allow this to happen.

As I said earlier, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia accepted the new geopolitical realities. We respect and will continue to respect all the newly formed countries of the former Soviet Union. We respect and will continue to respect their sovereignty, and an example of this is the assistance we have provided to Kazakhstan, which has faced tragic events and challenges to its statehood and integrity. But Russia cannot feel safe, develop and exist with a constant threat emanating from the territory of present-day Ukraine.

Let me remind you that in 2000–2005 we used our military to push back against terrorists in the Caucasus, defended the integrity of our State and preserved Russia.

In 2014, we supported the people of Crimea and Sevastopol. In 2015, we used the Armed Forces to create a reliable barrier to terrorist infiltration from Syria into Russia. We had no other way to defend ourselves.

The same is also happening now. We simply have been left with no other way to defend Russia and our people than the one we are forced to use today. The circumstances require us to act decisively and immediately. The People's Republics of Donbass appealed to Russia for help.

In this regard, in accordance with Article 51 (chapter VII) of the Charter of the United Nations, I have decided to conduct a special military operation with the approval of the Federation Council of Russia and pursuant to the treaties on friendship and mutual assistance with the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic, as ratified by the Federal Assembly on 22 February this year.

Its purpose is to protect people who have been subjected to abuse and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years. And to this end, we will seek the demilitarization and de-Nazification of Ukraine, as well as the prosecution of those who have committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.

However, our plans do not include the occupation of Ukrainian territories. We are not going to impose anything on anyone by force. At the same time, we hear that recently there have been increasing statements in the West that the documents signed by the Soviet totalitarian regime, in which the outcomes of the Second World War are enshrined, should no longer be implemented. Well, how do we respond to that?

The outcomes of the Second World War are sacred, as are the sacrifices our people made on the altar of victory over Nazism. But this does not contradict the high values of human rights and freedoms today based on the realities of the post-war decades. Nor does it override the right of nations to self-determination as enshrined in Article 1 of the Charter of the United Nations.

Let me remind you that neither at the founding of the Soviet Union, nor after the Second World War, did anyone ever ask the people living in any of the territories that make up present-day Ukraine how they themselves wanted to build their lives. Our policy is based on freedom, the freedom of choice for all to determine their own future and that of their children. And we consider it important that all peoples living on the territory of today's Ukraine, all those who want to exercise this right – the right to choose – should have the right to do so.

In this context, I would also like to address the citizens of Ukraine. In 2014, Russia was obligated to protect the residents of Crimea and Sevastopol from those you yourselves call “nats” or nationalists. The people of Crimea and Sevastopol made their choice to be with their historic homeland, with Russia, and we supported that.

I repeat, we simply could not act otherwise.

Today's events are not about the desire to infringe on the interests of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. They have to do with protecting Russia itself from those who have taken Ukraine hostage and are trying to use it against our country and its people.

Again, our actions are self-defence against the threats posed to us and against an even greater calamity than what is happening today. No matter how difficult it may be, I ask you to understand this and call for cooperation in order to turn this tragic page as soon as possible and move forward together, allowing no one to interfere in our affairs, in our relations, but rather building them independently, which would create the necessary conditions to overcome all problems and, despite the existence of State borders, strengthen us from within as a united whole. I believe in this, in our common future.

I must also address members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Dear comrades! Your fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers did not fight the Nazis in defence of our common homeland so that today's neo-Nazis could seize power in Ukraine. You swore an oath of allegiance to the Ukrainian people, not to the anti-people junta that is robbing Ukraine and mocking its very people.

Do not follow their criminal orders. I urge you to lay down your weapons immediately and go home. Let me be clear: all military personnel of the Ukrainian army who comply with this requirement will be able to leave the combat zone freely and return to their families.

Let me emphasize once again: all responsibility for any bloodshed will be entirely on the conscience of the ruling regime in Ukraine.

Now a few important, very important, words for those who may be tempted to intervene in the ongoing events from the outside. Whoever tries to stand in our way, and especially to threaten our country and our people, should know that Russia's response will be immediate and the consequences will be such as you have never faced before in your history. We are ready for any turn of events. All the necessary decisions have been made in this regard. I hope that I have made myself clear.

Dear citizens of Russia!

The well-being, the very existence of entire nations and peoples, their success and vitality always originate in the powerful underpinning of their culture and values and in the experience and the traditions of their ancestors. Of course, this depends directly on the ability to adapt quickly to a constantly changing life and on the cohesion of society and its readiness to consolidate and gather together all the available forces to move forward.

Strength is always needed, always, but strength can have different qualities. At the heart of the "empire of lies" policy I spoke about at the beginning of my speech is, first and foremost, brute, straightforward force. In such cases, we say "all brawn and no brains".

We all know that the real power is in justice and truth, which is on our side. And if this is so, then it is difficult not to agree that strength and a readiness to fight are the basis of independence and sovereignty, the necessary foundation on which alone one can reliably build one's future, one's home, one's family and one's homeland.

Dear compatriots!

I am certain that the soldiers and officers of the Armed Forces of Russia, devoted to their country, will fulfil their duty professionally and courageously. I have no doubt that at all levels governmental institutions, the experts responsible for the stability of our economy, financial system and society, the leaders of our companies and the entire

Russian business community will act in a coordinated and effective manner. I count on all parliamentary parties and on civil society to take a consolidated and patriotic position.

In the end, as has always been the case in history, the fate of Russia is in the capable hands of our multi-ethnic people. This means that the decisions taken will be implemented, the goals set will be achieved and the security of our homeland will be reliably guaranteed.

I believe in your support and in the invincible strength that our love for the Fatherland gives us.

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