



## Does Nuland's Departure Matter?

### Description

**WORLD : News came last week that, after a long and storied career, Victoria Nuland resigned as undersecretary of state for political affairs at the U.S. State Department.**

Over the years she gained a reputation as a neoconservative hardliner, having, among other roles, worked as a top aide to the anti-Russia hardliner Strobe Talbott; as national security adviser to Vice President Dick Cheney; and as spokeswoman for Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Nuland's reputation also derived partly (and perhaps unfairly) from the family into which she married. So there is an understandable temptation on the part of advocates of realism and restraint to breathe a sigh of relief over her departure from government service.

**But one has to wonder: Does Nuland's figurative defenestration actually matter?**

Nuland deservedly got a lot of criticism (not least from this writer) for inserting the U.S. front and center into the geopolitical squabbles afflicting Ukraine.

It is widely believed that before, during, and after the Maidan Revolution, she steered both the Obama and Biden administrations toward a more hawkish course than was advisable.

But this perhaps inflates her influence; after all, both Obama and Biden have been plenty hawkish on their own on issues outside of Russia–Ukraine; just consider their actions in Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Palestine.

**Informed speculation as to the import of Nuland's resignation requires us to consider at least three questions:**

[Where is the](#) sausage made? In this regard, the current administration is little different from its immediate predecessors. Policy emanates from the National Security Council under the direction of the White House.

By all available accounts, Biden national security adviser Jake Sullivan is primus inter pares among the

president's men. Antony Blinken's almost sublime incompetence has required the president to send Sullivan, CIA Director William Burns, and the Israeli-American envoy Amos Hochstein as [emissaries](#) on sensitive diplomatic missions.

To appreciate the extent to which State has been downgraded, this past summer, an up-and-coming member of the foreign policy establishment, Jon Finer, was floated as a possible candidate to fill the role of deputy secretary of state, the department's number two position.

Yet, in the end, he was deemed too valuable to leave his current position of deputy national security adviser. In other words, while Nuland occupied an esteemed position within the State Department hierarchy, the real decisions are made elsewhere.

What do those who formulate policy actually think? That is relatively straightforward, since the president and his top foreign affairs adviser, Jake Sullivan, have told us repeatedly.

Appearing on Meet the Press in late February, Sullivan expressed his view that "Ukraine still has the capacity if we provide them the tools and resources they need to be able to prevail in this war.

**" And the president, in a near perfect example of what George F. Kennan once mocked as "patriotic emotionalism," used last Thursday's State of the Union Address to compare Vladimir Putin, once again, to Adolf Hitler, declaring: "Overseas, Putin of Russia is on the march, invading Ukraine and sowing chaos throughout Europe and beyond.**

If anybody in this room thinks Putin will stop at Ukraine, I assure you, he will not. But Ukraine can stop Putin if we stand with Ukraine and provide the weapons it needs to defend itself."

Does it really seem likely, then, that the president and his advisers are going to gracefully withdraw from Ukraine now that Ms. Nuland is gone?

For the sake of argument, let's stipulate that the State Department actually does figure prominently in the Biden administration's policy making process. What, then, do the appointments of Kurt Campbell (to the job Nuland coveted) and John Bass (to the job Nuland just left) mean for Ukraine policy?

Well, on the basis of their past statements and records, not terribly much. Bass, like Nuland, served as an aide to both Strobe Talbott and Dick Cheney.

And Campbell, the newly minted deputy secretary of state, just gave a speech in Vienna in which he declared, "The United States and our Allies and partners remain united in our support for Ukraine.

And, frankly, we must be vigilant and attentive to those countries that are privately or quietly supporting Russia in its war against Ukraine, and that includes North Korea and China. We will keep exposing Russia's war crimes and atrocities. We will not forget Belarus's complicity in Russia's war."

In the end, it would be a triumph of hope over experience for us to expect too much (if anything) of Victoria Nuland's departure from government service.

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