



Kissinger Tells NATO to Ignore Putin's Threats

Description

Henry Kissinger, a former U.S. secretary of state and national security adviser, said in an interview published Thursday that NATO should make Ukraine a member despite Russian President Vladimir Putin's warnings.

"For the safety of Europe, it is better to have Ukraine in NATO, where it cannot make national decisions on territorial claims," Kissinger told The Economist.

Putin has said that one of his objectives for starting the war in Ukraine was preventing the expansion of NATO on Russia's borders. That goal backfired when Finland and Sweden were motivated by the invasion of Ukraine to apply to join the military bloc.

Putin has been especially opposed to Ukraine joining NATO. During the early weeks of the invasion in 2022, Ukraine and Russia reportedly discussed Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky committing to not join NATO in exchange for a ceasefire, but that condition was dropped when peace talks were halted.



Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger speaks during the Department of State 230th Anniversary Celebration in Washington, D.C., on July 29, 2019. Kissinger said he now supports Ukraine joining NATO after previously saying he didn't think the country should be part of the alliance.

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Putin also said during a press conference shortly before the war began that Ukraine joining NATO might increase the chances of a Russia-NATO conflict that could turn nuclear.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has long supported Kyiv's admittance, though the country joining while still at war seems unlikely. Last month, he went so far as to say that Ukraine's "rightful place" is in the military alliance.

"What the Europeans are now saying is, in my view, madly dangerous," Kissinger told *The Economist*. "Because the Europeans are saying: 'We don't want them in NATO, because they're too risky. And therefore, we'll arm the hell out of them and give them the most advanced weapons.' And how can that possibly work?"

He continued, "We shouldn't end [the war] in the wrong way. Assuming the outcome is the probable outcome, that would be somewhere along the line of the status quo ante that existed [prior to February

24, 2022]. The outcome should be one in which Ukraine remains protected by Europe and doesn't become a solitary state just looking out for itself."

Newsweek reached out to Kissinger via email for comment.

Kissinger's comments to *The Economist* represent a course reversal compared to a statement he made last year.

During a September discussion with the Council on Foreign Relations, he said he "thought it was not a wise American policy to attempt to include Ukraine into NATO."

He softened that stance somewhat by the time he spoke at the World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, in January.

"Before this war, I was opposed to membership of Ukraine in NATO because I feared that it would start exactly the process that we have seen now," Kissinger said at the forum. "The idea of a neutral Ukraine under these conditions is no longer meaningful."

In his interview with *The Economist*, the retired diplomat acknowledged he had changed his mind, saying that he's "in the weird position that people say, 'He's changed his mind, now he's in favor of full membership of Ukraine in NATO.'"

Kissinger has also changed his stance in regard to Ukraine and its territory. When he spoke at the World Economic Forum last year, he said Zelensky should accept giving up land in order to reach an immediate peace deal with Putin. Now, he seems to feel Russia will walk away with the conflict with little more to show other than possibly holding on to Crimea.

"We have now armed Ukraine to a point where it will be the best-armed country and with the least strategically experienced leadership in Europe. If the war ends like it probably will, with Russia losing many of its gains, but retaining Sevastopol (Crimea's largest city), we may have a dissatisfied Russia, but also a dissatisfied Ukraine—in other words, a balance of dissatisfaction," he said in his *Economist* interview.

In another reference to Crimea, which Putin invaded and annexed in 2014, Kissinger said: "I want Russia to give up much of what it conquered in 2014, and it's not my job to negotiate a peace agreement."

As for NATO, Kissinger said Russia would also benefit from Ukraine joining the bloc.

"If I talked to Putin, I would tell him that he, too, is safer with Ukraine in NATO," he said.

by Jon Jackson

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