

The Historical Context of the Russo/Ukraine War

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What is the historical relationship between Russia, Ukraine, and the West?
How did conflicts within Ukraine, and interference by Russia, lead to the Feb. 2022 invasion?

History of Russo/Ukrain relations

- When the Russian Empire fell in 1917, a Ukrainian parliament established itself in Kyiv, but was 'swept away' by the Russian militia, German occupation, and Polish occupation
- Soviet-made Great Famine contributed to Ukrainian desire for statehood
- After Stalin died in 1953, Ukraine enjoyed a state of relative peace and cooperation with Russia — seen as a "little brother" to the Soviet Union
- 1991: Soviet Union fell, Ukraine declared independence mostly without opposition

Russia's Relationship With The West

- NATO enlargement didn't pose a military threat to Russia, but it signified Russia's shrinking influence in eastern Europe
 - Former Soviet satellites joined NATO because they were scared of Russia
- Russia toyed with the idea of joining NATO, but it was never a serious possibility
- Hostility between Russia and the West, particularly the US, goes far beyond NATO expansion

Ukraine Pre and Post Euromaiden

- Nov. 2013: Ukrainian President Yanukovich rejected a popular economic agreement with the EU and pivoted toward Russia
- Euromaidan protests and the Revolution of Dignity result in the ousting of Yanukovich
- Disarray caused by the Revolution led to the invasion of Crimea and the establishment of the DPR and LPR

Buildup to Invasion

- 2014- Russia invaded Crimea under the pretense of a civil war
- 2014-2021: Russian-backed separatists continued fighting in Donbas
- July 12, 2021- Putin released an essay about the illegitimacy of Ukraine as an independent nation and began amassing Russian troops at the Russo-Ukrainian border
- February 21, 2022- Putin recognized the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics
- February 24, 2022- Putin invaded Ukraine ("special military operation")

Conclusions

- Ukraine's desire for self-determination extends beyond its independence from the Soviet Union
- Russia's primary concern is — and always has been — global relevance
- Ukrainian institutional reforms, especially after the election of Zelensky, prevented 2022 from becoming another 2014

Recommended Readings

- Timothy Snyder. 2022. "The War in Ukraine Is a Colonial War."
- Kimberly Marten. 2017. "Reconsidering NATO Expansion: A Counterfactual Analysis of Russia and the West in the 1990s."
- Anna Reid. 2022. "Putin's War on History: The Thousand-Year Struggle Over Ukraine."