

## NATO Expansion & Russia's Annexations

	<b>Estonia</b>	War of Independence 1918-1920. Annexed 1940. Repossessed by the Soviet Union 1944.
	<b>Finland</b>	Winter War 1939-1940. Annexed Finnish Karelia.
	<b>Georgia</b>	Annexed 1921-1922. Invasion and Annexations 2008.
	<b>Hungary</b>	Invasion 1944. Invasion 1956.
[East Prussia]	<b>Kaliningrad</b>	Annexed 1945.
	<b>Latvia</b>	Annexed 1940. Repossessed by the Soviet Union 1944.
	<b>Lithuania</b>	Annexed 1940. Repossessed by the Soviet Union 1944.
[Bessarabia]	<b>Moldova</b>	Annexed 1940. Repossessed by the Soviet Union 1944.
	<b>Poland</b>	Invaded 1918-1919. Annexed (201,000 Square Kilometres) 1939. Repossessed by the Soviet Union 1944-1945.
	<b>Romania</b>	Occupied 1944.
	<b>Slovakia</b>	Occupied 1944.
	<b>Ukraine</b>	Annexed 1918. Annexations 2014. Invasion 2022.



**THE BOLSHEVIKS**, the Soviet Union, and the Russian Federation, at various times and in differing circumstances have invaded and or annexed the territory of many of Russia's neighbours. Consequently, during the Second World War Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Finland participated in the German invasion of Russia. All of the states which joined fascist attacks on the Soviet Union, with the possible exception of Finland, were authoritarian dictatorships. Finland was in a slightly different situation given that the Soviet Union had already invaded and annexed vast swathes of its territory in 1940.

Poland it should be remembered was partitioned in Autumn 1939. The Nazis took possession of the Western half, whilst the eastern half of the country was taken by Joseph Stalin. This was when 'Uncle Joe' was in alliance with Adolf Hitler's Third Reich. The annexations of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia also occurred during the twenty-two months of mutual assistance, and economic cooperation, between the Nazi Party and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. These occupations, annexations, and reoccupations, involved killings and deportations on a vast scale. None of these claims are any longer controversial, or disputed.

Following the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941, and the subsequent defeat of the Nazis in May 1945 the Soviet Union consolidated its earlier annexations in Poland, the Baltic States, and Moldova (Bessarabia). It also established its dominion throughout Eastern Europe establishing what could only be called 'client states' throughout the region. This process involved suppressing mass strikes and widespread unrest throughout East Germany in June 1953, attacks on the Soviet political police in Poland in the forties, and the Poznan protests in the mid-fifties. The Hungarian Revolution of 1956, and twelve years later, the suppression of the 'Prague Spring' by heavily armed Soviet troops, provided ample evidence of Russia's brutal dominion. The use of tanks, phosphorous shells, threatening troop movements, arbitrary beatings, executions, torture and imprisonment, was the *modus operandi* of these Stalinist dictatorships.

These are historical realities for the peoples and states of the Eastern Europe. These vivid memories told and retold by parents, grandparents, and great grandparents, have been brought back to life by the modern behaviour of the Russian Federation. The Russians chipped away at Georgia with the South Ossetian War of 1991-1992, and the War in Abkhazia 1992-1993. These *de facto* annexations of one-fifth of Georgia's land were consolidated by the Russian Federation with their invasion of the country in the Russian-Georgian War of 2008. The invasions and annexations in the Donbas, of Crimea during 2014, and the wholesale invasion of Ukraine in February this year, completes the picture. The Russian Federation with ambitions and history dating back to the founding of the Soviet Union in 1922, and even to earlier Bolshevik policy and military campaigns in Poland, Georgia, the Baltics, and Ukraine, are not reassuring to any people or state within the region.

Vladimir Putin is now arguing that on top of his need to de-Nazify and disarm Ukraine, it was necessary for him to invade the sovereign state

because the fascist, Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and his Nazi government in Kyiv were, with the help of the West, planning to attack Russia. Therefore, despite all appearances to the contrary, the Russian Federation is merely acting in self-defence, and has no aggressive intent.

The Kremlin is becoming evermore cagey and slippery about its war aims and the reasons that it gives for launching the invasion. Whatever it says, and regardless of the evident pleasure that Western military circles derive from the opportunity of testing out their weaponry against the armies of the Russian Federation, there is absolutely no evidence of Western plans to attack Russia. Despite Putin's tireless assertions that NATO's expansion constitutes a threat to Russia's security, Ukraine has at no time ever planned to invade or attack Russia.

NATO was founded in 1949. It initially had 12 members and was designed to provide defence, primarily against the Soviet Union. Greece and Turkey joined in 1952. West Germany in 1955 and Spain in 1982. This was followed in 1999 by the accession of Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic. In 2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia joined the alliance. Albania and Croatia signed-up in 2009, Montenegro in 2017, and North Macedonia in 2020.

The Russians are not imagining it – NATO is expanding and will soon be joined by Sweden and Finland. But it is clearly a defensive alliance, and at no stage in its seventy-three-year history has the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation attacked or annexed a square inch of Soviet territory, or of the lands of the Russian Federation. Consequently, NATO expansion cannot legitimately be cited as a *casus belli* by Russia or Belorussia. These dictatorships, no doubt, fear the spread of economies regulated by the rule of law, and governed by freely elected administrations.

There is indeed a threat to the regimes in Belorussia and the Russian Federation, but it is not posed by an expanding NATO, but by the bacillus of

democracy, freedom of speech, and of bourgeois civil society. The incipient threats to democracy *within the Western alliance* in Hungary and Poland, and the dictatorial regime in Ankara, are likely to find their authoritarian tendencies undermined by democratic pressures in the coming years, as the real nature of the struggle between Ukraine and Russia is revealed.

Ukraine was not a model democratic state before the invasion, it was wracked by poverty and corruption, but comedian, Volodymyr Zelensky, was elected, precisely on an anti-corruption and democratic ticket. The war has not only consolidated his position, but has confirmed for all to see the capacity of his government, and of the reorganised Ukrainian state. It has cohered the support of its population, despite the inevitable imposition of martial law, and demonstrated extraordinary organisational capacity in the face of seemingly overwhelming odds.

As long as Western military and financial aid continues to flow into Ukraine, its people and state will not merely hold on, but will prevail against the Russian onslaught. This is what all democrats wish for, and the Herculean task of post-war reconstruction to begin as soon as it is feasible.

By the first weeks of April this year Ukraine suffered war damage to housing and infrastructure estimated at six hundred billion dollars – or around three times the country's Gross Domestic Product for 2021. The resources for the rebuilding of Ukraine must begin to be planned and assembled now; billions and billions of dollars over many years will be desperately needed.

It is also necessary to consider how the West might, in the longer term, help Russia overcome its economic and political difficulties, because if more had been done by a triumphant West to help in the reorganisation of Russia's economy and society on the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, Putin's promotion of dictatorial paranoia might not have proved so lethal.

Russian lads are being slaughtered by the bushel as Ukrainian forces set fire to enemy ships, aircraft, tanks, and armoured vehicles. We need to recognise the tragedy unfolding for all concerned in Putin's "special military operation". Ukrainian civilians and soldiers are dying and being maimed alongside young men from Russia, brutalised, dismayed, and often confused, by a dictatorship that abandons their bodies on the battlefield like so much rubbish.

Yet this carnage can only be brought to an end with the defeat of Russian forces by heavily armed Ukrainian soldiers, well-supplied and supported by NATO and the West.

The cause of the present catastrophe is not NATO expansion, but the arrogant failure of the West to do anything much to assist Russia to come to terms with its history of arbitrary rule, police repression, and the ruthless domination of its neighbours. The West could have done much in this direction in the nineties, perhaps by something like a 'Marshall Plan' of sustained assistance to Russia and the former states of the Soviet Union. Let us hope that the US, France, Britain, and Germany do not make the mistake of allowing Russia to descend into chaos once again, following its inevitable defeat in Ukraine.