The Ukraine War: A Comprehensive Analysis

Short Version:

The war in Ukraine did not start with Russia's invasion in February 2022; its roots trace back to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Western policies, particularly NATO's eastward expansion, played a significant role in escalating tensions with Russia. Despite Moscow's attempts to secure a place within a new European security framework, the West consistently dismissed Russia's security concerns, leading to deep mistrust. Western narratives framing Ukraine as defending democracy against Russian aggression mirror rhetoric used to justify past conflicts, such as in Afghanistan. De-escalation and diplomatic solutions are critical to preventing further destabilization in Europe, while the USA reaps strategic benefits from the ongoing conflict. Recognizing Russia's historical fears and understanding NATO's expansion are crucial to grasping the full dynamics of this war.

Key Points:

- The war's origins lie in post-Soviet transition and NATO's expansion.
- Russia's security concerns have been repeatedly dismissed, fuelling mistrust.
- Western narratives of defending democracy echo rhetoric from past conflicts.
- Diplomacy and détente, not militarization, are needed to avoid further escalation.
- The USA benefits strategically while Europe risks becoming the battleground.

For the full version, read on (approximate read time: 15–20 minutes).

Democracies are the most humane way to organise coexistence, but one must not forget that a functioning democracy relies on people being educated and comprehensively informed. About the current war in Ukraine, this does not start with the Russian attack in February 2022 but much earlier, essentially it begins with the dissolution of the Soviet Union.

This is a revealing example of the use of language. In the West, we often speak of the "collapse" of the Soviet Union. However, it was more of a politically driven dissolution. Under the leadership of Mikhail Gorbachev, the Soviet Union opened to the West in an unprecedented way. The scale of change was immense. Hopes and expectations were enormous, but the political West did not

significantly acknowledge this opening. There were essentially three revolutions that Russia had to manage.

The first revolution was the transition from a planned economy to a market economy. It sounds simple, but it was not. For Russia, in addition to its size, it was particularly challenging because the Russian economy was not ruined by the planned economy—it was created by it. That is a significant difference. The challenge of transitioning from this deeply entrenched planned economy to a market-driven system resulted in chaos, corruption, and the rise of oligarchs. The social and economic upheaval was immense.

The second revolution was the transition from the dictatorship of the Communist Party to constitutional governance. The Soviet constitution had guaranteed the Communist Party's control, so major reforms were required. The transition to a new governance system led to widespread political instability, chaos, and confusion.

The third revolution was the transition from the Soviet Union to a nation-state. This shift was not recognised by the West as a problem for Russia. While the other states that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union were given a relatively unburdened new beginning by the West, Russia was held responsible for the Soviet Union's crimes and violations. This attitude was significant because it laid the groundwork for reviving old enmities and seeing Russia as the villain. Even Stalin, who was Georgian, continues to be perceived as a Russian figure.

Then came Boris Yeltsin, initially seen as a beacon of hope by both the West and Russia. However, Russia soon descended into a chaotic form of capitalism. Corruption and instability ran rampant. Through dubious privatisations of key industries, Yeltsin facilitated the rise of oligarchs. His administration oversaw an unprecedented sell-off of the country's assets. Not only did Russian oligarchs benefit, but so did the West, and to a significant extent. The ideals of democratisation and liberalisation, which had sounded promising, turned into chaos for the Russian people. These concepts became permanently damaged in the minds of many. In 1993, Yeltsin even ordered the shelling of the Russian parliament—a deeply undemocratic act that, rather than being condemned by the West, was celebrated because it aligned with Western interests.

In this chaotic environment, **Vladimir Putin** emerged. Young, healthy, and athletic, Putin restored a sense of order and self-confidence to Russia. Rather than seizing the opportunity to build a common European house, a vision that Gorbachev had laid out, the West remained fixated on the fact that Putin had a KGB background. However, by the late 1980s, the KGB had confronted its criminal past. Furthermore, during the failed [coup attempt](#) by Communist hardliners in 1991, Putin showed his commitment to maintaining order when it was far from certain that the coup would fail.

During his first term, Putin made numerous offers of cooperation to the West, all of which were either ignored or rejected. This was not a trivial matter but a fundamental experience that shaped his future behaviour. Putin also placed great importance on fostering a strong civil society in his early years, but these efforts were either dismissed or ridiculed in the West.

This raises a critical question: Is Russia pursuing imperialistic ambitions, or is it concerned with a functioning security architecture that includes Russia? This debate must be addressed

analytically, not ideologically. Even **NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg**, who is known for his firm stance on Russia, stated that Russia does not pose a threat. Similar sentiments can be found in various US strategy papers. So why the continued scaremongering?

For Western financial and military support to Ukraine to continue, the narrative of a looming Russian threat must be maintained. The claim that our freedom and democracy are being defended in Ukraine is no more accurate now than it was during the war in Afghanistan, when similar claims were made about defending freedom in the Hindu Kush. History shows that creating a friend-enemy narrative and demonising opponents prepares societies for war.

A chronological review of Russian statements and policies shows that Moscow is primarily concerned with securing an appropriate place in a new security architecture. This need arose after the East-West confrontation seemed to have ended in the late 1980s. After the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, NATO should have undergone sensible restructuring. There were even plans that did not exclude the possibility of Russia joining NATO. But NATO did not restructure; instead, it expanded eastward. Although a NATO-Russia Council was established, it was more of a cosmetic gesture than a genuine offer of equal participation. NATO's eastward expansion is widely considered one of the greatest strategic mistakes since World War II. Long-serving German Foreign Minister **Hans-Dietrich Genscher** shared this view, as did **George Kennan**, the architect of America's containment policy, who described NATO's expansion as a "tragic mistake."

The breaking point came when NATO sought to make Ukraine a member, a country of profound historical and emotional significance to Russia. Russia's security concerns were dismissed as merely aggressive, despite evidence indicating that the West viewed the potential breakup of Russia and regime change in Moscow as favourable objectives.

One key difference between Russia and the US lies in geography. The US is flanked by oceans to the east and west, with Canada as a NATO ally to the north and Mexico to the south, both of which pose no significant security threats. Russia, by contrast, stretches across a vast landmass with over 22,000 km of land borders, many of which are difficult to defend. Russia has 14 neighbouring countries, not just two, and some of these relationships are severely strained. From a security standpoint, this creates a qualitatively different challenge, naturally leading to heightened sensitivities for Russia.

What often goes unacknowledged are Russia's historically developed fears. We are accustomed to acknowledging the historical fears of Poland and the Baltic states, but Russia's own fears are often overlooked. In 1904, Russia was attacked by Japan from the east. During World War I, German troops occupied large parts of Russia. The **Treaty of Brest-Litovsk** in 1917 imposed painful territorial losses on Russia. During the subsequent Russian Civil Wars, Western countries, led by **France and Great Britain**, intervened. After World War I, **Poland** tried to exploit Russia's weakness by expanding its territories eastward, beyond the line that was supposed to form Poland's eastern border during peace negotiations. Stalin reclaimed these annexed territories in 1939.

The **German invasion of 1941**, with its immeasurable suffering and cruelty, remains deeply ingrained in Russia's national consciousness, as does **Napoleon's invasion in 1812**. Russian

fears of external threats are grounded in real historical experiences, in stark contrast to the US's situation. Due to its geographical position and history, Russia views NATO's presence and the proximity of US military bases with deep suspicion. Russia operates 11 military bases outside its borders, 9 of which are in close proximity to Russia, while the US operates nearly 800 military bases in over 70 countries. So, who is threatening whom?

Whether the threat is real or perceived, the result is the same: the destruction of the foundations of peaceful coexistence and cooperation. Trust, the basic requirement for such coexistence, is eroding. Mutual distrust is now greater than ever. Statements like those from **Angela Merkel**, who admitted that the **Minsk agreements** were merely intended to give Ukraine time to strengthen its defences, are devastating. If agreements are not made in good faith, why make them at all?

From a Russian perspective, it was not Moscow but the West that sought to reshape the world order. The **Kosovo War in 1998** and the **Iraq War in 2003** were both led by the US without United Nations Security Council approval, bypassing international rules. Furthermore, the West has dismantled nearly all of the significant disarmament treaties. Consider the **INF Treaty**, which succeeded in abolishing an entire category of weapons. Yet, it was the US, not Russia, that withdrew from this treaty.

To draw the connection to Ukraine, the US has been deeply involved in Ukrainian affairs for years, spending enormous sums to influence elections and finance so-called educational programs aimed at promoting NATO membership to Ukrainians. For a long time, there was no majority support for NATO in Ukraine, and the country's neutral status was enshrined in its constitution. Nevertheless, Ukraine became the site of large-scale NATO manoeuvres, and the US systematically increased reconnaissance flights along the Ukrainian-Russian border. According to **The New York Times**, the US has operated 12 secret **CIA** bases on the Ukrainian-Russian border for about eight years, and the involvement of American intelligence agencies is said to have played a key role in **Vladimir Putin's** decision to invade Ukraine in February 2022. Moscow fears that Ukraine could become a springboard for operations against Russia, supported by the **CIA, MI6**, and other Western intelligence agencies.

Before the invasion, Putin formally requested security guarantees, but these requests were ignored. The situation recalls the dynamics of the Cold War, where the balance of terror relied on maintaining second-strike capability. This capability deters a potential aggressor from launching a first strike, as they must expect retaliation. Today, however, the political West seems determined to upset this balance.

International treaties emphasise that one nation's security should not come at the expense of another's insecurity. Yet the NATO-Russia Council and other crisis communication forums have been suspended or abolished. Détente politicians have been blamed for Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with many now retracting their earlier positions and declaring their policies mistakes. However, it was not the policy of détente that led to this situation but the failure to fully implement it. A rational, fact-based debate is needed, not one where dissenting opinions are dismissed as disinformation or Russian propaganda.

We must look forward and identify interests clearly. Peaceful politics is about balancing interests, not morality. Even **Kamala Harris**, the US Vice President, stated at the Munich Security Conference that American engagement in Europe is not out of charity but because it is in the US's strategic interest. The EU must begin to define its own interests. While some may align with the US, significant differences must be acknowledged. It is in the EU's interest to maintain good relations with Russia, as the two are natural economic partners. However, this is not in the US's interest. For over a century, US strategic documents have viewed the prospect of a unified and prosperous Eurasia as the primary threat to US dominance.

China plays a key role in this dynamic. From the US perspective, the risk of close EU-China cooperation has been averted for now. The beneficiaries of the current situation are the US and the arms industry. The US has also succeeded in selling its environmentally harmful and expensive fracking gas to Europe, while Russian gas continues to flow into Europe indirectly at much higher prices, with Germany's energy costs threatening its businesses.

The tragedy of Ukraine lies not only in the dead, injured, traumatised, and the destruction of the country but also in the fact that a more intelligent policy could have prevented this war. **Brazilian President Lula da Silva** noted that while Russia bears responsibility for starting the war, the US and Europe have since promoted a proxy war. Four weeks into the war, **Naftali Bennett**, the then-Israeli Prime Minister, attempted to mediate negotiations in Istanbul. These talks showed promise, particularly regarding Crimea, but the Western community of states was not interested in ending the war. At the **NATO Special Summit in Brussels on March 24, 2022**, **British Prime Minister Boris Johnson** stressed his support for Ukraine, later reaffirming it directly to **President Volodymyr Zelensky** during his visit to Kyiv on April 9, 2022. **US Secretary of Defence Lloyd Austin** stated that the West must take the opportunity to permanently weaken Russia militarily and economically through this war.

As a result, Ukraine's earlier diplomatic efforts were rendered obsolete. Ukraine has continued to request more military aid, but the reality is that many Ukrainians feel they are being sacrificed for geopolitical interests. Those who truly wish to help Ukraine must work towards ending the war. The course of the war has been difficult for Ukraine, with the **Kursk offensive** stalling after initial gains. **Russian forces** have advanced in the Donbas region, with the strategically important city of **Pokrovsk** nearly captured. Reports indicate that Ukrainian resistance is weakening, with severe personnel and equipment losses, particularly in the south-east and Kursk regions.

The British Times and **The Economist** corroborate this analysis. Ukraine has faced massive Russian air strikes on infrastructure, including power supplies and heating plants. The damage is often repaired only to be destroyed again. **Ukraine's Ministry of Defence** acknowledges that only about a quarter of Russian missiles and two-thirds of drones are intercepted. Ukraine needs success stories to maintain Western support, but the situation is becoming increasingly desperate. **Zelensky** continues to attempt to draw NATO into the conflict.

Starting in 2017 under the Trump administration, the US began constructing a military task force structure, and this is a critical point. By April 13, 2021—long before Russia's attack on Ukraine—preparations were well underway. At a **NATO summit in Washington**, it was announced that **the US and Germany** would deploy long-range fire capabilities in Germany by 2026 to show

their commitment to NATO and European defence. This was intended to lead to the longer-term stationing of advanced weaponry, including **SM-6, Tomahawk cruise missiles, and hypersonic weapons** with longer ranges than existing systems in Europe.

Hypersonic weapons, capable of reaching speeds 17 times faster than sound, drastically reduce the warning time for a response. What are the strategic implications? Does Moscow perceive this as a defensive measure by the West or as preparation for a surprise attack? In the current tense climate, it would be logical for Moscow to consider taking preventive action. Whether such action is preventive or retaliatory, it would target densely populated areas in Germany. It's hard to see how such developments could increase European security, and it's surprising that this hasn't sparked widespread protests, given the potential risks. In other words, this was a unilateral decision by the US, made well before Russia's invasion of Ukraine, leveraging the fear of Putin to stifle public discourse. From Moscow's perspective, the strategic implications of these actions become much clearer.

According to the Scientific Service of the German Bundestag, supplying weapons does not automatically make a country a party to the war, but training soldiers does. By the end of last year, around 8,000 Ukrainian soldiers had already undergone training with EU armed forces. At this point, it no longer matters whether we consider ourselves a party to the war; what matters is how Moscow perceives our actions. The situation could spiral out of control, and it doesn't help when those calling for diplomacy are accused of serving Moscow's interests.

It is in the EU's own interest to develop de-escalation strategies and plan for the future. However, these efforts are not coming from the EU but rather from China, African states, and Brazil. If the situation escalates, those distant nations will remain unaffected while Germany and its neighbours become the battleground—not Brazil, China, or the USA.

We must revive the idea of **détente** and reflect on its history. Since the late 1960s, **NATO** followed a dual strategy of military strength and cooperation, détente, and disarmament at a political level. Today, however, the language has shifted from "security" to "deterrence," a term that implies aggression rather than defence. Dialogue becomes meaningless when the other side's interests are dismissed as illegitimate from the outset.

When it comes to language, we must be mindful of how it is used in political discourse. Double standards in word choice are pervasive, whether in discussions about Russia-Ukraine or broader international affairs. For example, reports often describe the targeted killings of **Hamas** or **Hezbollah** leaders as being "neutralised" rather than "killed" or "murdered." These sanitised terms obscure the violence involved.

Similarly, terms like "the illegal war of aggression against Ukraine" are carefully applied in line with international law. But why is such precision not used consistently? The **Israeli-occupied Golan Heights**, which is also illegal under international law, is rarely described as such. This inconsistency in language reflects broader political dynamics and the need for clarity in public discourse.

The younger generation, which has largely taken peace for granted, is so focused on climate

change that the issue of war and peace has been side-lined. But it should be clear to everyone that if peace fails—particularly with nuclear weapons in play—then the climate becomes tragically irrelevant.

In conclusion, it is difficult to remain optimistic when discussing such matters, but it is vital not to hide one's opinion, even if uncomfortable. Democracy thrives on open debate, and we must ensure that information remains free from ideological constraints. Freedom of speech is only valuable when accompanied by a culture of debate. We owe it to our democratic system to keep that culture alive.