

# The Russo-Ukrainian War of 2022: How Did International War Make a Comeback in Europe?

Frank Cohen, Associate Professor of Political Science, Franklin Pierce University

603-899-4289 and [cohenf@franklinpiercedu](mailto:cohenf@franklinpiercedu)

## Pax Americana and post-Cold-War order

Pax Americana ([UN Charter on sovereignty, 1945](#)) after WWII ushered in an unprecedented era of peace and prosperity to Western Europe amidst the Cold War.

Life expectancy: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.DYN.LE00.IN>

Wealth: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>

Trade: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NE.TRD.GNFS.ZS>

The collapse of the Berlin Wall and the Soviet Union and, accordingly, Cold War victory for the West, ushered in a massive wave of democratization and market reforms in Eastern Europe. Peace, prosperity, plus human rights.

European integration, NATO expansion, and free trade brought about a post-Cold War order. Democracy > autocracy but autocracy made a comeback with the rise of China, able to reconcile free market capitalism with authoritarian command of its own market economy and Communist Party control of politics.

## The end of the post-Cold-War order

Russia's invasion of Ukraine marks the greatest challenge to, if not the end of, this sense of order, most significantly between Russia and its western border nations. Where Putin seeks redress for what he called the "[greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the \[20th\] century](#)." Said this in 2005, following the swift, voluntary and eager efforts of the former Soviet Baltic republics and former Warsaw Pact nations to join the European Union and NATO.

Post-Cold War order of unchallenged European integration, NATO expansion, and of relatively peace and trade with Russia's over.

We now have the "unimaginable": [Major international war in Europe \(by the established definition in political science scholarship\)](#)

[Balkan wars](#) of early 1990s was more of a civil war than an international war over the division of Yugoslavia into sovereign states. NATO's intervention with no response from Russia was evidence of the solidification of the post-Cold War order.

## A purely defensive response by Russia?

To what degree is this war a defensive response by Russia to NATO expansion and European integration?

[Soviet \(Russia\) invasion of Hungary of the 1950s](#)

[Soviet \(Russia\) invasion of Czechoslovakia in the 1960s](#)

[Soviet \(Russia\) invasion of Afghanistan in the 1970s](#)

[Russian airstrikes on Georgia in 2008](#)

[2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia](#)

NATO forces have never fired back

The neutrals and China's position on the conflict

[Neutral nations of Sweden, Finland deliberating NATO](#) membership after 70-80 years of neutrality

[Switzerland, over 200 years since Congress of Vienna, breaking neutrality to enforce anti-Russian sanctions](#)

China's [non-veto in the UN Security Council](#) and its [abstention in the UN General Assembly](#)

## Russian security needs. An imperial (expansionist) urge?

[The U.S. allows its allies to determine the conditions under which West Germany enters NATO](#)

The difference between American and Soviet/Russian alliances highlighted by the contrast between the chosen departures of France and Hungary from, respectively, NATO and Warsaw Pact

Hungary's attempted departure from WP in 1956 was met with a brutal and swift invasion

[France's actual departure from its military role in NATO was mild in comparison. Met with shock, regret,](#)

Three key episodes showing the difference between American and Russian foreign policy practice

The democratizations of Germany and Japan by way of military occupation

[The management of the NATO alliance: A joint venture. Europeans proposed it and the U.S. permitted them influence over its structure and strategies](#)

[The encouragement of European integration. Washington's insistence on European cooperation in return of economic and military assistance.](#)

Warsaw Pact was a completely centripetal arrangement with Moscow at the center. Everything routed through Moscow like a classic empire. Of course, the Baltic states were simply annexed by force into the Soviet Union. Classic empire

Warsaw Pact "allies" and former Soviet republics head for the exits in the absence of Soviet coercion and rushed into the arms of NATO and European integration. Why? Maybe it's a collective wisdom about Russian ambitions.

The Russians knew of no way to deal with independent thinking other than to smother it. For Stalin, the slightest signs of autonomy were treason. Complete subservience was demanded. I think now that Putin leveraged the oligarchs and Russian natural resources into a powerful enough state, it's more of the same.