

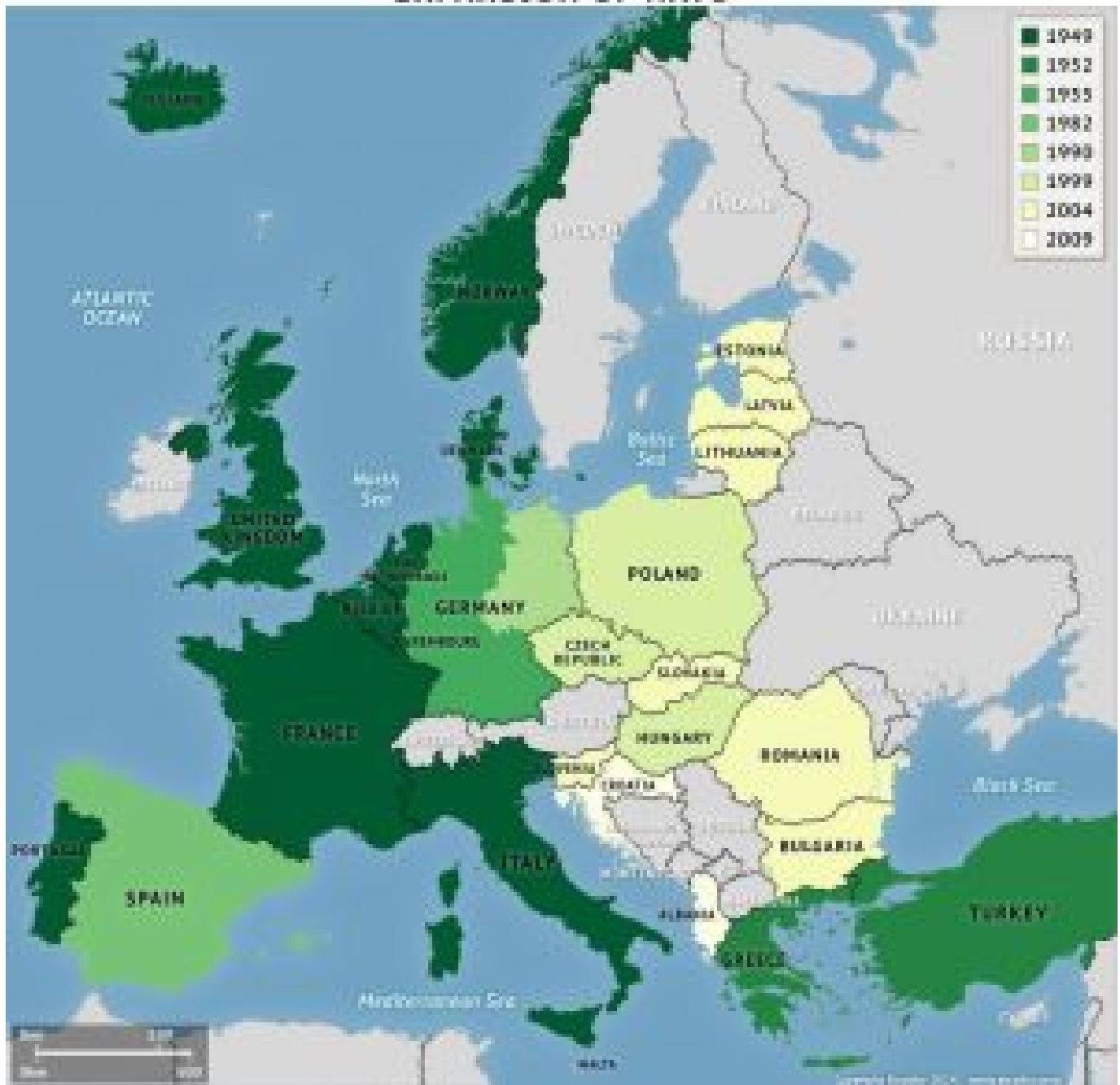


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Is Russia imperialist?

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EXPANSION OF NATO



For socialists, the fundamental understanding of imperialism goes back to World War I and is found in V.I. Lenin's pamphlet "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism."

Imperialism is not a policy chosen by one government and dropped by another. Imperialism is a system.

The first world war was the outcome of imperialism, Lenin wrote, an imperialist war waged for the political and economic exploitation of the world, export markets, sources of raw material, spheres of capital investment, etc. The imperialist powers raised huge armies and navies, not only to forcibly subjugate oppressed people in the colonies but to wage war against other imperialist countries competing for control.

According to Lenin, the world was already divided among the great capitalist powers when he wrote “Imperialism” in 1916. The war resulted from inter-imperialist competition to redivide the world.

The wars since WWI have changed circumstances. And World War II signaled a turning point in world imperialist relations. The United States emerged from WWII as the world’s most powerful imperialist country, gaining control of former European empires in Asia and Africa.

The overturn of the socialist Soviet Union in 1991 and the breakup of the Soviet republics into individual nation-states dismantled a planned economy, resulting in underdeveloped capitalist economies. Out of these ruins, an imperialist Russia has not suddenly, almost magically, appeared.

Lenin thought that imperialism had a few characteristics, including the rise of finance capital and the export of capital, not just commodities. The U.S., for example, exports not just commodities but capital — mostly in the form of loans or investments. U.S. banks are at the center of world commerce.

Russia’s economy is almost neocolonial

Today, capitalist Russia ranks 55th in [GDP \(PPP\) per capita](#) (a measure of a

country's economic output per person adjusted for the cost of living). Russia's economy is almost neocolonial, heavily dependent on the export of raw materials like oil, natural gas, and metals. Russia is currently the world's largest exporter of wheat and a major exporter of other grains like barley and corn.

This is the classic economic relationship of a colony to imperialist finance capital. In the list of the top 50 banks in the world, not one is Russian. The ruble is not a currency of trade. Russia does not export capital.

During the Soviet period, Russia and the other republics that formed the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics made remarkable industrial progress. Indeed, between 1921 and 1988, there were no years of negative economic growth — no recessions — except for the World War II years.

The Soviet economy fell into recession only in 1989 as the Gorbachev government began to dismantle the planned economy.

Under Gorbachev and then even more drastically under the openly anti-communist, anti-socialist government of Boris Yeltsin in the Russian Federal Republic and in the new non-Russian former Soviet republics, including Ukraine, the socialist industry was dismantled.

Yeltsin finished the job of dismantling the Soviet economy that Gorbachev began. The years of Yeltsin are now remembered as perhaps the worst period in Russia's 1,000-year history. This was the greatest economic disaster any country has seen in modern times, in war or peace.

Ukraine had the second-largest economy in the USSR. "Independent" Ukraine is now the poorest country in Europe. By the end of 2020, some 45% of the population was in the poor category, according to a study by the Ptukha Institute.

Putin's role

Putin, Yeltsin's prime minister and chosen successor, took a more protectionist approach, unlike Yeltsin and Gorbachev, who had fawned on the West.

Does that mean Putin moved away from Yeltsin's and Gorbachev's policies, which had oriented the economy to exporting raw materials? Did Putin adopt a policy of industrialization?

Under Putin, there has been little growth in Russia's manufacturing production that the "perestroika" reforms had demolished. Manufacturing is the foundation of any successful modern economy. Yet, under Putin, Russia continues mainly as an exporter of raw materials and grains. Manufacturing is a small part of Russia's GDP.

Russia now accounts for about 6% of the global aluminum supply, 3.5% of the copper supply, and 4% of the cobalt supply. Russia is also the world's largest crude oil producer and the second-largest dry natural gas producer after the U.S.

Russia is in the top 10 exporters of grain crops, including barley, corn, rye, oats and especially wheat. From 2017 to 2019, it was the biggest exporter of wheat, accounting for about 20% of the world market.

Russia is a capitalist state, but that does not make it imperialist. Not all capitalist countries are imperialist nations. For example, Indonesia is a capitalist country with an economy (Purchasing Power Parity — PPP) slightly larger than Russia's, but is Indonesia an imperialist or exploited country? Saying that it is capitalist is not enough to know the answer.

Lenin named five characteristics of imperialism: concentration of production into monopoly; merging of bank capital with industrial capital, creating finance capital; export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities; formation of international monopolist capitalist associations that share the world among themselves; and territorial division of the world among the biggest capitalist powers.

The role of finance capital and the export of capital may be most important. The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have taken over the economies of the world. The dollar (not gold) is the currency of world trade. Today, almost every country is capitalist, and most of those are exploited by imperialism, by finance capital.

Indonesia is capitalist but not imperialist. Russia, too, is an exploited country in relation to imperialism, like Indonesia.

NATO targets Russia

Russia is the primary provider of gas and oil to much of Europe. The European Union imports 40% of its gas from Russia, putting Russia in competition with the U.S., the biggest producer of gas in the world.

The U.S. has been on a drive to control the world market in oil and gas. This can be seen in its attacks, actual acts of war (sanctions) against Iran and Venezuela, as well as its war on Iraq. These are countries that had sought national sovereignty over oil and gas.

Russia, too, has been a target, especially its Nord Stream 2 pipeline, but not just for that.

NATO is the U.S.-commanded military alliance established in 1949 as a military force aimed against the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist states. After the overturn of the Soviet Union, NATO was expanded to almost every country in Eastern Europe to lock in capitalist retrenchment in the formerly socialist countries.

Look at a map of NATO's expansion since the breakup of the USSR. The countries put under NATO include Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Croatia, Albania, Romania, Bulgaria, Montenegro,

North Macedonia.

In 2008, NATO put the inclusion of Ukraine and Georgia, both bordering Russia, on the table.

The threatened expansion of NATO's military force to Ukraine, on the border of Russia, along with NATO naval operations in the Black Sea, are direct provocations aimed at Russia. As Leon Panetta — White House Chief of Staff under Bill Clinton, CIA Director and Secretary of Defense under Barack Obama — explained, the conflict in Ukraine is a NATO “proxy war” against Russia.

NATO war on Yugoslavia

Despite the war propaganda that's presented as news these days, the first war in Europe since World War II didn't just start. That war was launched by the U.S. and NATO against Yugoslavia in 1999.

For 78 days, from March 24 to June 10, 1999, U.S. and NATO bombers hit Belgrade, Pristina in Kosovo, Podgorica in Montenegro, and several other cities. On the first day, more than 20 buildings in Belgrade were leveled.

Much of the U.S./NATO bombing hit civilian targets. A passenger train was bombed. Cruise missiles could be seen flying down the streets. The U.S. directly bombed the Embassy of the People's Republic of China in Belgrade, killing three Chinese reporters.

Russia understood the lesson of Yugoslavia and told the U.S. and NATO “no” to expansion to Ukraine and Georgia on Russia's borders – 5 minutes by missile to Moscow.

The former U.S. ambassador to Russia, William J. Burns, who is now director of the CIA, said in a February 2008 embassy cable that Ukraine joining NATO constituted a

security threat for Russia. Burns noted that to push for this “could potentially split the country [Ukraine] in two, leading to violence or even, some claim, civil war, which would force Russia to decide whether to intervene.”

The U.S. never withdrew the proposal to include Ukraine.

Maidan coup

In Ukraine, the so-called Maidan coup in 2014 that was openly supported and financed by the U.S. put in a government that made NATO membership a policy mandate.

The U.S. even picked the prime minister for the coup regime.

In a leaked phone conversation from 2014, Victoria Nuland, then the Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs at the U.S. Department of State, was heard discussing the political situation in Ukraine with the U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine, Geoffrey Pyatt. In the conversation, Nuland said, “Yats is the guy.” When Pyatt asked about the EU’s role, Nuland responded, “F**k the EU.”

Arseniy Yatsenyuk (Yats) became Prime Minister of the 2014 coup regime in Ukraine.

When Volodymyr Zelensky was made president in 2019, he repeatedly requested Ukraine’s entrance into NATO. On Feb. 19, 2022 — five days before Russia’s special military operation — at the Munich Security Conference, Zelensky demanded, once again, entry to NATO.

Many Ukrainians resisted the Maidan coup, particularly in the working class. In the Maidan civil war, fascist gangs emerged as a force for the coup. Resistance to the coup was strongest in the eastern section of the country. In Odessa, a neo-Nazi pro-Maidan gang targeted the Odessa House of Trade Unions, near the center of the

resistance. The building was firebombed and at least 46 anti-fascists and labor activists were burned alive.

The resistance to the Maidan coup has continued from 2014 to today. The independent Donetsk People's Republic and Lugansk People's Republic were created when the people there voted overwhelmingly (89% and 96%) to secede from the Maidan regime. They have been subjected to continuous attack since then, particularly by the Ukrainian National Guard's Azov regiment, a neo-Nazi stormtrooper-like operation. More than 14,000 were killed in Ukraine's war on Donetsk and Lugansk before Russia's special military operation to stop the neo-Nazi war on these independent republics.

As U.S. Ambassador Burns predicted, Russia was pushed into a corner by the unrelenting drive for NATO entry to Ukraine as well as the growing buildup of neo-Nazi militias and the war on Donetsk and Lugansk. Ukraine had promised in the Minsk agreements it signed in 2014 and 2015 that there would be a ceasefire, an end to all fighting, withdrawal of heavy weapons, the release of prisoners of war, and the recognition of self-government in Donetsk and Lugansk. Ukraine fulfilled none of these promises.

Putin may not be an anti-imperialist leader, but the Russian military operation to "demilitarize and denazify" Ukraine and recognize the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic is a move against imperialism, U.S. and NATO imperialism.

War and Lenin in the 21st century

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