

Why Putin Took Military Action

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Important analysis and historical review by Joe Lauria

Global Research does not support Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. A bilateral Peace Agreement is required.

Russia says it has no intentions of controlling Ukraine and its military operation is only to “demilitarize” and “de-Nazify” Ukraine in an action taken after 30 years of the U.S. pushing Russia too far, writes Joe Lauria.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in a TV address Thursday morning that the goal of Russia’s military operation was not to take control of Ukraine, but to “demilitarize” and “de-Nazify” the country. Moments after he spoke, explosions were heard in several Ukrainian cities.

The Russian Defense Ministry said these were “precision” attacks against Ukrainian military installations and that civilians were not being targeted. It said Ukraine’s air force on the ground and its air defenses had been destroyed.

The Ukrainian government, which declared a state of emergency and broke off diplomatic relations with Russia, said an invasion was underway and that Russia had landed forces at the port city of Odessa, on Ukraine’s Black Sea coast, as well as entering from Belarus in the north. It [said](#) it had killed 50 Russian troops and shot down six Russian fighter jets, which Russia denied.

Putin said one of the operation’s aims was to arrest certain people in Ukraine, likely the neo-Nazis who burned dozens of unarmed people alive in a building in Odessa in 2014. In his speech Monday, Putin said Moscow knows who they are. Russia said it aims to destroy neo-Nazi brigades, such as Right Sector and the Azov Battalion.

Putin said the aim was not to occupy Ukraine, but he gave no indication when Russia might

leave. It could be over quickly if Russia's objectives are met. But war has its own logic and often lays waste to military plans.

The BBC reported that according to Ukrainian authorities 50 civilians have been killed so far. President Joe Biden is certain how this will turn out.

"President Putin has chosen a premeditated war that will bring a catastrophic loss of life and human suffering," Biden said Wednesday night. "Russia alone is responsible for the death and destruction this attack will bring, and the United States and its allies and partners will respond in a united and decisive way. The world will hold Russia accountable."

Diminishing Russia

Biden is to make a televised address on Thursday after he coordinates a response to Russia's military action in Ukraine with the G7 and NATO. Biden said he will announce a new package of economic sanctions against Russia, in addition to those imposed on Monday, but reiterated that U.S. and NATO forces would not become involved. According to TASS, Russia's news agency, the EU [said](#) it intends to weaken "Russia's economic base and the country's capacity to modernize."

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson even hinted at British military involvement.

"Our mission is clear," he said. "Diplomatically, politically, economically and eventually militarily this hideous and barbaric venture of Vladimir Putin must end in failure."

In a White House readout after the last phone call between Biden and Putin this month, Biden said Russia would be "diminished" if it invades, a longstanding U.S. goal.

In addition to the sanctions, Russia has faced widespread condemnation from most of the world, expressed at United Nations meetings this week, including an emergency session of the Security Council on Wednesday night. Several nations spoke in melodramatic tones about the military operation changing global security. Many of those nations supported the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

On Monday, Putin said he would send Russian "peacekeepers" into Lugansk and Donetsk, which he recognized as states independent from Ukraine. The West denounced it as an invasion, triggering the first round of sanctions against Russia. Putin said the Russian troops were sent in to protect ethnic Russians, many of whom have now fled for safety over the border to Russia.

Combat in Donbass

Fierce fighting was reported Thursday along the line of separation between Ukrainian forces and militias from Donetsk and Lugansk. It is not clear to what extent Russian forces are taking part in the Donbass battle and if the aim is to capture all of the two breakaway provinces.

Both had voted for independence from Ukraine in 2014 after a coup overthrew the elected president Viktor Yanukovych. The new Ukrainian government then launched a war against the provinces to crush their bid for independence, a war that is still going on eight years later at the cost of 14,000 lives.

Neo-Nazi groups, such as Right Sector and the Azov Battalion, who revere the World War II Ukrainian fascist leader Stepan Bandera, took part in the coup as well as in the ongoing war against Lugansk and Donetsk.

A Matter of 'Life or Death'

The Russian military action follows demands made in December by Russia to the U.S. and NATO in the form of treaty proposals that would require Ukraine and Georgia not to join NATO; U.S. missiles in Poland and Romania to be removed; and NATO deployments to Eastern Europe reversed. The U.S. and NATO rejected the proposals and instead sent more NATO forces to Eastern Europe and have been heavily arming Ukraine.

In his address on Thursday morning, Putin said the military operation he was launching was a “question of life or death” for Russia, referring to NATO’s expansion east since the late 1990s. He said:

“For the United States and its allies, it is a policy of containing Russia, with obvious geopolitical dividends. For our country, it is a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a nation. This is not an exaggeration; this is a fact. It is not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and to its sovereignty. It is the red line which we have spoken about on numerous occasions. They have crossed it.”

Detailed Explanation of Causes and Aims of Operation



Silets Sokalskyi Lvivska battlefield monument in Ukraine of Soviets soldiers against Nazi invaders.
(Viacheslav Galievskyi/Wikimedia Commons)

In his 3,350-word [speech](#), Putin laid out in full detail the reasons he decided to take military

action and what he hopes it will achieve. The speech is a devastating critique of U.S. policy toward Russia over the past 30 years, which no doubt will fall on deaf ears in Washington.

Western media is so far ignoring the speech or superficially dismissing it. But it has to be carefully studied if anyone is interested in understanding why Russia launched this military operation. Just calling Putin “Hitler,” as Nancy Pelosi did Wednesday night, won’t do.

Hitler in fact features in Putin’s address. For instance, addressing the Ukrainian military, Putin said:

“Your fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers did not fight the Nazi occupiers and did not defend our common Motherland to allow today’s neo-Nazis to seize power in Ukraine. You swore the oath of allegiance to the Ukrainian people and not to the junta, the people’s adversary which is plundering Ukraine and humiliating the Ukrainian people.”

He linked the Nazis’ invasion of Russia to NATO’s threat today, saying this time there would be no appeasement:

“Of course, this situation begs a question: what next, what are we to expect? If history is any guide, we know that in 1940 and early 1941 the Soviet Union went to great lengths to prevent war or at least delay its outbreak. To this end, the USSR sought not to provoke the potential aggressor until the very end by refraining or postponing the most urgent and obvious preparations it had to make to defend itself from an imminent attack. When it finally acted, it was too late.

As a result, the country was not prepared to counter the invasion by Nazi Germany, which attacked our Motherland on June 22, 1941, without declaring war. The country stopped the enemy and went on to defeat it, but this came at a tremendous cost. The attempt to appease the aggressor ahead of the Great Patriotic War proved to be a mistake which came at a high cost for our people. In the first months after the hostilities broke out, we lost vast territories of strategic importance, as well as millions of lives. We will not make this mistake the second time. We have no right to do so.”

Putin said the existential threat from NATO’s expansion was the main reason for military action:

“Our biggest concerns and worries, [are] the fundamental threats which irresponsible Western politicians created for Russia consistently, rudely and unceremoniously from year to year. I am referring to the eastward expansion of NATO, which is moving its military infrastructure ever closer to the Russian border.

It is a fact that over the past 30 years we have been patiently trying to come to an agreement with the leading NATO countries regarding the principles of equal and indivisible security in Europe. In response to our proposals, we invariably faced either cynical deception and lies or attempts at pressure and blackmail, while the North Atlantic alliance continued to expand despite our protests and concerns. Its military machine is moving and, as I said, is approaching our very border.

Why is this happening? Where did this insolent manner of talking down from the height of their exceptionalism, infallibility and all-permissiveness come from? What is the explanation for this contemptuous and disdainful attitude to our interests and

absolutely legitimate demands?”

Putin called the Americans “con-artists” for lying about NATO expansion. He referred to:

“promises not to expand NATO eastwards even by an inch. To reiterate: they have deceived us, or, to put it simply, they have played us. Sure, one often hears that politics is a dirty business. It could be, but it shouldn’t be as dirty as it is now, not to such an extent. This type of con-artist behaviour is contrary not only to the principles of international relations but also and above all to the generally accepted norms of morality and ethics.”

Putin said Russia had long wanted to cooperate with the West.

“Those who aspire to global dominance have publicly designated Russia as their enemy. They did so with impunity. Make no mistake, they had no reason to act this way,” he said.

Cold War Triumphalism & Its Consequences



U.S. soldier conducts search of family's home in Iraq, 2006. (Navy Journalist 1st Class Jeremy L. Wood)

Putin said the collapse of the Soviet Union had led to a redivision of the world and a change to international law and norms. New rules were needed but instead of achieving this “professionally, smoothly, patiently, and with due regard and respect for the interests of all states ... we saw a state of euphoria created by the feeling of absolute superiority, a kind of modern absolutism coupled with the low cultural standards and arrogance of those who formulated and pushed through decisions that suited only themselves.”

Putin then said this “absolutism,” with the Soviet Union no longer as a barrier, led to unchecked U.S. aggression, starting with NATO’s bombing of Serbia in 1999, the 2003 invasion of Iraq and U.S. involvement in Syria. Russia has been taking note of the destruction Washington has wrought, even as it seems whitewashed from American minds.

“First a bloody military operation was waged against Belgrade, without the UN Security Council’s sanction but with combat aircraft and missiles used in the heart of Europe. The bombing of peaceful cities and vital infrastructure went on for several weeks. I have to recall these facts, because some Western colleagues prefer to forget them, and when we mentioned the event, they prefer to avoid speaking about international law.

Then came the turn of Iraq, Libya and Syria. The illegal use of military power against Libya and the distortion of all the UN Security Council decisions on Libya ruined the state, created a huge seat of international terrorism, and pushed the country towards a humanitarian catastrophe, into the vortex of a civil war, which has continued there for years. The tragedy, which was created for hundreds of thousands and even millions of people not only in Libya but in the whole region, has led to a large-scale exodus from the Middle East and North Africa to Europe.

A similar fate was also prepared for Syria. The combat operations conducted by the Western coalition in that country without the Syrian government’s approval or UN Security Council’s sanction can only be defined as aggression and intervention.

But the example that stands apart from the above events is, of course, the invasion of Iraq without any legal grounds. They used the pretext of allegedly reliable information available in the United States about the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. To prove that allegation, the US Secretary of State held up a vial with white powder, publicly, for the whole world to see, assuring the international community that it was a chemical warfare agent created in Iraq.

It later turned out that all of that was a fake and a sham, and that Iraq did not have any chemical weapons. Incredible and shocking but true. We witnessed lies made at the highest state level and voiced from the high UN rostrum. As a result we see a tremendous loss in human life, damage, destruction, and a colossal upsurge of terrorism.

Overall, it appears that nearly everywhere, in many regions of the world where the United States brought its law and order, this created bloody, non-healing wounds and the curse of international terrorism and extremism.”

Putin said over the past days “NATO leadership has been blunt in its statements that they need to accelerate and step up efforts to bring the alliance’s infrastructure closer to Russia’s borders. In other words, they have been toughening their position. We cannot stay idle and passively observe these developments. This would be an absolutely irresponsible thing to do for us.”

Ukraine, he said, had essentially become a de-facto NATO member posing the greatest threat to Russia.

“Any further expansion of the North Atlantic alliance’s infrastructure or the ongoing efforts to gain a military foothold of the Ukrainian territory are unacceptable for us. Of course, the question is not about NATO itself. It merely serves as a tool of US foreign policy. The problem is that in territories adjacent to Russia, which I have to note is our historical land, a hostile “anti-Russia” is taking shape. Fully controlled from the outside, it is doing everything to attract NATO armed forces and obtain cutting-edge weapons.”

A Parting Shot at European Vassals

Putin also blasted America's European allies for not having the strength of principle or the moral fiber to stand up to Washington. He said:

"The United States is still a great country and a system-forming power. All its satellites not only humbly and obediently say yes to and parrot it at the slightest pretext but also imitate its behaviour and enthusiastically accept the rules it is offering them. Therefore, one can say with good reason and confidence that the whole so-called Western bloc formed by the United States in its own image and likeness is, in its entirety, the very same 'empire of lies.'"

Read the full text of the [speech](#).

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Featured image: Putin explaining his reasons for going to war. (AP screenshot from YouTube)

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