

# The terrible consequences of geopolitics are here

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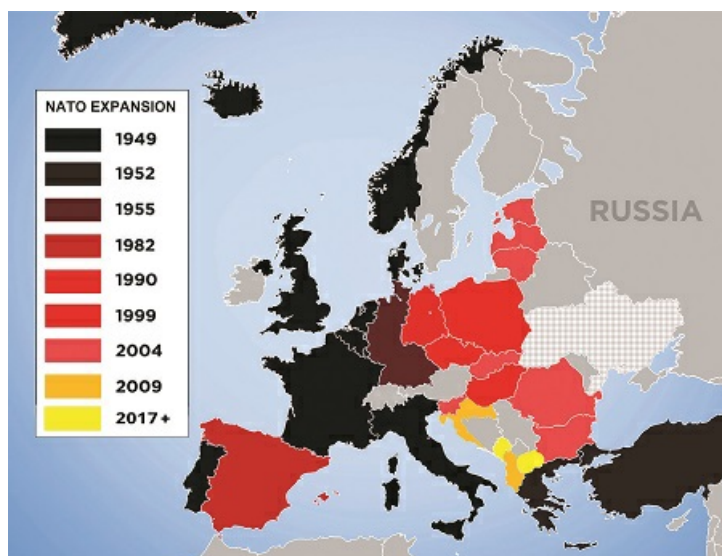
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## Lead Editorial

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Decades of relentless NATO expansion for geopolitical gain, in breach of promises to Russia not to, has provoked the most serious consequences yet—Putin's determined pushback. (Crosshatching shows Ukraine.)

US President Joe Biden has announced deep and extensive financial and economic sanctions against Russia. The sanctions were invoked after Russian President Vladimir Putin recognised the independence of two eastern border provinces of Ukraine, the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics, *at their request*. The two republics, which resisted the puppet regime installed following the 2014 "Euromaidan" coup, were promised a pathway to self-government in the Minsk Agreement, but Ukraine has stalled. (Read this week's Almanac, "Ukraine on the knife's edge of world war", for a fuller picture.)

Putin on 18 February had stated "Sanctions will be imposed in any case", with a reason or not, "to slow down the development of Russia". Indeed, on 25 January senior US administration officials gave a press briefing, describing sanctions that "would hit Putin's strategic ambitions to industrialise his economy quite hard" and that in union with EU actions "would deliver a severe and immediate blow to Russia and over time make its economy even more brittle and undercut Putin's aspirations to exert influence on the world stage."

Stating that the USA would work with any country to "deny Russia an input that it needs to diversify its economy", the officials envisioned this would "lead to an atrophying of Russia's productive capacity over time. ... And, for us, from our perspective, that gives them a very weak strategic hand over the medium term."

This agenda betrays the broader motivation for the war drive. Particularly considering the [agreement between Russia and China](#) on the sidelines of the Beijing Olympics, focused on economic cooperation as essential to a “modern international system” and as the basis for peace. China has long been pushing for a new economic architecture, especially since the 2008 global financial crisis revealed the extent of the current system’s fragility. A growing number of nations are in support of this approach.

In WWI and WWII the British Empire never hesitated to drive its geopolitical games to the brink, risking global war in order to maintain economic and political control. Today, despite the obvious implications of world war on a nuclear scale, the Anglo-American war party doesn’t seem capable of exercising restraint. Whether they believe warfare can be contained in a zone short of nuclear conflict or that the world would survive a “limited” nuclear exchange, or completely discount the dangers afoot due to historical illiteracy or training by video game/long-distance drone warfare, they fall short of recognising reality.

The alleged Russian invasion of Ukraine is a furphy. The real issue which must be resolved is Russia’s red line on the expansion of NATO, as expressed in its December draft agreement submitted to the USA and NATO. Russia’s demand that Ukraine’s status as a neutral state be assured and that there be no further expansion of NATO is considered by many seasoned diplomats and world leaders as entirely justified.

But at a meeting of NATO defence ministers on 17 February, NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg affirmed that NATO’s door remains open to future aspirant countries such as Ukraine; and two days later at the Munich Security Council, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy implied Ukraine would consider acquiring nuclear weapons if it didn’t get security guarantees from NATO. This is a very real threat to Russia. In an extraordinary 21 February session of the Russian Security Council, televised live, Putin stated that if Ukraine joined NATO then claimed that Crimea is still their territory, under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty all member countries would be obliged to come in and back Kiev in a direct attack on Russia.

Russia is also concerned about an escalation by Kiev. Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu reported in the Security Council that (not including nationalist battalions) Ukraine has stationed 59,000 troops at the border with the eastern republics, in violation of the Minsk Agreements. Putin is pushing for a ceasefire while sending peacekeeping forces.

PM Scott Morrison has declared that Australia “will be in lockstep” with our Anglo-American allies. If so, we are committing to a new world war.

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