

Comparative Analysis of Russian Military Aggression towards Ukraine

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Background

Since the dissolution of the USSR, the Russian Federation has repeatedly engaged in military and political aggression towards Ukraine. This has escalated to military conflict between the two states on multiple occasions.

In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, and the state has illegally occupied the region ever since. On February 24th 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, which marked the beginning of the present War in Ukraine. Thousands of Ukrainian civilians have lost their lives in these conflicts, and millions have been forced to flee their homes.

Methodology

- ☐ Analysed secondary literature on the 2014 Annexation of Crimea
- ☐ Reviewed up-to-date news coverage of the 2022 War in Ukraine
- ☐ Studied thinkpieces from the period before both conflicts that made incorrect predictions about Russia's likelihood of invasion
- ☐ Compared public statements about Ukraine from Russian officials

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Findings

There were several similarities in the events leading up to both conflicts:

- ☐ **Putin's rhetoric** dismissed Ukraine's right to exist. In 2013, Putin claimed that Russia and Ukraine were "one nation" with a "common destiny". In 2022, Putin claimed that the state of Ukraine was created by the USSR under Vladimir Lenin.
- ☐ Russia took military action **before** officially declaring war. In 2014, Putin sent special operations forces into Ukraine at least three days before officially announcing his intent to annex. Russian soldiers were also stationed on the Ukrainian border for four months before the 2022 invasion.
- ☐ The West **underestimated** the likelihood of invasion. A NATO Defence College expert said Russia was "neither a threat, nor a partner" in 2014. Many academics in 2021 and 2022 were certain that Putin would never invade. In both cases, Western sources dismissed the risk of an invasion.

Conclusion

These similarities would indicate that Russia was similarly dismissive of Ukrainian sovereignty and international law norms in both cases.

Despite patterns of behaviour repeating in 2022, the West underestimated the likelihood of conflict reoccurring. A more accurate framework of Russian behaviour must be identified, or else we will similarly miscalculate the risk of future conflicts.

