



Expansionism of NATO

For Prelims: NATO, Two plus four treaty, Warsaw Pact, United Nations General Assembly.

For Mains: Bilateral Groupings & Agreements, Effect of Policies & Politics of Countries on India's Interests, Russia-Ukraine Conflict, Russia-NATO Conflict.

Why in News?

When Russia launched a [military invasion of Ukraine](#), the purported reason behind this act of territorial aggression was the eastward expansion of the [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation \(NATO\)](#).

- The expansionism of NATO **threatened at some undefined point in the future to allow Ukraine to join the grouping** as a treaty ally and thus bring this transatlantic security coalition within striking distance of Russia's western borders.
- Earlier, an emergency special session was convened by the [United Nations General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#) for discussing a resolution that called for Russia to unconditionally withdraw its troops.

What is NATO?

- It is a **military alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty** (also called the Washington Treaty) of April, 1949, by the United States, Canada, and several Western European nations to provide collective security against the [Soviet Union](#).
- There are currently **30 member states**, with North Macedonia becoming the latest member to join the alliance in 2020.

What are the Origins of NATO?

- The self-declared mission of NATO when it **emerged in 1949**, had **three points**:
 - Deterring Soviet expansionism.
 - Forbidding the revival of nationalist militarism in Europe through a strong North American presence on the continent.
 - Encouraging European political integration.
- Clearly the legacy of the [Nazi \(Hitler\)](#) affiliation and [World War II](#) weighed heavily on the minds of the founding members of NATO.
- Although NATO claims that it is only "partially true" that its very creative was to counter the threat from the erstwhile Soviet Union, there was a **strong emphasis on military cooperation and collective defence in its clauses**.
 - **For example**, Article 5 of the treaty proclaims that **an armed attack against one or more of them** (NATO members) shall be **considered an attack against them all**" and that following such an attack, each ally would take "such action as it deems necessary, including the **use of armed force in response**."
- The broader context at the time was that in 1955, a time when the [Cold War](#) was gaining momentum, the **Soviet Union signed up socialist republics of Central and Eastern Europe to the Warsaw Pact (1955)**, including Albania (which withdrew in 1968), Bulgaria,

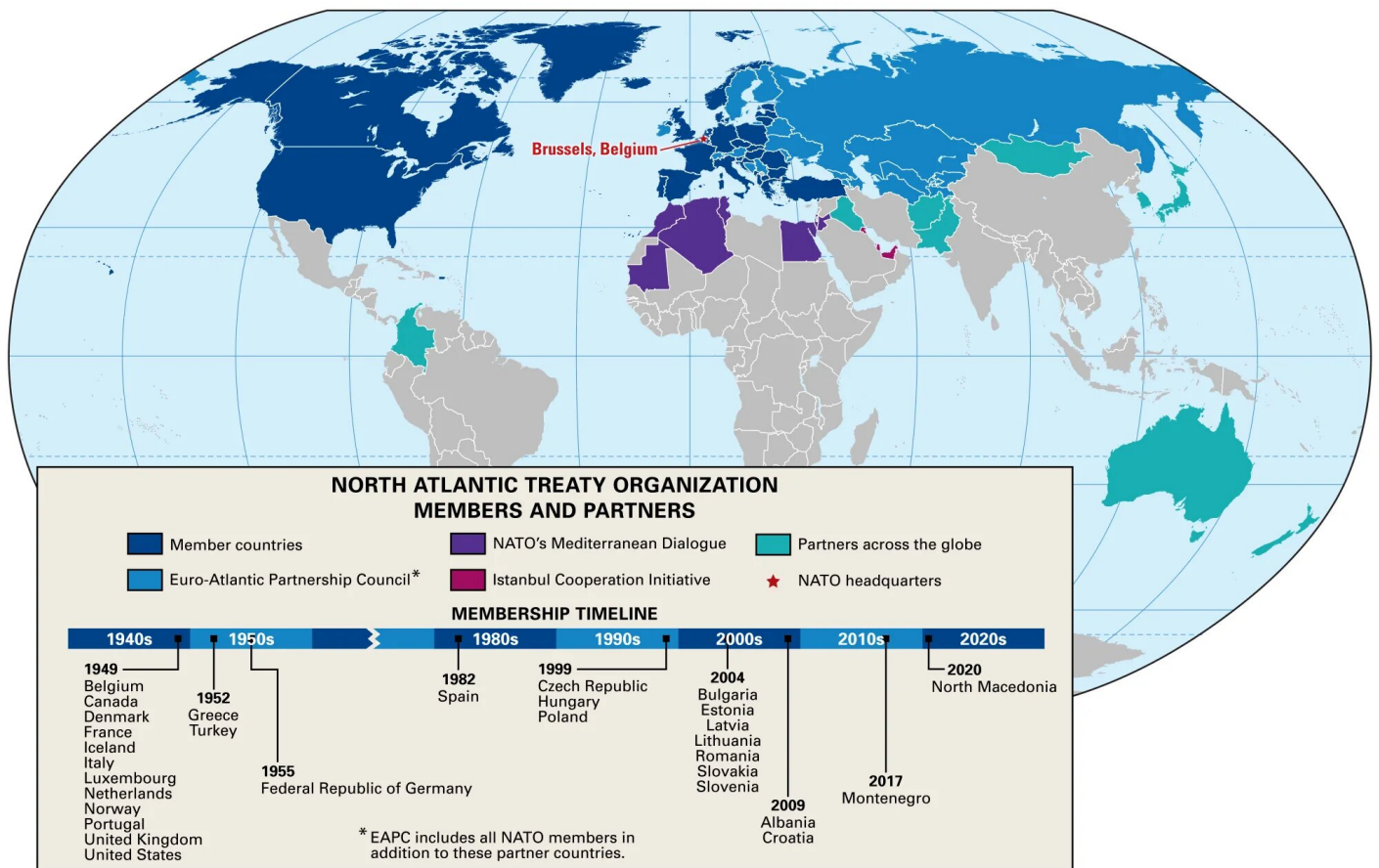
Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

- The Pact, essentially a **political-military alliance**, was viewed as a direct **strategic counterweight to NATO**.
- Its focus at the time was the fact that while **East Germany was still part of the Soviet occupied-territory of Germany**, the Federal Republic of Germany had joined NATO by May 1955, and **Russia began to worry about the consequences of a strengthened and rearmed West Germany** at its border.
- As a unified, multilateral, political and military alliance, **the Warsaw Pact was aimed at tying Eastern European capitals more closely to Russia**, which it effectively did for several decades through the worst hostilities of the Cold War.
- Indeed, the **Pact even gave the Soviet Union the option to contain civil uprisings** and dissent across the European satellite states, including in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland in 1980-1981.
- All that began to unravel by the late 1980s, when the sheer downward pressure of inevitable **economic slowdown in most Eastern European Pact (Warsaw Pact) allies reduced the potential for military cooperation** to make any real difference strategically across the region.
- Thus, it hardly came as a surprise in September **1990 that East Germany quit the Pact to be reunified with West Germany**, and soon Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland withdrew from all Warsaw Pact military exercises.
- **The Pact was officially disbanded in early 1991 after the dissolution of the Soviet Union itself.**

What Were the Rounds of Expansions Carried out by NATO?

- Even as the Soviet Union was dissolved into Russia and former Soviet republics, NATO, emboldened by circumstances and optimism that the **global balance of power was tipping in its favour, embarked on a path of expansion**.
 - During the term in office of the US, NATO began, in successive rounds of negotiation and expansion, to pull former Warsaw Pact states into its membership.
- After reunification, while **Germany retained membership of NATO**, the **Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland joined the alliance in 1999**. But it did not end there — in **2004, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia joined** the treaty organisation.
- In **2009 Albania and Croatia** signed on, in **2017 Montenegro** entered the bloc and in 2020 it was North Macedonia's turn.

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Why is Russia Sensitive to NATO expansion?

- In 2008, in the week leading up to **NATO's Bucharest Conference**, NATO Allies **welcomed Ukraine's and Georgia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership** and agreed that these countries will become members of NATO.
- They went on to announce a period of intensive engagement with both countries at a high political level to address the questions still outstanding regarding their **Membership Action Plan applications**.
- This set off alarm bells in Russia, because **even the very concept of Ukraine, a nation considered to hold strong historic ties first to the Soviet Union, was against Russia's belief**.
- This development prompted **Russia to warn the US that no Russian leader could stand idly by in the face of steps toward NATO membership for Ukraine**.
- That would be a **hostile act toward Russia**.
 - This was only **among the more recent of a long list of actions by NATO leaders that Russia considers a political betrayal**.

Did NATO Violate a Promise to Avoid Expansion?

- In 1990 the US informed Russia that **there would be no extension of NATO's jurisdiction for forces of NATO one inch to the east**.
 - While **Russia seized upon this comment to fuel its ostensive outrage at NATO expansion** into the Baltic states region.
 - It is a fact that in early 1990, the locus of the diplomacy for the **Two Plus Four** – including East and West Germany plus the United States, France, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom – **agreement was whether a unified Germany would be part of NATO**.
- The US wanted to **reassure Russia that NATO command structures and troops would not be transferred to the territory of the former German Democratic Republic**.
- It was a difficult time in Russia, domestically, because in **the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution, there was a failure to institutionalise democratic practices, a stable market**

economy, and a robust law and order system.

- Facing all manner of chaos at home, erstwhile Russia began to interpret the **Two Plus Four Treaty** (Treaty on the final settlement with respect to Germany, 1990) **as a ban on NATO expansion east of Germany.**
- Russia informed the US that it ruled out “the option of expanding NATO territory eastward.”
- Through the 2000s, Russia carried on in this vein, speaking with increasing alarm and anger at **NATO’s steady expansion into Eastern Europe**, and saying in Munich, Germany in 2007 that **it is obvious that NATO expansion does not have any relation with the modernisation of the alliance** itself or with ensuring security in Europe.
 - On the contrary, it represents a serious provocation that reduces the level of mutual trust.
- In 2008, following NATO announcement of its intent to admit Georgia and Ukraine into its alliance, **Russia invaded Georgia and took control of several of its territorial regions**, and in 2014, with Ukraine drifting closer towards an economic alliance with the [European Union](#), **Russia marched into Ukraine and [seized Crimea](#).**

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