

# Review of: "Rebuilding a 'Greater Russia' and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine"

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Below I my review of "Rebuilding a 'Greater Russia' and the Russian Invasion of Ukraine." This is an interesting piece which provides a good deal of historical perspective about the earlier foundations of the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. According to Kanet, Russia has been 'building' (my word, not his) toward this ever since the early days of post-Soviet Russia. The implication is that no one should have been surprised that Russia had sought to reacquire the most substantial part of the former USSR: Ukraine. As such, it does a valuable service in putting more recent events in a larger context.

There are some issues, however, that could/should be addressed in an update to this paper.

First, there is no clear introduction. The 'implication' cited above is just that: an implication. The paper could easily be improved by having a formal introduction, including a thesis statement, argument progression, and connections between the various sections.

The second is more substantive, but the seeds of this are already found in the paper. In the paper, there is a conceptual collapse between what ultimately amounts to very different thing. The first is a Russian sphere of influence, something that all great powers seek to do, and the second is an actually-expanded Russian Federation, which amounts to an irredentist project. Certainly, the author would argue that the two are tightly linked in the form of a restored imperial project and they say such in the conclusion of the paper. However, it is possible that, conceptually, they should be considered different. There appears to be a qualitative difference between what Russia has done in areas others than Ukraine, on the one hand, and what it did in Crimea in 2014 and then, more expansively, in 2022, on the other – at least in my estimation. The former category of actions represents a remarkable lack of irredentist intentionality and seems like normal, great power activities. It would have been easy -- especially now when there would really be no additional costs that the West could heap upon Moscow – for Russia to annex Transnistria and South Ossetia. (I am actually surprised that they didn't, at least in the latter case. Abkhazia, other statelet, might resist, but the two other statelets would likely vote to enter the Russian Federation.) The fact that Moscow has restrained itself from such an open irredentist project indicates that Ukraine, as Putin outlined in his 2021 letter, is clearly a special case. And while the 2022 invasion fits into the larger trend, the fact that Moscow has taken the steps it had in Ukraine (annexations, denials of nationhood, massive crimes) indicates that it seems to come from a different ideational space than Moscow's other post-Soviet actions. As such, drawing a direct and clear line from the initial post-Soviet chaos of the Transnistria conflict to the 2022 Ukraine invasion is probably going too far -- at least as presented in this paper. It is possible better make this claim, but the argument would

ultimately need to diminish the ideational significance of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by placing it within the context of the more general wars of Soviet succession, which would include conflicts such as Nagorno-Karabakh and, as the author cited, Chechnya. In this way, Putin's 2021 letter on Ukraine is actually meant to obfuscate what amounts to a pure power grab. This paper shows us a way to get there and could do so with just a little bit of work.

In short, this is a good paper that deserves a read.