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)** affilction 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,
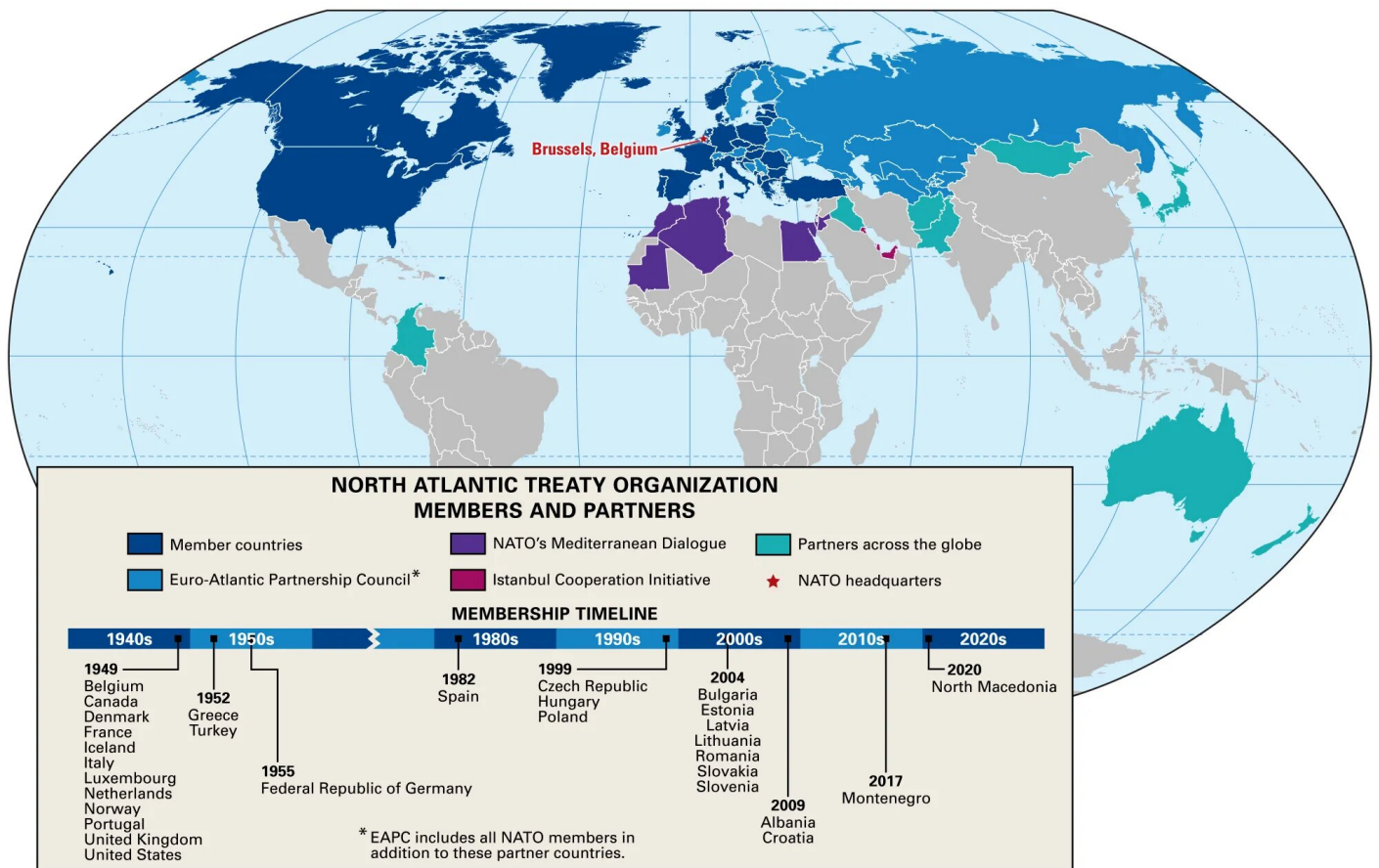
Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.
- The Pact, essentially a **political-military alliance,** was viewed as a direct **strategic counterweight to NATO.**
- Its focus at the time was the fact that while **East Germany was still part of the Soviet occupied-territory of Germany,** 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 Pacts tates 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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NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION MEMBERS AND PARTNERS

- Member countries
- Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council*
- NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue
- Istanbul Cooperation Initiative
- Partners across the globe
- ★ NATO headquarters

MEMBERSHIP TIMELINE

1940s | 1950s | 1980s | 1990s | 2000s | 2010s | 2020s

1949
Belgium
Canada
Denmark
France
Iceland
Italy
Luxembourg
Netherlands
Norway
Portugal
United Kingdom
United States

1952
Greece
Turkey

1955
Federal Republic of Germany

1982
Spain

1999
Czech Republic
Hungary
Poland

2004
Bulgaria
Estonia
Latvia
Lithuania
Romania
Slovakia
Slovenia

2009
Albania
Croatia

2017
Montenegro

2020
North Macedonia

*EAPC includes all NATO members in addition to these partner countries.

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.

Source: TH

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