Russia and Ukraine: Poisoned History
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Ukraine is an old country, with its history perhaps 3,000 years old. Russia is a
relatively new country: its Slavic beginnings was in the Ukraine itself. The first
people who called themselves "Rus" (meaning red) established a dukedom in what would
be today?s Ukraine. But soon, it moved to create a new Russia in Muscovy (today?s
Moscow). This took place about the year 1147 AD.

A number of warlords fought each other for power until they finally exhausted
themselves and actually took a vote in 1613 and elected Mikhail Romanov, whose
dynasty ruled until the Russian Revolution.

The Russians never voted again, until after the USSR fell. Real elections morphed
into tainted elections under Putin during his two decades of rule. He is now a
dictator, a familiar experience for the long-suffering Russian people.

Compared with the antiquities in Europe, Greece and Rome, Russia was the new kid on
the block. And as the older European countries descended from Rome had a renaissance
of knowledge, art, and politics, Russia was still enmeshed in the Medieval world. The
Western European kingdoms fought internal wars to unseat the unchallenged religious
rule of the Roman Catholic Church, and Protestantism was born, bringing literacy,
parliaments, and some constraint on monarchs.

Russia languished under the rigid, backward Orthodox form of Christianity which
smothered all new ideas until Czar Peter the Great took them on and began the process
of modernizing and joining the rest of Europe?s development.

Peter the Great knew that Russia was far behind even Sweden in development. He
crushed the conservative nobility, sent their sons to Europe for school, and made
peace with the Church: he permitted them to push religion and accumulate wealth but
not to challenge the Czars.

The 19th century ushered in the era of great empires: Spain, France, England, and the
Netherlands all conquered older countries in Asia, Africa, and the New World. Russia,
not a seagoing nation, created its empire by absorbing mostly countries on its
borders (except Turkey) and all across Siberia to the Pacific (many from the former
Silk Road). They turned Siberia into a vast prison colony to abuse anyone who
challenged Imperial power.

A dazzling female Czar, Catherine the Great, tried to convince Voltaire and the other
French enlightenment geniuses that she too was enlightened. However, with the stroke
of a pen, she unseated the Duke of Ukraine and absorbed that formerly independent
country into the Russian Empire. Enlightenment was for show only.

Ukraine never had a chance to join the rest of Europe, with which it had much more in
common than autocratic Russia. Russia went to great lengths to keep it that way. When
the Russian Empire collapsed, Ukraine enjoyed a brief democratic nationhood. But
within two years, the Bolshevik Revolution reabsorbed them as a part of the new
Communist Empire, the USSR. Stalin?s first act was to create a famine, taking all of
Ukraine?s wheat harvest and letting two million farmers starve. They did this again
the next year, killing millions more. The Nazis then added millions more deaths,
wiping out most of the Ukraine?s thousand-year-old Jewish population.

The USSR built a nuclear plant in Chernobyl and ran it so badly that the plant
exploded, sending radioactive clouds through Northern Europe. Russia kept silent
about this, but were outed by European scientists, resulting in one of the two events
that eventually brought down USSR: Chernobyl and Afghanistan.

Post-Soviet Russia made an arms reduction deal with the United States and Ukraine.
Ukraine surrendered all of its nuclear weapons in exchange for a guarantee of
protection by both Russia and the US. Russia did what it has done throughout its
imperial history: it lied.

Once more, Ukraine wants to join the EU and be free to develop a genuine democracy.
Russia?s current "Czar," Vladimir Putin, is waging a horrific war to force Ukraine
back into Russia?s deadly embrace. But this time, the world is watching and is

helping Ukraine in its David-and-Goliath struggle to free itself. The much-loved Volodymyr Zelenskyy stands in contrast with the hated Vladimir Putin. In the Bible story, David wins.

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