

***The Astounding Gluttony of Giants***  
***Dan Perry (Opinion) - Newsweek***

*Russian dictator Vladimir Putin has unleashed hell upon Ukraine, and on his own information-deprived people, in a bid to enlarge the world's largest country, which already stretches across 11 time zones.*



*SAM YEH/AFP via Getty Images Three French-made Mirage 2000 fighter jets taxi on a runway in front of a hangar at the Hsinchu Air Base in Hsinchu, Taiwan, on August 5, 2022.*

*Closely watching is China's [Xi Jinping](#), who rules the world's most populous country with 1.4 billion people, has destroyed freedom in Hong Kong (violating a commitment to preserve "one country, two systems"), and is sorely tempted to gobble up Taiwan.*

*To the west, it would be a wonder if India and Pakistan, two nuclear powers which are the second and fifth most populous on Earth respectively, don't eventually go to war over Kashmir, a province that would barely move the needle for either by any metric.*

*Is nothing ever enough? Is it worth sacrificing a single life to add to these countries' already huge numbers?*

*It is worth examining Taiwan especially, if only because it accounts for most of the world's production of microchips, and as it's in the news because Beijing is [agitated as hell](#) over a meaningless visit by House Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#). China's military is issuing ominous warnings, [trade restrictions](#) have been applied, highly [threatening live](#) exercises have been held, and it is not inconceivable that more extensive blockades are coming in addition to violations of Taiwan's airspace.*

*The island was never part of communist China, and the vast majority of its 23 million people clearly enjoy their boisterous democracy and quality of life, displaying no wish to join the oppressive mainland.*

*Populated by both indigenous people and mainland migrants who began arriving in the 17th century, the former Formosa has been a Dutch colony, an annexed Chinese province, a protectorate of Japan and an independent republic founded by anti-Communists fleeing the mainland.*

*Beijing, whose territory is about the size of the United States, considers Taiwan, which is 250 times smaller, a breakaway province. Especially if Putin gets away with land grabs in Ukraine, the communist rulers of China will be emboldened to make an even more aggressive move.*

*If China invaded, the global economic damage would be incalculable, eclipsing even the energy and food crises caused by the Ukraine war.*

*Revanchism, the desire to acquire or reacquire land, has been a fixture in history. But in much of the world and certainly in Europe, it was in retreat during the decades after World War II, a trauma whose legacies included a mighty impatience with quibbles over borders.*

*But as memories fade, revanchism is back in style, with autocrats especially. And when big powers like Russia and China start to mess with the map, smaller powers take note and emulate, especially bad actors who rule non-democracies or fake democracies.*

*Turkey is a case in point. If Ankara were rational, it would seek to unload some of the Kurdish historic homeland in its east, and even make history by persuading Iran and Iraq, which also occupy Kurdish lands, to allow the creation of a contiguous Kurdish state.*

*All three countries would no longer rule over the world's largest dispossessed people (a pesky minority for each) and would shock all observers with a positive contribution to global justice.*

*But that is a pipe-dream. Instead, the despot Recep Tayyip Erdogan bans the Kurdish language and culture, arrests Kurdish leaders, tried to keep Finland and Sweden out of [NATO](#) by claiming they go easy on Kurdish terrorists, and now [plots to deepen his incursions into Syria](#) in order to fight Kurds there—a land grab which, if allowed, may not be reversed for decades, if ever.*

*The model for that might be Turkey's own 1974 invasion of the island of Cyprus, whose territory is almost 100 times smaller. Having added Turkish settlers to the already existing non-Greek population, it has cemented its rule over the island's north, and a hideous wall bisects the capital Nicosia.*

*Moreover, Erdogan, having seemingly given up on Turkish admission to the [European Union](#), now makes [threats against EU member Greece](#) and dreams of*

*reestablishing Ottoman influence around the region—a soft-power version of empire-building.*

*One of Turkey's main protectorates, Azerbaijan, is run by the corrupt dictator Ilham Aliyev, who has learned well. Armed by Turkey, and having signed a cooperation agreement with Putin days before the Ukraine invasion, he too is looking to expand.*

*Azerbaijan has some mineral wealth—it just signed a deal to increase natural gas supplies to the EU—and could focus on building a better life for its 10 million people, who have never known a day of decent government.*

*Instead, it seeks conquest. In 2020 Azerbaijan instigated a war against the Armenians, succeeding in grabbing significant portions of Nagorno-Karabakh, a region that had been self-governed by its ethnic Armenian majority and that is in dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Even in recent days, incursions on Armenian-held areas [reportedly continue](#).*

*Aliyev's statements strongly suggest he now has [designs on the territory of small, landlocked Armenia](#) itself. Specifically, he has often spoken about carving out a [land corridor through Armenia's southeast](#) to connect Azerbaijan with its non-contiguous province of Nakhichevan, and less frequently, but quite tellingly, he proclaims all of Armenia to be Azeri lands (full disclosure: an Armenia-related NGO is a client).*

*If such revanchism is allowed, the flames will quickly spread around the world. The borders in Africa are especially vulnerable. They largely resulted from colonialism dividing up the spoils of the continent without regard to local tribal loyalties or linguistic connections.*

*This is why there is currently a war almost no one in the West is paying attention to in Tigray, in northern Ethiopia. It is why there was such violence in Darfur, in central Africa, and in parts of the continent's west.*

*You could argue that there are practical reasons to try to enlarge a country – natural resources issues, access to the sea, a reuniting of minorities. Indeed, Putin's aggression against Ukraine is rooted in a not-inconceivable sense that its northern and eastern provinces especially played a role in Russian culture and history.*

*But that is plainly not what the people in Ukraine want today. Indifference to their wishes—or the invention of fantasy narratives to discredit them—reveals revanchism for what it usually is: hubristic and vicious.*

*There is a reason why the world has been unsympathetic to land disputes and prefers the status quo even in cases in which ethnic groups were left on the "wrong" side of a border—such as the millions of ethnic Hungarians stuck in Romania just because that country was the last to wrest control of the Transylvania region before World War II.*

*It's because there is no end to it. Every border in the planet could be disputed. There is no such thing as a natural connection between people and a territory. Almost every border is the result of one conquest or another, one injustice or another.*

*The only way to prevent never-ending war—and the global disruptions they often cause—is to make revanchists pay a high price. The world could step in and refuse to accept even the hint of warlike rhetoric.*

*The world community's toolbox for disincentivizing mischief makers from threatening border changes without mutual agreement is very broad, ranging from disallowing visa-free travel and trade arrangements to proactive economic sanctions against countries or their leaders and nationals of consequence, all the way to arming the other side.*

*In an interdependent and highly globalized world, these are not trifles, and in most cases, they should amount to an effective deterrent.*

*Sure, a price would be exacted on the West as well, especially when economic warfare results. We see a version of that in the current inflation, which is partly caused by the prolonging of the Ukraine war by the West's arming of and support for the victim—and in Europe's coming natural gas crisis.*

*But decency always carries a price, for it is scarce, and scarcity has value. The price of peace is always worth it in the long run,*

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