Why is Russia drawing ‘red lines’ over Ukraine?

Why in news?

Russia wants to revert back Ukraine from Western influence and reclaim it in its sphere of influence.

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Why is Russia so concerned about Ukraine?

- **Eastward expansion of NATO -** Since the end of Cold War NATO has expanded eastwards by taking in 14 new countries.
- This includes the states of the former Warsaw Pact and the three Baltic nations that were once in the Soviet Union.
- Russia saw this as an encroachment towards its borders.
- **Betrayal of Western Promises -** Russia view it as a betrayal of Western promises at the start of the 1990s – something the United States and its allies deny.
- **Ukraine tilt towards West -** Ukraine is not a NATO member but has promised to join it since 2008.
- Since toppling a pro-Russian president in 2014, it staged joint military exercises with NATO and has taken delivery of weapons including U.S. Javelin anti-tank missiles and Turkish drones.
- This could make Ukraine a launch pad for NATO missiles targeted at Russia. Russia needs to lay down “red lines” to prevent that.
- **Strive for global power –**Russia wants to restore its influence throughout the post-Soviet space, defying the West and reassert Russia as a global power.
- **Resources -** Ukraine is the second biggest country in Europe after Russia.
- It has major ports on the Black Sea and shares borders with four NATO countries.
- It is a major exporter of corn and wheat.
- **Geography -** Europe depends on Russia for about one third of its natural gas and one of the main pipelines passes through Ukraine.
- Controlling Ukrainian would enhance Russia’s pipeline security.
- This will provide leverage for Putin in any dispute with the West.
- **Culture –** Russia and Ukraine speak closely related languages.
- Ukraine and Belarus, formed the Slav core of the Soviet Union.
- Russians feel a connection with Ukraine, which they do not feel with other former Soviet republics in the Baltics, Caucasus and Central Asia.
- They consider Russians and Ukrainians were one people who shared a single “historic and spiritual space”.
- **History -** The two had been linked since the 9th century when Kyiv became the capital of the ancient state of Rus
- From 1654, Russia and Ukraine were united by treaty under the rule of the Russian tsar.

How USA and Ukraine have responded?

- Kyiv and Washington view Ukraine's move as legitimate.
- They view it as Ukraine's defence after Russia seized the Crimea region in 2014.
- They provided backing to separatists who are still fighting government forces in eastern Ukraine.
- Kyiv rejected Russia's reference to history as a politically motivated and over-simplified version of history

How has Russia responded?

- Russia rejects Ukrainian and U.S. suspicions that it is preparing an invasion of Ukraine
- It says it is responding to threats and provocations.
- It only wants security guarantees from the West including the rescinding of NATO's membership promise to Ukraine.

What might be Russia's plan?

- It unlikely that Russia would attempt to seize and defend large swathes of Ukrainian territory because the military cost would be too high.
- Keeping the world guessing about a possible invasion Russia has made its security demands to the top of the international agenda.
- Using this it will look to complete its unfinished business in Ukraine by blocking its westward shift and reclaiming it as part of a Russian sphere of influence.

Reference

1. https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/explained-ukraine-russia-border-conflict-putin-7743021/

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