The year is 264 BC, the beginning of the First Punic War. The location is Europe and North Africa. The players are Rome, Carthage, and two factions on the island of Sicily. Rome and Carthage had at one time been trading partners. But as each expanded, it became clear that confrontation was inevitable. Both sides hesitantly waited for war.

A minor battle in Sicily finally brought the two superpowers into confrontation. Located on the island was the nation of Syracuse and a mercenary army in the city of Messana. These two factions eventually went to war, and after a decisive defeat, the mercenary army of Messana asked both Rome and Carthage for protection from Syracuse. Rome eventually answered the call and sent forces to invade the island and attack Syracuse. Of course, this caught the eye of the Carthaginians who already owned most of the island and perceived Rome’s expansion as a threat. Sicily had previously served as a buffer zone between Carthage and Rome. But now both countries agreed they could not leave Sicily in the hands of the other. Rome eventually won the war. But Carthage waited for the chance to strike back. In 218 BC, it got its chance.

**A Quick Modern Connection**

There are a few connections to the modern era that must be recognized. Two minor factions in Sicily fought each other and eventually appealed to outside powers for help. The modern comparison is Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, and most recently Ukraine. In Korea, the United States was forced to intervene as two minor nations went to war to protect its interests. The same happened in Vietnam.
Then it happened to Russia in Afghanistan. It is currently happening in Ukraine. So in a sense, the Cold War was not a new type of conflict, it is just a pattern of warfare between superpowers. And like the First Punic War, it resulted in the ‘defeat’ of one nation. In the Cold War, Russia was defeated. However, it has reached a powerful status once again and is desiring to topple the United States’ dominance in the world, leading to what is now being called the Colder War.


The Beginning of the Second Punic War

After a long buildup of military forces, Carthage made its move. It began by increasing its territory in Spain, an important strategic base that would give Carthage a foothold in Europe, and a launching point to compete with Rome over influence in Europe. In 218 BC it invaded part of Gaul (Gallia) that Rome had recently signed a treaty with. Rome immediately understood the significance of this move. Gaul had served as an effective buffer between Carthage’s Spain and Rome. When Carthage invaded Gaul, it was perceived as a declaration of intent to invade Rome. Rome quickly sent an army to thwart the Carthaginians in the region. But by the time the Romans fielded their army and began searching for the Carthaginian troops, they were gone. They were already marching towards northern Italy, unbeknownst to the Romans.
Ukraine

So how does this apply to the ‘Colder War’? Ukraine is Gaul. A once neutral nation that served as a buffer zone between Russia and NATO. Think of NATO as the Romans and Russia as Carthage. Europe and America (Rome) and Russia (Carthage) both decided to let Ukraine (Gaul) serve as a buffer zone. But Russia violated this understanding when it took Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine. NATO then created a quick reaction force of 4,000 professional soldiers to deal with the Russian threat and stationed them close to the border with Russia. In the same way that Rome raised an army and sent them to engage the Carthaginians in Gaul, NATO has raised an army for a possible confrontation in Europe. The Ukraine scenario, thus far, is playing out fairly closely to the Gaul scenario. Once the NATO force was created, Russia ceased its invasion and moved its attention elsewhere. But to where? Like Romans at the time, the West doesn’t know what Putin will do next. An all-out war in Ukraine could happen.

(Source: http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200809/cmselect/cmdfence/276/27607.htm)
The Middle and End of the Second Punic War

After the Romans lost track of the Carthaginian army just north of Italy, another Roman army was dispatched to invade Spain. The goal of this army was to create a two front war and to cut off Carthage’s supply lines to their army. The move didn’t catch Carthage off guard. Carthage knew Spain was exposed and had left an army in place to protect Spain. Neither side, however, expected what happened when the two armies met in battle. Both sides took severe losses, with Rome claiming victory. But the truth was that the losses on both sides were horrendous. The Carthaginians’ losses caused Carthage to divert an army preparing to invade Italy from Africa to be redirected and sent to Spain instead. This later caused Cartage’s defeat in the war.

The Romans, however, never launched another invasion of Spain. Instead, they sent military advisors to North Africa to train Carthage’s rival Numidia. This opened another front, much closer to home for the Carthaginians, and cost them valuable resources and men to contain.

Meanwhile in Italy, Carthage won battle after battle. In fact, it virtually annihilated all the armies Rome threw at it. The armies of Carthage succeeded in almost every battle and at one point could have marched on Rome. It wasn’t until Rome invaded North Africa and threatened Carthage that the Carthaginian forces withdrew from Italy and were eventually defeated in Africa.

The Lesson for the West

As the metaphorical Rome in this situation, NATO needs to reevaluate Russia. The West needs to hear the powerful rhetoric coming out of Russia and understand Russian strategic goals. But, like the actual
Romans, NATO has underestimated the Russians. Ukraine is the tipping point, just as Gaul was. Russia is not invading Ukraine for any other reason than to prepare an invasion into Europe. Putin, by his own admission, desires to recreate the USSR. The only way this can be accomplished is the reconquering of both the Balkan and the Baltic states. By invading Ukraine Putin has brazenly revealed his desire to dominate Europe. In such a context, this is like Carthage’s invasion of Gaul which portrayed a desire to invade Italy.

At this point, the similarities with the Cold War and the Second Punic War end. This is because NATO and Russia are still fighting. The Cold War is not yet history. But we are at the most dangerous point in the war—where Rome underestimated Carthage. The West foolishly believes that appeasement will stop Putin in Ukraine. The creation of the quick reaction force is good, but more is required. In the scheme of things, 4,000 soldiers will not stop Russia's 250,000 soldiers should they choose to invade Europe.

This is a time in the war where NATO should open new theaters of war. Russia is currently investing heavily in the Artic. Should global warming, in fact, actually melt the Polar ice caps, thereby opening new trade routes and exposing more natural gas and oil, Russia will likely enjoy a profit. Should NATO choose to so, they could force Russia to spend more money and manpower on this front. It doesn’t have to be a military show of power but simply a method of forcing Russia to compete economically in the region. The goal should be to draw Putin’s attention from Ukraine and force him to react in an area where he knows he is weak. At that point, it would be possible to counter Putin by giving the Ukrainians training and weaponry. NATO needs to follow Rome's example and strike hard where Russia is vulnerable and then train Russia's adversaries on front's close to Russia's home territory.

If NATO doesn't, they will be looking at an invasion of Europe very soon.

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