

Russia Ukraine Conundrum

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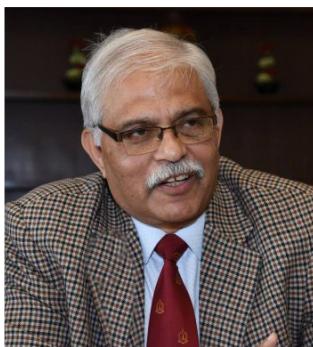
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An Electronics and Telecommunication Engineering graduate from BE College, Shibpore, M Tech from IIT, Kharagpur and M. Phil from Madras University Major General P K Mallick, VSM (Retd) was commissioned in the Corps of Signals of Indian Army. The officer has interest in Cyber Warfare, Electronic Warfare, SIGINT and Technology. His last posting before retirement was Senior Directing Staff (Army) at National Defence College, New Delhi. He runs a popular website on national security issues @ <https://www.strategicstudyindia.com>. Currently, he is a consultant with Vivekananda International Foundation, New Delhi.

Introduction

Ukraine is in the eye of the storm now. It is the most critical hotspot of the world where war can start anytime. ‘Drumbeats of war’ are being sounded. Understandably the complete focus of world media is there. The situation is changing every day. It is very difficult to predict what is going to happen next. All types of opinions are being circulated. It is time to look at the critical issues. As the situation develops, these issues may dramatically morph rather frequently and things can change or remain stalemated.

Besides monitoring the present situation, unravelling of the complexity of the Ukraine imbroglio requires a deeper awareness of strategic sensitivities in the region. Accordingly, it is proposed to deal with the subject matter in following Parts:-

1. Part 1: Confrontational Build-up.
2. Part 2: Geo-strategic Connections.
3. Part 3: Non-Kinetic Hostilities.
4. Part 4: Present Situation.

Part 1: Confrontational Build-up

Ukraine has always played an important part in the global security order. Today, it is in the middle of a renewed great-power rivalry that may dominate international relations in the decades to follow. Ukraine was a cornerstone of the erstwhile Soviet Union. It was the second-most populous and powerful of the fifteen Soviet republics, after Russia. Ukraine was home to much of the union's agricultural production, defence industries and military including the Black Sea Fleet and some of the nuclear arsenal. Ukraine has deep economic, cultural and political bonds with Russia.

Russian leaders have been sensitive to the eastward expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as the alliance opened its doors to former Warsaw Pact states and ex-Soviet republics in the late 1990s (the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland) and early 2000s (Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia). As the alliance showed its inclination in the late 2000s to admit Georgia and Ukraine Russia became worried. For Russia, the very notion that Ukraine would join NATO was a red line. Putin warned U.S. Undersecretary for Political Affairs William

J. Burns, who is now director of the CIA, in the weeks leading up to NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit, "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." Though NATO did not announce a formal membership plan for Ukraine and Georgia at the Bucharest Summit, the alliance did affirm that these countries will become members of NATO. Albania and Croatia became members of NATO in 2009. NATO expanded again in 2017, admitting Montenegro and North Macedonia in 2020.

In its nearly three decades of independence, Ukraine wanted to forge its path as a sovereign state and looked to align closely with the European Union and the NATO. However, Ukraine has not been able to balance its foreign relations and its deep internal divisions. Generally, the Ukrainian-speaking population in western parts of the country has supported greater integration with Europe, while a mostly Russian-speaking community in the east has favoured closer ties with Russia. In 2014, Ukraine became a battleground when Russia annexed Crimea, a part of Ukraine. Russia started arming and abetting separatists in the Donbas region in the country's southeast. It is important for Russia not to let the country become more aligned with NATO and the European Union (EU). In past Ukraine has sought NATO membership. This has been denied based on the degree of corruption in its national government. Probably, Ukraine's geographic vulnerability to a Russian invasion is preventing it from getting NATO membership. If Ukraine is invaded by Russia, the U.S. and its allies are obliged to send troops for Ukraine's defence.¹

Tensions between Russia and NATO have reached a point of crisis. Russian President Vladimir Putin is threatening a wider military incursion into Ukraine unless the U.S.-led alliance makes several major security concessions, including a commitment to cease

expanding eastward. Russia says that the United States and NATO have continually violated pledges allegedly made in the early 1990s that the alliance would not expand into the former Soviet bloc. NATO leaders have said they are open to new diplomacy with Russia on arms control and other matters but that they are unwilling to discuss forever shutting NATO's doors to new members.

Russia is frustrated with Ukraine's reluctance to implement the 2014-2015 Minsk agreements, which call for it to reabsorb two separatist-controlled regions while affording them 'special status' – measures that Ukraine argues would compromise its sovereignty. Russia alleges that U.S. leaders have broken promises they made in the early 1990s to not expand NATO's membership eastward. U.S. and NATO leaders say no such pledges were made and refuse to discuss limitations on NATO's future expansion, but they say they are open to some security dialogue with Russia. Moscow's goal remains the same: a Ukraine that is permanently in Russia's sphere of influence. For Russia, Ukraine is the front line in its continuing battle to block Western inroads into its neighbourhood.

Tensions between Ukraine and Russia have been increasing for months after Russia has mobilized more than one hundred thousand troops along its border with Ukraine as well as aviation and other equipment. Western intelligence agencies have reportedly intercepted Russian military plans to do so by early February. It stoked fears that Russia is preparing for a large-scale invasion of Ukraine, although Russia has denied this. Mr Putin may have three options:-

- A full-scale invasion, thrusting deep into Ukraine to seize the capital, Kyiv and overthrow the government.

- Annex more territory in eastern Ukraine, carving out a corridor linking Russia with Crimea.
- A small war, in which Russia “saves” Kremlin-backed separatists in Donbas, an eastern region of Ukraine, from supposed Ukrainian atrocities and degrades Ukraine’s armed forces.

The ‘little green men’, soldiers without insignia, helped Russia seize Ukraine’s the Crimean Peninsula in 2014. Since then, Ukraine has had seven years to prepare for a fight. Russian officials know any incursion will be met with stiff resistance. Military experts believe that the Russian army could quickly overwhelm the Ukrainian military, even if it is backed by the United States and its European allies. But a Ukrainian insurgency would most likely bog down the Russian military for years.



In a full Russian invasion, Russians would not only suffer casualties but also cause the death of untold Ukrainians, with whom many have family ties. Russia would also suffer heavy sanctions. Its banks would be harshly penalised and its economy deprived of crucial American high-tech components. Ordinary Russians would suffer from lower living standards, which have already been falling over the past seven years.

Military experts believe that the Russian army could quickly overwhelm the Ukrainian military, even if it is backed by the United States and its European allies. But a Ukrainian insurgency would most likely bog down the Russian military for years. In a full Russian invasion, Russians would not only suffer casualties but also cause death of untold Ukrainians, with whom many have family ties. Russia would also suffer heavy sanctions. Its banks would be harshly penalised and its economy deprived of crucial American high-tech components. Ordinary Russians would suffer from lower living standards, which have already been falling over the past seven years. Europe faces the prospect of Russia stopping the flow of piped gas. War would affect the prices of other commodities. The price of oil would rise. Russia is the world's largest exporter of wheat, with Ukraine close behind. Russia is a big source of metals.

The United States, NATO, and Ukraine must seriously consider the risk of a Russian invasion of Ukraine and prepare military, diplomatic and economic measures to deter and respond to that threat.

Part 2: Geo-strategic Connections

The Russian Narrative

Imperialist Russia

Six years of conflict from 1768 to 1774 between Russia and an overstretched Ottoman Empire led to the signing of the 1774 *Treaty of Küçük Kaynarca*. It provided Russia with direct access to the Black Sea region. Russia was also granted the right to protect Christian minorities in the Ottoman Empire, and the nominally independent Crimean Khanate was placed under its influence. Nine years after the treaty was signed, popular resentment toward reforms combined with the constant inflow of settlers to the Crimea fuelled regional unrest. It gave Catherine II's envoy, Prince Grigory Potemkin, the opportunity to annex Crimea through military means. From 1783 onward, Russia emerged as a growing Black Sea power as the Ottoman Empire slipped onto a slow, declining path.

The decline of the Ottoman Empire continued. The bloody 1853–1856 *Crimean War* between the Ottoman Empire and Russia left hundreds of thousands of people dead. France and Britain sided

with the Ottomans, as they feared Russia's growing strength would give Russia a hegemonic position in the region. A stronger but more isolated Russia repeatedly failed to seize control of the strategic Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits from the Ottoman Empire.

Both the Russian and Ottoman Empires collapsed during and at the end of World War I. There were attempts to redraw the map of the region. The *1923 Peace Treaty of Lausanne* created the basis for the Republic of Turkey. The *1936 Montreux Convention* established Turkish control over the straits and guaranteed free passage of warships belonging to the Black Sea states not at war with Turkey. Non-Black Sea powers were restricted in sending their military vessels to the Black Sea (they had to be under 15,000 tons per vessel, 45,000 in aggregate, and could only stay in the Black Sea for 21 days). The United States was not a party to the Montreux Convention.

The Post-World War II and Post-Cold War Order

Tensions flared between the Soviet Union and Turkey at the end of World War II. The Soviet Union pushed Turkey to renegotiate the Montreux Convention so that the Soviets could share control with Turkey over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits. Known as the *1946 Turkish Straits Crisis*, the Soviet Union increased its Black Sea military presence and pressed the Turkish government to accept its demand for military bases on Turkish soil. To safeguard itself from Soviet pressure, Turkey sought help from the United States. U.S. sent warships to the region. The Soviet Union eventually backed down. By 1952, U.S. wanted to contain a growing Soviet threat in the Mediterranean by anchoring both Turkey and Greece as members of NATO. Throughout the Cold War, there was an uneasy equilibrium in the Black Sea among Turkey, NATO, the U.S. and the Soviet Union. From 1976 on, Turkey allowed Soviet aircraft carriers built in Ukraine

(Kiev-class, then Kuznetsov-class) to pass through the straits.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the Black Sea region became less geo-strategically significant from a Western perspective. The most important strategic issue following the end of the Cold War was the removal of nuclear weapons from Ukraine. This was encapsulated in the *1994 Budapest Memorandum* in which Ukraine agreed to the removal of its nuclear weapons in exchange for security guarantees by Russia, the U.S. and U.K., supported by France and China to protect its territorial integrity.

An uneasy relationship continued between Ukraine and Russia over the strategic Crimean Peninsula. Russia retained military infrastructure including a base in Sevastopol that was necessary to the operation of the Black Sea Fleet. In 1997, the *Ukraine-Russia Friendship Treaty* split the Soviet Black Sea Fleet between Russia (81 per cent) and Ukraine (19 per cent). This allowed Russia to lease the Sevastopol Base for 20 years, a term extended until 2042 in 2010 in exchange for concessionary energy prices and cancellation of most of the Ukrainian debt.

Emergence of A New Russia

Although Russia maintained the perception that its former Soviet Republics and the Black Sea area belonged to its natural sphere of influence, it lacked the political, economic and military power to impose its will. This had to change in response to the *Colour Revolutions*, which occurred in Russia's neighbourhood in Georgia (the 2003–2004 *Rose Revolution*) and in Ukraine (the 2004–2005 *Orange Revolution*). The leaders were replaced by pro-West and pro-Euro-Atlantic leaders. U.S. actively supported these revolutions.²

Russia viewed these events seriously. It took measures to re-establish its influence and enhance its military presence in the Black Sea. Russian energy was used as an instrument of power over Ukraine in 2006 and 2009 when Russia temporarily stopped the supply of natural gas to Europe through Ukraine and increased Russian energy prices. In August 2008, Russian military forces entered Georgia, overwhelming Georgian forces, and nearly seized the capital Tbilisi. Russia has thus increased its control over Georgian territory.

The United States and NATO did not recognise Russia's claims to Crimea. They have encouraged Russia and Ukraine to resolve the conflict in the country's eastern Donbas region via the *Minsk Agreements*. Brokered by France and Germany and signed in 2014 and 2015, these accords call for a cease-fire, withdrawal of heavy weapons, Ukraine's control over its border with Russia, local elections and a special political status for certain areas of the region.

The most geo-strategically and militarily significant event was Russia's annexation of *Crimea* in March 2014. In violation of both the Budapest Memorandum and the Friendship Treaty, Russia's remilitarization of the peninsula and military intervention in eastern Ukraine paved the way for several military reinforcements in the region.

Russia's Ukraine Connection

Ukraine is a quintessential borderland state. The country borders three former Soviet states of Russia, Belarus and Moldova and four countries of the EU, Poland, Slovenia Hungary and Romania. Ukraine has a coastline along the Black Sea in the South and sits on the Northern European Plain, the area that has historically served as an invasion super-highway going East and West. The Ukrainian geography facilitated such invasions. The country consists of flat and

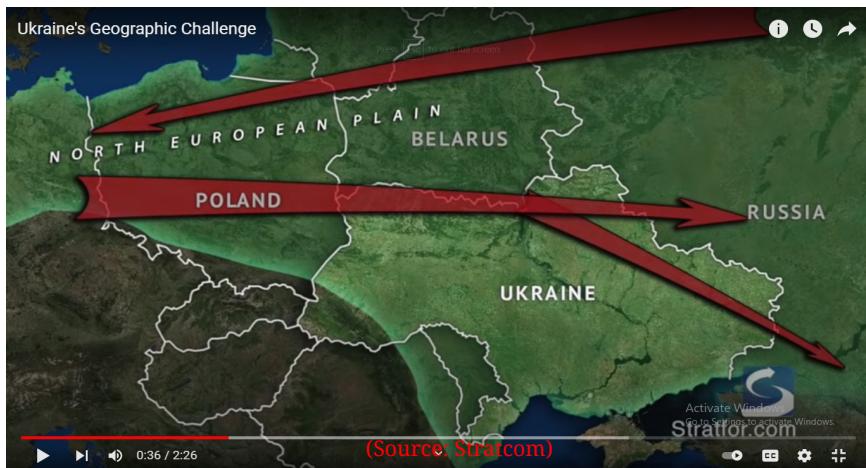
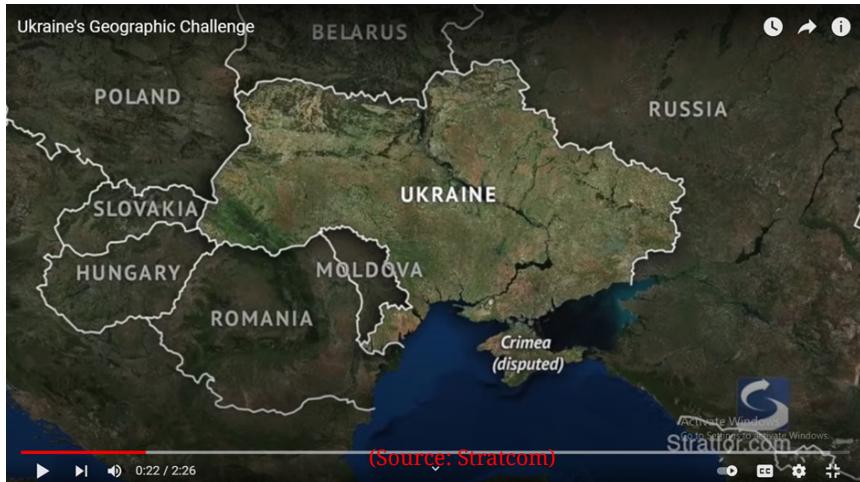
fertile plains except the Carpathian Mountains that arches into the far West of the country. Even these mountains can be penetrated and have not posed any significant barrier to invasion.

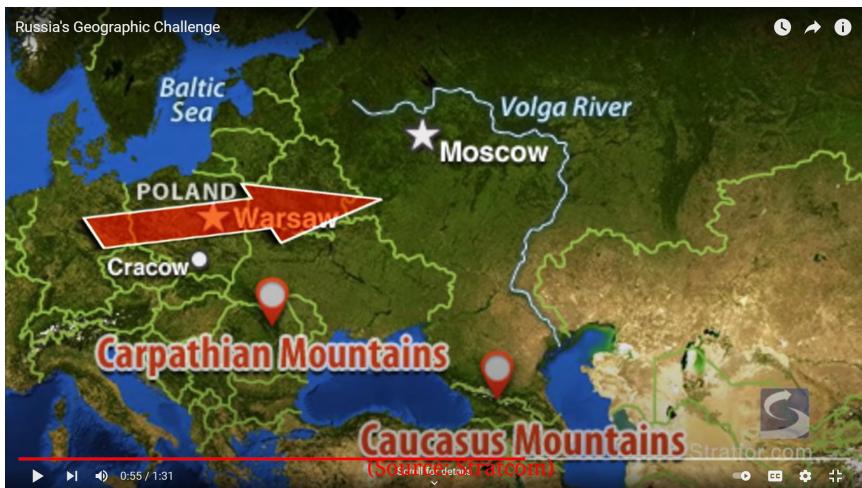
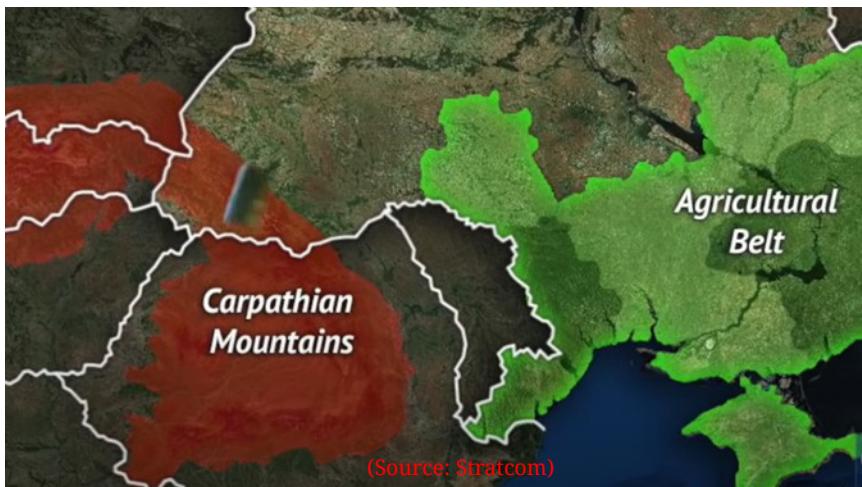
Ukraine's wide-open geography is inextricably linked to that of Russia. Ukraine's agricultural and industrial belts have traditionally integrated with Russia. Ukraine serves as a primary transit state for Russian energy to Europe. Due to its location and abundance of agriculture and mineral resources Ukraine has been contested between regional powers for centuries. This competition is being currently played out in extreme form with a Western-backed government confronting Russian backed uprising in Eastern Ukraine.

There is one major hole in this geographic expanse. The Northern European plain. The Northern European plain has the gap between the Carpathian Mountain and the Baltic Sea. At its narrowest, it is 300 miles across Poland. This narrow point is referred to as the 'Push Funnel'. Russia has faced three major attackers along this axis - Napoleon, Wilhelm the Second and Hitler. Russia will prefer to control the land between Russia and the Polish funnel and push as far west as possible. Knowing that once an attacker has passed that narrow chokepoint then it is an open march to Russia's heartland. It doesn't necessarily need the buffers to be part of the Russian Federation; it just needs to make sure they are not hostile or occupied by hostile powers.

Even if Russia is the largest country in the world, it has an indefensible and unforgivable territory. The core of Russia which runs from the Volga grain belt up to Moscow proper is without any natural geographic barrier. This is why the country has looked for traditionally major geographic barriers far from its core to keep foreign powers at a distance. This meant *Russian dominance has*

had to reach East to the present Siberia to the Pacific Ocean, in the South East to the Tien Shen Mountain of Asia, in the South to the Caucasus Mountains bordering Iran and Turkey, and finally West of the Carpathian Mountains in Central Europe. Siberia is large enough and no army could invade through it and make it to Moscow.





Russia's Access to Warm Water Port

Having good access to water allows countries to trade with the world, but Russia, despite its 23 thousand miles of coastline, has no significant warm water ice-free ports with direct access to the ocean. Russia is fundamentally limited in its maritime power because it has

no easy way to access the world oceans round the year. This is a major challenge for Russia. Somehow this vulnerability of Russia is not being played out in the current discourse.

The Port of Novorossiysk is ice-free but its throughput is limited both by the depth and size. St Petersburg also is an important port but it freezes for many months of the year. On the Pacific ports like Vladivostok also occasionally freeze during the winter. But ice is not the biggest problem with these ports. The biggest *problem is their access to the world's oceans through choke points controlled by either NATO countries or NATO allies*. To get to the ocean from Novorossiysk, one needs to pass through the Bosphorus Strait which is controlled by Turkey, a NATO country. To get to the ocean from St. Petersburg one needs to pass through the Danish Straits controlled by Denmark, also a NATO country. And to get to the ocean from Vladivostok and many of the other Pacific ports one needs to pass through the Sea of Japan which is controlled by Japan, a close ally of NATO. In case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and if NATO countries decide to exercise their options, Russia will be in serious trouble even if invasion of Ukraine will not be treated as an attack on a NATO country.

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Russia has continued to strive to maintain political power in the region. Out of 15 states that emerged from the Soviet Union, 12 joined a Commonwealth of Independent States with Russia (CIS) essentially aligning them politically with Russia, while three joined both NATO and EU – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. That means, on paper Russia had a strong political buffer between it and Europe. The Russian exclave of Kalinigrad and the countries of Belarus and Ukraine covered almost all of the Northern European Plain.



(Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3C_5bsdQWg)

Russia used its influence on Ukraine to sign a long-term lease on the warm water port of Sevastopol which greatly expanded the naval capabilities of Russia's black sea fleet. But Ukraine tended to be more and more pro-European in the decades following the fall of the Soviet Union. That was a major reason for Russia's invasion of Crimea, while on the surface Putin might have claimed that it was to save the Russians of the area from the increasingly westernizing country. Annexation of Crimea was in reality a strategic imperative to keep the warm water port of Sevastopol. A Ukraine that was friendlier to the West likely would have ended Russia's lease on that Port. *Putin needed to invade Crimea to prevent a crippling blow to Russia's oceanic access.*

Russia's Commercial Leverage

Russia has managed to overcome many of its geographical challenges partially because of two assets - oil and natural gas. It has enormous energy reserves, partially because of its enormous size. Russia's natural gas pipeline provides for 40 percent of Europe's natural gas demand. Some countries such as Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Finland are almost fully dependent on Russia

for their natural gas. This gas dependency is a major reason why Germany, a country with high Russian oil dependency, is much less likely to criticise Russia than a country like the U.K. which has virtually zero Russian gas dependency. If Russia shut off gas to Germany it would devastate them. The U.S. has attempted to reduce Russian influence in Europe by exporting liquefied natural gas across the Atlantic. It costs more but it allows Western European countries to buy their energy from their American ally.

It wasn't only a matter of energy pipelines, but the long-term physical security of Russia. The Ukrainian border with Russia is over seven hundred miles long. It is five hundred miles from Moscow over flat, open terrain. Odesa and Sevastopol, both in Ukraine, provide Russia with commercial and military access to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean. *If Ukraine were to be integrated into NATO and the European Union, Russia would face a threat not only in the Baltics, but one from Ukraine. Loss of access to Ukrainian territory would be a blow to Russian economic strategy.* A Ukrainian alliance with NATO would pose an unmistakable threat to Russian national security. Precisely that threat has resurfaced.



Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yzX2N1L3A-c>

Russia's Military Power

The Former Soviet Union (FSU) had a GDP of about \$2,042 billion in 1990. Russia only had a GDP of some \$460 billion in 1992. The FSU had a population of 290.5 million in 1991, while Russia had a population of 148.5 million in 1992. Comparing the size of the FSU armed forces versus those of Russia is difficult because of the complex transitions and force structure involved. As per the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) estimates for the calendar year 1991, the FSU had some 3,400,000 active forces and 5,239,000 reserves. It had some 1,400,000 ground forces: 20,725 active main battle tanks; 14,400 artillery weapons; 4,950 combat aircraft; 2,050 armed helicopters; 317 submarines; and 218 principal surface combatants. It had a defence budget that the IISS estimated was \$238 billion in 1991 dollars and an official defence budget of \$171.9 billion. In 2020-2021, Russia had some 1,004,100 active forces plus 2,400,000 more that had served within five years who could play some role as effective reserves. It only had about 348,000 ground forces. It had only 7,500 modern active main battle tanks; 2,733 active combat aircraft; 900 armed helicopters; 67 submarines; and 35 principal surface combatants. The IISS estimated that its defence budget was only \$57.1 billion in 2020 dollars.

In recent years there has been a great deal of talk about the weakness of the Russian armed forces. Russia has taken measures to reverse the trend. Now Russian military can pose a challenge to any power trying to project force into the region. Russia has already annexed Crimea in 2014, using its “little green men” to take *de facto* control over part of eastern Ukraine, steadily expanded its influence and military exercises in Belarus, used military exercises and other measures to show how effectively it can threaten the Baltic and Scandinavian states, made a major arms sale to Turkey, and gained

air bases and a naval base in the Mediterranean in Syria.³

In 1992 the Soviet Union collapsed. The U.S. remained the only superpower. In 2008 the world changed in just seven weeks. On August 8, 2008, Russia attacked Georgia and announced its re-entry into history. The assumption that Russia was no longer an aggressive actor in global politics suddenly seemed false. With Georgia's occupation, the Russians sent a message: America is not in a position to support its ally Georgia. While Europe was weakening, it was inevitable that Russia would return as an active participant.

Today's Russian military structure is different from that of the Soviet Union and the U.S. in another way. It emphasizes active-duty forces and relies less on reservists. Because of universal conscription, the Soviet Union had a large active-duty force and an even larger reserve of former conscripts who could be recalled in an emergency. The U.S. maintains a large all-volunteer reserve that trains constantly and maintains a relatively high level of readiness. Although Russia has made efforts to create a reserve establishment, those efforts have been modest thus far. This means that Russia has a very strong active-duty force, but not the depth to sustain a long conflict. Another difference between the Russian military today and that of the twentieth century is the sensitivity to casualties. Russian and Soviet forces during the world wars were infamous for their willingness to take massive casualties and endure great suffering. That is not the case today. During the war in Afghanistan during the 1980s, protests by the Russian population, especially Russian mothers' groups, highlighted casualties and the costs of conflict. Russia has, therefore, designed a military to fight with skill and equipment rather than mass.

These reforms have succeeded in building a modern, ready, and high-quality, but smaller, military designed to operate near the Russian homeland. When Russian military forces occupied Crimea in 2014, the results were much different than in 2008. As a RAND study noted, “While few were surprised by the annexation, many were surprised by the performance of the Russian armed forces. Russian soldiers in Crimea were competent, capable and professional, three terms that had not been applied to the Russian military in quite some time. The Russians themselves seemed to be no less surprised—and proud.” The proxy war into Eastern Ukraine and the intervention in Syria also demonstrated considerable technical expertise. The operations, though relatively small, have given combat experience to many Russian military personnel. In addition to the operations in Georgia, Crimea and Ukraine, Russia has sent units to Syria for extended but limited combat operations. The Russian navy makes forays into the Eastern Mediterranean and occasionally into the North Atlantic. Russian patrol aircraft fly across the Atlantic. Small delegations of military personnel and contractors have been seen in Cuba, Venezuela, and Libya, as well as throughout other parts of Africa.⁴

The Ukraine Narrative

Background

Ukraine has a rich history of a proud Cossack warrior culture and self-determination. The Kyivan Rus dominated the plains of Eastern Europe. Their empire stretched from the Black Sea to the Baltics. However, after losing to the Mongols at the Kalka River in 1223, Ukraine was subjugated by foreign rulers for nearly eight centuries. Vladimir Putin, in a recent 7,000-word essay on Ukrainian history, wrote about the *Battle of Poltava in 1709*, saying that most

locals sided with Moscow against Swedish forces and Cossacks under a Ukrainian leader named Ivan Mazepa. Ukraine was a cornerstone of the Soviet Union during the Cold War. After Russia, it was the second-most populous and powerful of the fifteen Soviet republics. Ukraine was home to much of the union's agricultural production, defence industries and military, including the Black Sea Fleet and some of the nuclear arsenal.

Ukraine has long played an important and sometimes overlooked role in the global security order. Today, the country is on the front lines of a renewed great-power rivalry that many analysts say will dominate international relations in the decades ahead. In recent elections, Ukrainians have indicated that they see their future in Europe. But the country continues to grapple with extreme corruption and deep regional rifts. Shortly before declaring its independence in 1989, the economy of Ukraine was at the level of top countries of Western Europe. According to Friedman Ukraine was the real contender for the role of a "full Southern European centre of force".

After three decades of independence, Ukraine is looking to align more closely with Western institutions, including the European Union and the NATO. However, Ukraine has struggled to balance its foreign relations and bridge deep internal divisions. A more nationalist Ukrainian-speaking population in western parts of the country has generally supported greater integration with Europe, while a mostly Russian-speaking community in the east has favoured closer ties with Russia.

Ukraine became a battleground in 2014 when Russia annexed Crimea and began arming and abetting separatists in the Donbas region in the country's southeast. Russia's seizure of Crimea was the first time since World War II that a European state annexed

the territory of another. More than fourteen thousand people have died in the conflict, the bloodiest in Europe since the Balkan Wars of the 1990s. For many analysts, the conflict marked a clear shift in the global security environment from a unipolar period of U.S. dominance to one defined by renewed competition between great powers.

Geography

Ukraine is the largest country in Europe by area. It shares a 1,400-mile border with Russia to the north and east and a 700-mile border with Russian-aligned Belarus to the north. To the west, Ukraine borders Moldova in addition to four NATO member states: Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania. Ukraine's vulnerability is a function of its terrain.



UKRAINE AT A GLANCE

Area
603,550 square kilometers
(largest country in Europe,
excluding Russia)

Population
44 million

Religions
Orthodox Christianity,
Catholicism, Protestantism

Primary Languages
Ukrainian (official), Russian

Form of Government
Semipresidential republic

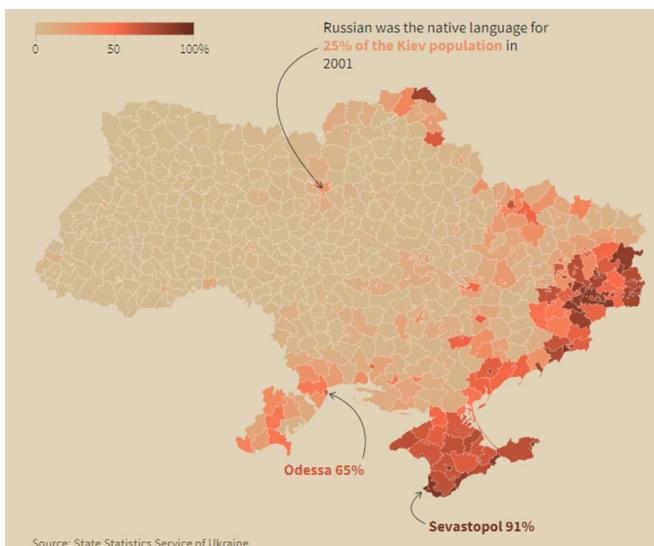
GDP
\$155.6 billion

GDP Per Capita
\$3,727

For centuries, armies have swiftly crossed the steppe that dominates much of Ukraine, with the Carpathian Mountains in the far northwest and the Dnipro River as the only two sizeable natural impediments to troop movement. The nation's capital, Kyiv, straddles the Dnipro River in western Ukraine. Despite its large Black Sea coastline, the country's main naval ports are penned in by Russian naval bases and have been threatened by Russian Black Sea forces. One aspect of Ukraine's geography is an advantage: the territory is too large to be swiftly taken in one Russian offensive. This would allow NATO and Ukrainian forces to regroup in the west/interior and then launch a counteroffensive.⁵

Russian Speakers

Russia's top concern is the welfare of the approximately eight million ethnic Russians living in Ukraine, according to a 2001 census, mostly in the south and east. Moscow claimed a duty to protect these people as a pretext for its actions in Ukraine.



Percentage of native Russian speakers according to the 2001 Ukrainian census

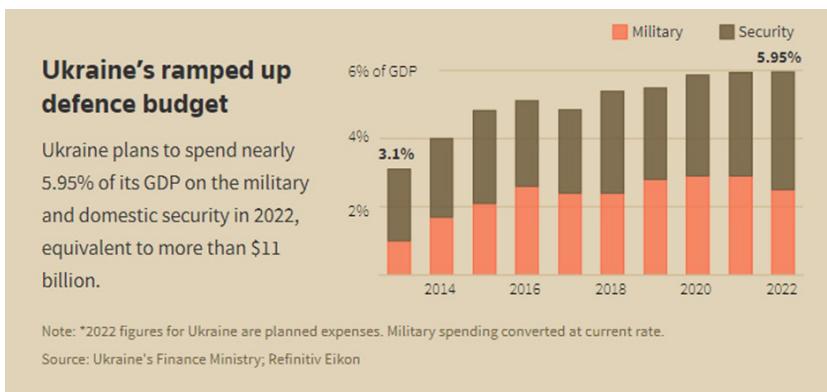
Economy

Ukraine's westward tilt is obvious in its exports and imports. Russia now accounts for just 8 percent of Ukraine's international trade, while that with the European Union has climbed to 42 percent.



Defence Preparedness

Ukraine's National Security Strategy 2020 stated its desire to join NATO eventually and prescribed greater interoperability to meet NATO standards. Ukraine has participated actively in NATO exercises and accepted NATO trainers. Since the annexation of Crimea, Ukraine has increased its security and defence spending to 6 percent of GDP, compared to just 2 percent in 2014.

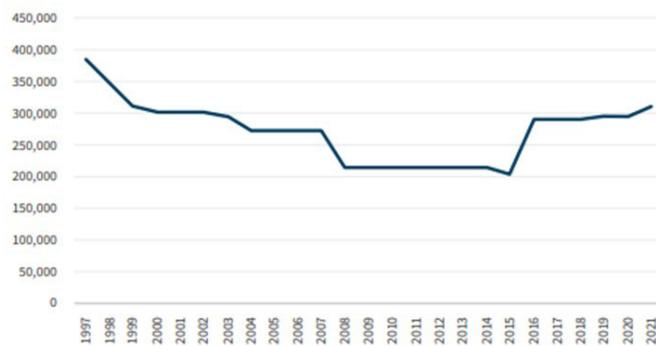


But it's all relative. According to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Russia has 900,000 active-duty personnel compared with Ukraine's 209,000 and is vastly outgunned in terms of equipment and aircraft. The former Ukrainian defence minister Zagorodniuk said, "The Russian budget is 11 times bigger than the Ukrainian [budget]." Even while ramping up defence spending, Ukraine has reformed the country's sprawling state defence conglomerate, Ukroboronprom. The increase in military funding also made Ukroboronprom fiscally secure. Ukroboronprom gives Ukraine a stronger defence industry than a country and economy its size might otherwise have. The commander in chief of the Ukrainian armed forces, General Ruslan Khomchak in April 2021 affirmed that Ukraine's industrial base was "ready for an adequate response" to any Russian aggression. Michael Kofman, an expert on the Russian armed forces with the think tank CAN said, other reforms are far from finished. He said, "The Ukrainian military retains some substantial structural deficits, and important parts of it remain unreformed."

While Ukraine's armed forces of more than 200,000 servicemen are less than a quarter the size of Russia's, their strength has been significantly increased since 2014 by Western military aid, including

supplies of U.S. Javelin anti-tank missiles and Turkish drones. After 15 years of decline, Ukrainian military forces expanded in 2015 to meet the separatist and Russian challenges. The army consists of 209,000 active soldiers organized into 27 combat brigades and supporting units. However, the combat brigades are severely understrength. For internal security, Ukraine has a large paramilitary force, national guard and border guard. After the Russian seizure of several of its Black Sea Fleet vessels, Ukraine has worked to rebuild its navy. The navy is small and has limited capabilities. The air force flies about 100 aircraft, which are upgraded versions of Soviet aircraft. The Ukrainian armed forces have invested in some domestically produced modernization: air and missile defence (S-300V, 9K300 Tor, 2K12 Kub, and S-125 Neva); modernised coastal defence forces and Neptune anti-ship ballistic missiles for the navy; and Stugna anti-tank missiles for the ground forces, in addition to Javelin missiles from the United States. Ukraine surrendered its nuclear weapons in the 1990s, thereby losing that ultimate guarantee of sovereignty.

Figure 14: Total Ukrainian Active Armed Forces



Note: *The Military Balance* does not include figures for the size of the Ukrainian Black Sea Fleet.

Source: IISS, *The Military Balance 2021* (London: IISS, 2021), 209–213.

Most experts agree that Russia's vastly superior army, air force and navy could quickly seize Ukrainian territory. Ukraine knows it

doesn't have much of a navy or an air force, and it doesn't have the most advanced anti-aircraft defences. Ukraine has substantial gaps in the country's air and naval defence capabilities. Ukraine's navy lost 70 per cent of its vessels following the occupation of Crimea.

When Russian troops invaded eastern Ukraine in 2014 and occupied the Crimean Peninsula, they faced little resistance from an inexperienced, crumbling Ukrainian military affected by corruption and lacking the most basic supplies. But, after seven years of conflict with Russian-backed rebels in Ukraine's separatist-held Donbas region, Ukraine armed forces have undergone reforms. Since 2014, the U.S. has given \$2.5 billion to support the development of the country's armed forces, including Humvees, patrol boats, radar systems and anti-tank Javelin missiles. The Ukrainian military is now battle-hardened and highly motivated. Ukraine's defence minister from 2019 to 2020, Andrii Zagorodniuk, said, "It's certainly not going to be an easy operation. It's not going to be a quick victorious war [for Russia]." He stated, "even the most fanatical Russian military planner must realize that once an invasion begins, events will spin out of control. You don't know how many people you are going to lose, how quickly you're going to advance. And you will certainly have trouble keeping control of anything you have invaded."⁶

Ukraine has taken measures to create a territorial-defence force, run by the professional military but open to civilian volunteers. According to a survey, about 30 per cent of Ukrainians and 46 per cent of men say that they are willing to join an armed battle if an invasion occurs. The former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko spelt it out clearly: Ukraine wants to ensure that every city and every home becomes a fortress. And that thousands of coffins are sent back to Russia.

The Ukrainian army itself is also prepared to split into smaller units, less easily targeted by advanced weapons. This might not stop a Russian bombing campaign, but that isn't the point. The point is to make anyone considering a longer-term occupation think twice. This effort is now being formalized into units of the newly formed *Territorial Defense Forces*, a part of the military. Last year, the Ukrainian Army began weekend training for civilian volunteers in these units. The goal is not to achieve victory against the weight of the Russian military. It is to create the threat of disruption and resistance to an occupying force that would serve as a deterrent to an invasion.

There are problems with civilian defence. Domestic political divisions could spark violence from armed militias. The Institute for the Study of War in Washington noted that, in an invasion, these groups could quickly turn into a decentralized insurgency in many parts of the country.⁷

Implications of Russia-Ukraine Connection

Russia has deep economic, cultural and political bonds with Ukraine. Kyiv, Ukraine's capital, is sometimes referred to as 'the mother of Russian cities'. In the eighth and ninth centuries, it was in Kyiv that Christianity was brought from Byzantium to the Slavic peoples. Christianity served as the anchor for Kievan Rus, the early Slavic state from which modern Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians draw their lineage. One of the top concerns of Russia is the welfare of the approximately eight million ethnic Russians living in Ukraine mostly in the south and east of Ukraine. Nikita Khrushchev transferred Crimea from Russia to Ukraine in 1954 to strengthen the "brotherly ties between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples." Since the fall of the Soviet Union, many Russians in both Russia and Crimea

have longed for a return to the peninsula. Sevastopol is the home port for the dominant maritime force in the region, Russia's Black Sea Fleet. In 2005, Vladimir Putin said, "the demise of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century. As for the Russian people, it became a genuine tragedy. Tens of millions of our fellow citizens and countrymen found themselves beyond the fringes of Russian territory."

Russia had relied on Ukrainian pipelines to pump its gas to Central and Eastern Europe for decades. Even now it pays billions of dollars per year in transit fees to Ukraine. However, Russia completed construction of its Nord Stream-2 pipeline in mid-2021. Russia has solidified its control of a critical foothold on the Black Sea by seizing Crimea. With its military presence there, Russia can project power deeper into the Mediterranean, Middle East, and North Africa.

Putin has made it clear that he will never allow Ukraine to become "anti-Russian" and will continue to push back against the expansion of Western influence in Ukraine. In a remarkable paper published July 2021, President Putin explained his views of the two countries' shared history, describing Russians and Ukrainians as "one people" who effectively occupy "the same historical and spiritual space."⁸ If there are further Western sanctions, Russia is well aware that markets in China, India and elsewhere, as well as investments in oil and gas infrastructure from the Middle East, can support the Russian economy.

Some observers draw attention to the following:-

- Ukraine has a 1,200 miles land border with Russia.
- Nearly all Ukrainians speak the Russian language. Although the people who report Russian as their first and primary

language is just over a third.

- This one-third of people who have Russian as a mother tongue are concentrated geographically near the land border. This is because of historic migration.
- Russia and Ukraine do a lot of trade. But less nowadays because Russia's economy has gone down.
- The above make Ukraine's politics unstable.
- Russia's access to the warm-water ports of Crimea and the naval port at Sevastopol is critical for Russia.

Due to Ukraine's geography and history, internal divisions, economic connections and susceptibility to Russian media, it's relatively easy for Russia to influence Ukraine. Taking out Ukraine from the security concerns and economic relationships with Russia, and forbidding Russia from accessing Sevastopol, would require extraordinary economic and military commitments from the EU and NATO. Ukrainian governments to tilt towards the West has to demand EU and NATO membership. Ukrainian sovereignty and independence would be completely dependent on the West.⁹ Former US national security adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski observed that without Ukraine, there can be no Russian empire. Putin fears a Ukraine that is economically and politically orientated towards the West is a critical security risk and a dagger pointed at the heart of Russia. Putin is determined to take measures either to destabilise and bring down the current western-orientated government of Ukraine or to try to seize the country by military force. Former Defence Secretary Robert Gates feels that Russia's strategy in Ukraine has been working but Putin has overplayed his hand on Ukraine.

European Concerns

Role of the EU

If Russia invades Ukraine there will be long term, serious and strategic effects on Europe. The European security architecture is under tremendous threat. Institutional arrangements like the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, other arms-control agreements and the NATO-Russia Founding Act, exist only on paper now. Due to their divisions, weaknesses and failures, the EU and its member states are seen as weak. On arms control and other security issues, the EU has almost nothing to offer. So, Russia does not take EU as a serious threat and simply ignores it. For EU, the way to defend its interest is to make use of its main strength of economic influence and do so strategically. In the case of the Russian invasion, the EU is yet to prepare a robust package of sanctions to impose.

As per Handelsblatt, the widest circulation German-language business and financial paper, the US and the EU have ruled out the option of cutting Russia off from the SWIFT financial messaging system. Within Germany's ruling coalition, there are differences of opinion on whether to leverage the Nord Stream-2 pipeline to deter Russia. On 18 January 2022, Olaf Scholz, the German Chancellor, emphasised during a press conference with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg that "all this [Nord Stream-2 and SWIFT] will have to be discussed if there is a military intervention against Ukraine".¹⁰

German Concerns

For Germany, life after the Cold War was about economics. It achieved through the EU what it couldn't achieve since 1871: domination of Europe. And it did so without the kind of violence that had ripped the Continent apart for centuries.¹¹ Germany is a

big economic power in the EU. And depends on Russia for energy. It is deeply perturbed by the possibility of armed conflict to its east. Germany has refused to send weapons to Ukraine, putting it at odds with the U.S. and Britain. It cannot afford to risk its economic relationship with Russia.

The U.S. would demand the Europeans take on more responsibility for their security as its forces would be stretched thin between Europe and Asia.

The NATO Factor

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) originated in the trauma of World War II. After World War II in 1945, western Europe was economically exhausted and militarily weak. Devastation of western Europe encouraged the U.S. to abandon its traditional isolation from European political and military affairs. The Soviet Union had emerged from the war with its armies dominating all the states of central and eastern Europe. NATO was created in 1949 by the United States, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom to provide collective security against the Soviet Union.

Joining the original signatories were Greece and Turkey (1952); West Germany (1955; from 1990 as Germany); Spain (1982); the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland (1999); Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia (2004); Albania and Croatia (2009); Montenegro (2017); and North Macedonia (2020). France withdrew from the integrated military command of NATO in 1966 but remained a member of the organization; it resumed its position in NATO's military command in 2009. Over time, NATO expanded.

● Founding members	● Cold War expansion	● Post-Cold War expansion
1949 Belgium	1952 Greece	1990 Germany*
Canada	Turkey	1999 Czech Republic
Denmark	1955 West Germany	Hungary
France	1982 Spain	Poland
Iceland		2004 Bulgaria
Italy		Estonia
Luxembourg		Latvia
Netherlands		Lithuania
Norway		Romania
Portugal		Slovakia
United Kingdom		Slovenia
United States		2009 Albania
		Croatia
		2017 Montenegro
		2020 North Macedonia

*German reunification in 1990 resulted in what was formerly East Germany becoming part of NATO. The map shows West and East Germany.

NATO's Eastward Expansion

Source: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/north-atlantic-treaty-organization-nato>



The heart of NATO is expressed in Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, in which the signatory members agree that: “An armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all; and consequently, they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in the exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognized by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.” In recent years NATO has focused on deterring Russian aggression. It also been conducting military operations in Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo and Somalia. The U.S. spends far more on defence than other NATO members combined.

Since 1994, Ukraine, an alliance partner of NATO but is a non-member. It is outside of NATO’s defence perimeter. Membership of Georgia and Ukraine was not possible as Russian forces were already present on their territories and that of the NATO’s were far away. If Article 5 were taken seriously, Ukrainian membership would mean immediate alliance participation in an ongoing war. While NATO deplores Russia’s bullying behaviour against its neighbours, none of the allies is willing to risk a military confrontation with Russia over Ukraine. Nuclear power states going into a conflict is a different ball game altogether. For these and other reasons, both Ukraine and Georgia found their applications for acceptance into NATO’s Membership Action Plan (MAP) not fructifying.

However, the 2008 NATO summit in Bucharest declared, “NATO welcomes Ukraine’s and Georgia’s Euro-Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO.” But NATO never gave either country

a formal MAP or any concrete roadmap that would facilitate their accession to NATO. It will not offer membership to Ukraine and Georgia any time soon. The reluctance is based on sound geopolitical reasoning and a sober evaluation of the two countries' limited progress on much-needed reforms. In 2019, Ukraine passed a constitutional amendment committing itself to join the alliance. However, while a majority of Georgians support NATO membership, a significant portion of the Ukrainian people concentrated in the country's southern and eastern parts closer to Russia are against joining the alliance. Notably, when NATO talks of democracy etc., it is not averse to tolerate autocracies like Portugal and Turkey.

The USA Factor

U.S.' Options

Democrat of New Jersey, Senator Robert Menendez, the chair of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, has introduced the 'Defending Ukraine Sovereignty Act' of 2022, a bill that looks like a wish list for activists of Ukrainian sovereignty. It includes provisions for:-

- Use of the Department of Defense lease authority and the Special Defense Acquisition Fund to support Ukraine.
- Enhanced Ukrainian defensive capabilities; increased support for U.S.-Ukrainian military exchange programs.
- Additional loans to equip Ukraine's military.
- Public disclosure of illegal assets belonging to Putin and members of his inner circle.
- Assistance for combating disinformation in Ukraine.

- Sanctions on Russian financial institutions and sanctions on Russian state officials who participate in any form of attack on Ukraine.
- Sanctions on the Russian energy and mining sectors.
- Sanctions for the disconnection of major Russian financial institutions from financial messaging services such as SWIFT.
- Prohibition on transactions involving Russia's sovereign debt.
- Review of sanctions on Nord Stream-2.

In addition to the above other options available are:-

- Sanctions on exports of advanced U.S. technology like semiconductors and microchips that could adversely impact the Russian aerospace and arms industries.
- Disclosing the assets held by Putin's inner circle of 35 individuals previously recommended by the Russian dissident Alexei Navalny.

Conversely, Russia has the following factors to its advantage:-

- \$630 billion in international reserves.
- Favourable energy market.
- Augmented indigenization of critical industries.
- Chinese Cross-Border Interbank Payment System
- Alternatives to SWIFT in the form of the domestic Russian System for Transfer of Financial Messages.

Sanctions

U.S. semi-conductor manufacturers rely on many Russian and Ukrainian-sourced materials like neon, palladium and others. Over 90 percent of U.S. semi-conductor grade neon supplies come from Ukraine and 35 percent of U.S. palladium is obtained from Russia. Neon, critical for the lasers to make chips, is a by-product of Russian steel manufacturing. It is then purified in Ukraine. Neon prices rose 600 percent during Russia's 2014 annexation of the Crimean Peninsula. Palladium is used among other applications, in sensors and memory. Conflict in Ukraine can cause rare gas prices to increase and affect supply issues. Fluorine is another gas that has a large supply from that part of the world that could be affected.¹² Chipmakers have been reviewing their supply chains for potential fallout from conflict in Ukraine. If the U.S. is serious about using sanctions it must sharpen its messaging. They should name the Russian banks it would blacklist, the specific dealings it would ban and the companies that would be in danger of going under. This would make Russia take the threat of sanctions seriously.

U.S. is unable to make the EU united in taking action against the Russians. French President Emmanuel has requested the EU to conduct its dialogue with Russia. Germany has not clarified its clear position on delaying or cancelling approval of the Nord Stream-2 pipeline. In case Russia cuts off its energy supplies to Europe, there will be a further threat to trans-Atlantic unity. The U.S. may not be willing to coerce its allies at the risk of fracturing that trans-Atlantic unity.¹³ After all, in terms of their impact on the global economy, tough financial sanctions on Russia could well be the largest use of sanctions since the United States targeted Japanese finance and oil imports before World War II. This is why Russia may think the U.S. is

bluffing when it threatens dramatic sanctions. The Kremlin believes it has a far higher tolerance for risk than its American or European counterparts.¹⁴

Military Assistance

Since Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, U.S. military support for Ukraine largely has been limited to defensive weaponry. The U.S. can provide Ukraine with battlefield intelligence that could help the country respond quickly in case of an invasion. If Russian troops crossed the border, the U.S. could offer offensive weaponry and training.

In the event of a Russian victory in Ukraine, there is a chance of a bloody insurgency. Covertly the C.I.A. and overtly the Pentagon can help such Ukrainian insurgency. U.S. could provide training in neighbouring NATO countries like Poland, Romania and Slovakia. This could help insurgents to get in and out of Ukraine easily. However, it is not clear whether Ukrainians would be fighting an insurgency campaign that could drag on for years or even decades. Some experts point to Crimea, where there has been little armed resistance since Russia invaded. Also, Russia might limit its offensive to the eastern parts of Ukraine, which is pro-Russian.

China's Ambivalence

China is watching Ukraine with a lot of interest. How Xi interprets the outcome of the Ukraine stand-off could influence whether and how China tries to reunify with Taiwan.¹⁵ If Russia invades Ukraine and triggers a long-drawn conflict with the United States and its Western allies, China stands to benefit. America will have to divert strategic resources to confront Russia.

Interestingly, China has been extremely careful about showing its hand. Ukraine does not dominate the official Chinese press. Between December 15 and January 24 this year, the official mouthpiece of the Communist Party of China, *The People's Daily*, carried only one article about the crisis. It seems Xi Jinping is carefully hedging his bets. It is not clear whether Xi knows Putin's real intentions vis-à-vis Ukraine. Xi Jinping is prudent enough not to show his own cards, either. China understands that unequivocal support to Russia will certainly upset the EU. EU is now China's second-largest trading partner. China must prevent the U.S. from engaging the EU in its anti-China coalition. EU could restrict technology transfers to China and express further diplomatic support for Taiwan.

China knows that it cannot influence the outcome of the current crisis in Ukraine. China's diplomatic support is not likely to alter the strategic calculus of the U.S., EU or Russia. If Russia invades Ukraine, China's influence will increase manyfold because Russia will then need Chinese economic support to reduce the impact of Western sanctions. If the U.S. imposes harsher sanctions, the Chinese response might be different. China is Russia's largest trading partner. If the U.S. blacklist a major Russian firm would the Chinese companies stop dealing with them? China and Russia have already collaborated to establish alternative payments mechanisms if U.S. sanctions obstruct their banking systems. Any legal action against the Chinese companies would require risky escalatory measures such as imposing penalties on major Chinese firms.¹⁶

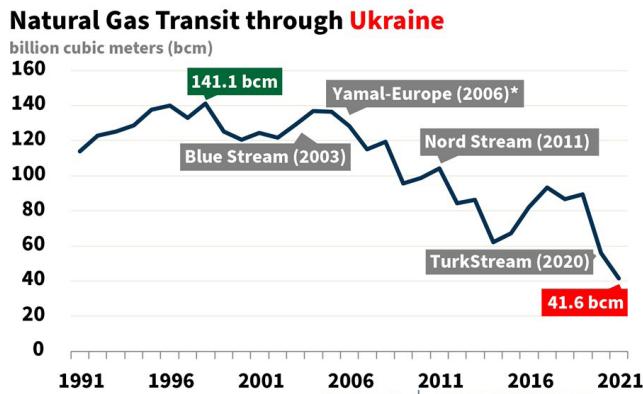
If China chose to reject U.S. sanctions and its companies didn't comply, it would put Washington in a tight spot. Chinese companies would violate U.S. law, but any legal action against them would require risky escalatory measures such as imposing penalties on major Chinese firms. The alternative, however, would be to accept

that China need not follow U.S. sanctions, which would dramatically undermine their economic reach. The same dilemma applies to the Biden administration's threat to cut off Russia's ability to buy semiconductors, smartphones, or airline parts. Smartphones are mostly produced in China, for example, so any export controls on smartphone components would work only if China were willing to enforce them. Beijing could buck U.S. sanctions and dare Washington to retaliate—which would open a second front in a great-power financial war. China has previously taken humiliating steps to avoid violating U.S. sanctions. Chinese state-owned banks, for example, refused to open accounts for Hong Kong's chief executive, Carrie Lam, after the United States imposed sanctions on her. U.S. sanctions that have a chance of changing the Kremlin's calculus, however, could force a rethink in Beijing. If there were ever a time to try to undermine American financial power, this would be it.

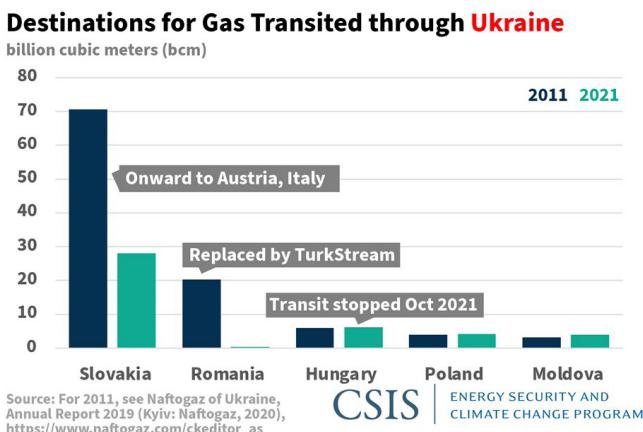
The Factor of Energy Security

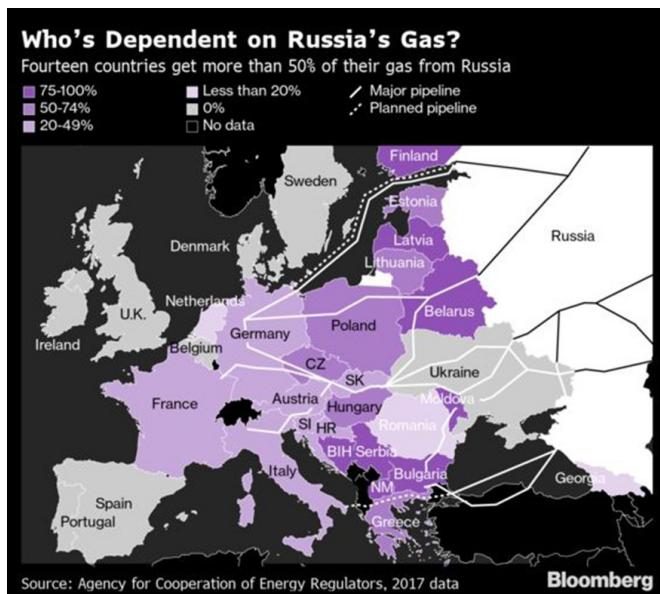
Energy Flow

The conflict in Ukraine is going to affect European energy security. Ukraine used to be a key node in the European energy system. Its criticality has diminished. In the 1990s, most gas that Russia exported to Europe crossed Ukraine. Since then, Russia has diversified its routes. In 1994, it started construction on the Yamal-Europe Pipeline through Belarus and Poland, which reached its full capacity in 2006. In 2003, Russia completed a pipeline to Turkey (Blue Stream); in 2011, it completed a route to Germany (Nord Stream); and in 2020, the TurkStream provided a second link to Turkey. This multi-decadal Russian effort has reduced Ukrainian transit by 70 per cent—from over 140 billion cubic meters (bcm) in 1998 to less than 42 bcm in 2021.



As Ukraine's transit role diminished, so did the number of countries that depended on it for supplies. By 2021, Ukraine was a transit corridor largely for gas going into Slovakia, from where it continued to Austria and Italy. There was a time when Ukraine sent a lot of gas south, to Romania, Bulgaria, Greece, and Turkey, but TurkStream changed that. Even Hungary, the second-largest recipient of gas from Ukraine in 2021 stopped imports in October 2021.





Source: <https://www.bloombergquint.com/quicktakes/why-the-world-frets-over-russian-nord-stream-pipeline-quicktake>

Any interruption in Ukrainian transit would affect Ukraine itself. Over the years, Ukraine has stopped buying gas from Russia directly. Now, it gets its import needs through backhauling. Earlier, this involved shipping gas west and then re-importing it back into the country. Now, this process is done virtually. In 2021, 89 per cent of Ukraine's imports came through virtual backhaul. Ukraine used to be the main corridor for delivering Russian gas to Europe. Though it remains significant for certain countries that is no longer for Europe. However, Ukraine's own energy security still hinges on its role as a transit country.

Gas Transit to Europe

Ukraine was a transit state for Russian natural gas exports to Europe. Russia wanted to reduce the amount of natural gas it transits

through Ukraine. Before the 2011 opening of the first Nord Stream pipeline from Russia to Germany via the Baltic Sea, most of Russia's natural gas exports to Europe transited through Ukraine. Since the opening of the first Nord Stream pipeline, about 40 percent-50 percent of these exports have transited through Ukraine.



The Economist

Nord Stream-2 is a second Baltic Sea pipeline system that runs parallel to Nord Stream-1. It is a new export gas pipeline running from Russia to Europe across the Baltic Sea. The new pipeline was based on the successful experience in building and operating the Nord Stream gas pipeline. It will establish a direct link between

Gazprom and the European consumers and ensure a highly reliable supply of Russian gas to Europe. This is important when Europe sees a decline in domestic gas production and increasing demand for imported gas.

Nord Stream-2 Pipeline

Nord Stream-2 (NS2) will stretch across the Baltic Sea. The project was envisioned in 2015 to run in parallel to the existing Nord Stream-1 pipeline to reach Germany, from where it connects to the European pipeline system under the unified European market. The project brings together Russian Gazprom and five European companies - Engie (France), OMV (Austria), Shell (Netherlands/UK), Uniper (Germany), and Wintershall (Germany). The estimated cost of the pipeline is US\$11 billion and is expected to be 1,200-km in length. Its exit point in Germany will be in the Greifswald area close to the exit point of Nord Stream-1. The route covers over 1,200 kilometres. The total capacity of two strings of Nord Stream is 55 billion cubic meters of gas per year. The aggregated design capacity of Nord Stream-1 and Nord Stream-2 is 110 billion cubic meters of gas per year.

Russia's state-owned energy company Gazprom owns, in its entirety, the subsidiary Nord Stream-2. AG is the project operator and it is financed by Gazprom (50 percent). Balance of the cost is financed by five European energy companies: Engie, OMV, Shell, Uniper, and Wintershall. Russia, Germany, Finland, Denmark and Sweden have granted all the necessary permits for the construction of the planned pipeline within their exclusive economic zones. Once the project is completed it would bypass the existing pipeline between Russia and Europe through Ukraine, depriving it of a significant transit fee of around \$ 3 billion per year. Germany has been a key advocate of the

pipeline. Germany thinks of it as an important natural gas corridor as Germany is ending nuclear energy production and reducing coal use.

U.S.' Stance

The U.S. supports Ukraine against Russian efforts to reduce Ukraine's role as a transit state for natural gas exports.¹⁷ The 'Countering Russian Influence in Europe and Eurasia Act' of 2017 (CRIEEA) states that it is U.S. policy to "oppose the Nord Stream-2 pipeline given its detrimental impacts on the EU's energy security, gas market development in Central and Eastern Europe, and energy reforms in Ukraine."

The Biden Administration has shifted its focus away from working to prevent the completion of the Nord Stream-2 pipeline to mitigating the potential negative impacts of an operational pipeline. A U.S.-Germany joint statement in July 2021 pledges to bolster Ukraine's energy security and to support sanctions in response to further acts of Russian aggression against Ukraine.¹⁸

Current Status

The pipeline construction was initially suspended in December 2019 after the passage of U.S. legislation establishing new sanctions related to it. It resumed one year later. Despite subsequent U.S. sanctions on 25 Russian-related entities and vessels, Gazprom announced in September 2021 that it had completed pipeline construction. The pipeline must pass the technical and regulatory certification, obtain insurance, and traverse a slew of impending legal challenges before the pipeline can transport gas. In November 2021, Germany's energy regulator Federal Network Agency suspended the certification process because the NS2 operating company did not

meet conditions as an ‘independent transmissions operator’. Barring additional delays, experts expect certification could be completed between March and June 2022.

Although the EU has an ambitious energy diversification strategy, many European governments have not reduced dependence on Russian gas. In 2020, Russian gas accounted for about 48 percent of EU natural gas imports. Factors behind reliance on Russian supply include diminishing European gas supplies, Russian investments in European infrastructure, commitments to reduce coal use, and many Europeans’ perception that Russia remains a reliable supplier. German and Austrian governments, supporters of Nord Stream 2, are of the view that the pipeline would enhance EU energy security by increasing the capacity of a direct and secure supply route. Germany supports the development of infrastructure to ensure that gas can be transported across Europe once it reaches Germany. They emphasise that Germany supports European energy supply diversification efforts, including the construction of new liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals in northern Germany.

NS2 pipeline has created controversy. It has caused splits between Europe and America and within Europe. Poland feels it is anti-competitive. Ukraine says it has a potential Russian noose around its neck. America opposes the pipeline, arguing that it hands too much market power to Russia. Opponents of the pipeline argue that it would give Russia greater political and economic leverage over Germany and other countries that are dependent on Russian gas. It would make some countries more vulnerable to supply cut-offs or price manipulation by Russia.

In December 2019, Gazprom, Naftogaz, and a new Gas Transmission System Operator of Ukraine (GTSOU) renewed a

contract for the transit of Russian natural gas to Europe from 2020 to 2024. The contract provided for transit of at least 65 bcm in 2020 and 40 bcm a year from 2021 to 2024.¹⁹ Gazprom agreed to accept the ruling of an international arbitration court concerning several trade disputes with Naftogaz and paid the latter \$2.9 billion in damages and interest. In 2020, Russia shipped about 56 bcm to Europe via Ukraine. Ukraine received the full contracted amount of \$2.1 billion in transit revenues.²⁰

Part 3: Non-Kinetic Hostilities

Information Warfare

Russian Tactics

Russia has stepped up the war against Ukraine in the information domain. There has been a marked shift in the focus of Russia's propaganda. There is a rapid advancement of a narrative describing Russia as the carrier of a "new ideology" and genuine Western values. Separate ideologies are created for members of the radical right in the U.S.²¹ As Pyotr Pomerantsev, a Russian propaganda analyst observed, the purpose of such an informational strategy was to create a feeling that objective truth does not exist and any presented evidence may turn out to be fabricated. All reports of any crimes linked to Russia should also be perceived as fake.²²

Since 2014, Russian propagandists tried to combine their aggressive rhetoric with the image of a "peaceful" Russia, which does not interfere in the "civil war in Ukraine."²³ That narrative has survived to this day, but there is now a stream of 'pure' propaganda of aggression. The "Eurasianist" ideologue of Russian foreign policy,

Alexander Dugin, demands that:-

- Russia seize entire Left-Bank Ukraine.
- Spread up to the Baltic countries.
- Offer them a choice: neutralization or war.

For the remaining countries of the post-Soviet space, Dugin proposes to forcibly include them into a new, geopolitically founded “Eurasian Union”.²⁴ Russian TV channels discuss in detail the probable takeover of Ukraine, calling it a “military-political” or “military-police” operation.

Russia is known for using disinformation and leaks as a tactic to sow confusion and discord as part of its overall conflict strategy. U.S. and European elections have been beleaguered repeatedly by Russia’s cyber-enabled disinformation campaign. In the time of fragile alliances and complicated political environments in Europe and the U.S., Russia can achieve important goals by shaping public conversation and perception as a war in Europe emerges.

The U.S. has repeatedly emphasised what it sees as disinformation. It is sharing additional intelligence confidentially with allies including Ukraine. The State Department recently published a fact sheet listing and rejecting several Russian claims. The Treasury Department sanctioned four men accused of ties to influence operations intended to set the ploy in Ukraine for a new invasion. Jen Psaki, the White House press secretary said, “We are much more cognizant of the Russian disinformation machine than we were in 2014. We need to be very clear with the global community and the U.S. public what they’re trying to do and why.” Meanwhile, Washington and Moscow go back and forth online. Kremlin-backed RT.com on Dec. 21 posted a video alleging “US private military companies are amassing CHEMICAL COMPONENTS in Eastern Ukraine.” The State Department rejected

that claim in its fact sheet on Russian propaganda. Russia's Foreign Ministry then responded with tweets "debunking @StateDept 'facts' on Russian disinformation on Ukraine."

In both the U.S. and Ukraine, experts say, there is far more societal awareness now of state-sponsored disinformation. Russia in the past several years has continued to bombard Ukrainians with text messages and false stories during the ongoing war in eastern Ukraine in which at least 14,000 people have died. And Russia's interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election led to several investigations and years of often fractious debates.

U.S'. Response

U.S. has developed an effective technique for waging information war. The U.S. is releasing intelligence reports about Russia's attempts to create a justification for an invasion of Ukraine and not allowing Russia to freely broadcast conspiracy theories about anti-Russia plots involving the West and Ukraine.

U.K. in collaboration with the U.S. announced on January 23, 2022, the details of an alleged Russian plot to install a pro-Moscow regime in Kyiv. It even named a pro-Russia former member of the Ukrainian parliament as Putin's preferred puppet. On February 3, U.S. released information about a Russian arrangement to film a fake attack on Russian territory or Russian speakers in eastern Ukraine to create a justification for an invasion. It said Russia had already recruited people who would be involved in the fake attack. John Kirby, Pentagon spokesperson said the plan was to result in "a very graphic propaganda video, which would include corpses and actors who would be depicting mourners and images of destroyed locations, as well as military equipment at the hands of Ukraine or the West, even to the point where some of this equipment would be

made to look like it was Western-supplied.”

The U.S. has released details about Russian troop movements on Ukraine’s border. It has shared information about dissension within the ranks of the Russian military over a possible attack on Ukraine. A senior U.S. official explained the administration’s strategy to the *Wall Street Journal*: “We’ve seen [Russia] run false-flag operations and use the confusion to launch military action many times in recent history. Exposing these plots makes it that much harder for Russia to execute them.”

Exposing Russian plots in real-time raises concerns about exposing the U.S. intelligence community’s sources and methods. However, this is one of the effective ways to neutralise Russian propaganda and control the narrative by the U.S. rather than yielding to Russian propagandists.²⁵

Cyber War

Russia has been using cyber warfare against Ukraine for a long time. In the third week of January 2022, there was a barrage of hacking that crippled and defaced more than a dozen Ukrainian government websites. In the past Russia has revealed its ability to cripple critical infrastructure in Ukraine. Russian hackers turned off electric power for nearly a quarter-million people for several hours in the winter in 2015, followed by a similar attack the next year.²⁶

The *New York Times* reported in December 2021, that Russia was stepping up its cyber intrusions into Ukrainian infrastructure. The U.S. and the U.K. sent cyber warfare experts to assist Ukraine. Experts consider this activity by Russia as ‘cyber preparation of the battlefield’. The targets were precisely the ones one would expect to be targeted for intelligence collection and battlefield preparation ahead of an invasion. In 2014, Russia’s annexation of Crimea also

involved the execution of various cyber operations by both pro-Russian non-state actors and Russian soldiers bearing no insignia. These operations included the defacement of websites, disruption of websites through DDoS attacks and other activities that facilitated Russia's control of Crimea's telecommunications infrastructure.

The vice president of Threat Intelligence at cybersecurity group Mandiant, John Hultquist, said, "We've definitely seen a lot of Russian cyber activity targeting Ukraine. That is absolutely to be expected — they are in the middle of a very tense situation. Both sides I'm sure are collecting as much as possible."

On Jan. 14, 2022, the *New York Times* reported:-

- Hackers brought down dozens of Ukrainian government websites posting a message on dark screens that read: Be afraid and expect the worst.
- To enhance its intimidating effect, the message mocked its intended audience more specifically, "Ukrainians! All your personal data ... have been deleted and are impossible to restore."
- Ukraine's communication intelligence service indicated that as many as 70 central and regional authority websites were targeted.
- The intimidating message was published in multiple languages—Ukrainian, Russian and Polish - in an attempt to obfuscate the perpetrators' origin and motive.

Microsoft on Jan. 15, 2022, released information about the appearance of malware on the systems of government agencies providing critical executive branch or emergency response functions in Ukraine, as well as those of an IT firm that manages the recently defaced websites of Ukrainian government agencies. It stated:

Today, we're sharing that we've observed destructive malware in systems belonging to several Ukrainian government agencies and organizations that work closely with the Ukrainian government. The malware is disguised as ransomware but, if activated by the attacker, would render the infected computer system inoperable. We're sharing this information to help others in the cybersecurity community look out for and defend against these attacks.

U.S. government officials and other experts have expected that Russia would engage in offensive cyber operations against Ukraine. However, discerning the source and entity responsible for such actions would be difficult. Nevertheless, a Ukrainian government agency, the 'Center for Strategic Communications and Information Security', directly blamed Russia for the attacks. The spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Ukraine, Oleg Nikolenko, stated on January 14, 2022, that while many government agency websites were temporarily down, Ukrainian government specialists had already started restoring the work of Information Technology (IT) systems.

The attack is unlikely to be directly traced to the most capable in the Russian cyber offensive organisation like SVR or GRU cyber-intelligence unit. It looks like it is designed for short-term effects and public intimidation. Probably private hackers associated with Russian ransomware groups were responsible. These groups operate with varying degrees of subservience to the Russian state, specifically the FSB domestic security service.

The unfolding crisis demonstrates how cyber operations are an integral part of modern-day international conflict as they facilitate various military and diplomatic options available to states.²⁷

Russia has frequently demonstrated that, in the cyber domain, they have a large and varied inventory to choose from. Sometimes

it is used for a simple but effective disinformation campaign, aimed to destabilise or divide adversaries. Russians can also develop and deploy some of the most complex and aggressive cyber operations in the world. As Erica Lonergan and Shawn Lonergan have argued: “Rather than use cyber operations as a means of coercion or to shape battlefield dynamics, governments might turn to conduct cyber operations to de-escalate crises. Cyber operations’ non-violent effects and relative limitations in imposing costs make them an ideal way to resolve a crisis without appearing to have backed down. All sides may perceive cyber operations as less escalatory, in comparison to other military options that may be on the table during a crisis”.

This may well be true in Ukraine.

Part 4: The Present Situation

Warmongering

NATO has refused to accept Moscow's key demands of a guarantee that Ukraine will never be permitted to join NATO and that the alliance rolls back its expansion in Eastern Europe. The US and its NATO allies are firm in their stance that such proposals from Russia are non-starters. The West is demanding that Russia pull its troops and weapons away from the Ukraine border. After meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov in Geneva on 21 January, 2021, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told reporters after the meeting, "If any of Russia's military forces move across the Ukrainian border, that's a renewed invasion. It will be met with a swift, severe and united response from the United States and our partners and allies." Blinken said the U.S. and its allies are prepared to address Russia's concerns. Blinken urged Moscow to pull back its troops from the border to prove its assertions. Speaking at a news conference after the meeting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said it was "constructive and useful". He denied Russia has intentions of invading Ukraine while it seeks security guarantees. Lavrov noted that Ukraine is receiving assistance from western nations, including

weapons deliveries from Britain. Lavrov said, “No one is hiding the fact that weapons are being handed over to Ukraine; that hundreds of military instructors are flocking to Ukraine right now.”

The U.S. has been firm in stating that a Russian military invasion of Ukraine would draw swift and significant economic sanctions, but no U.S. or NATO military response. But Secretary of Defence Austin said that if Putin does decide to invade Russia, the US military stands ready to reinforce its NATO allies. It is not very clear what the West might do in the event of Russian cyberattacks or other actions against the Ukrainian government. President Joe Biden warned his President Putin about the high cost of an invasion in Ukraine. Biden said that President Vladimir Putin “has never seen sanctions like the ones I promised will be imposed if he moves”. He said, “If they actually do what they’re capable of doing with the forces amassed on the border, it is going to be a disaster for Russia if they further invade Ukraine, and that our allies and partners are ready to impose severe costs and significant harm on Russia and the Russian economy.”

At his news conference, U.S. President Joe Biden made confusing remarks about the West’s response to what he called a “minor incursion.” Later White House press secretary Jen Psaki clarified that Biden “knows from long experience that the Russians have an extensive playbook of aggression short of military action, including cyberattacks and paramilitary tactics. And he affirmed today that those acts of Russian aggression will be met with a decisive, reciprocal and united response.” Biden’s comment about a “minor incursion” drew a sharp retort from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, who said on Twitter, “We want to remind the great powers that there are no minor incursions and small nations. Just as there are no minor casualties and little grief from the loss of loved ones. I say this as the president of a great power.”

The Pentagon announced that 8,500 troops have been placed on heightened alert and could deploy to Eastern Europe as part of the NATO Response Force. In addition, General Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the U.S. said, a small contingent of US military advisers and trainers are currently working in Ukraine, playing a 'limited role' in the country assisting Ukrainian forces with tactics, training and procedures. Biden has also authorized \$200 million in additional support to meet Ukraine's emergency defence needs. Those deliveries are ongoing, and there are more scheduled in the coming weeks. Though the U.S. and its allies can provide additional armaments and weapons to Ukraine, these cannot be shipped in quantities sufficient to truly change the balance of power in the event of renewed major hostilities. However, they can create additional costs that Russia will need to factor into its calculations. Ukraine has shortages of secure communications equipment and complains of gaps and inconsistencies in its sniper and counter-sniper kit. If Moscow mounts a large-scale assault, Ukraine could benefit greatly from bolstered air defence capability.

Arms Supply to Ukraine

The defence ministers of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have announced that they have received approvals from Washington to send US-made anti-tank weaponry to Ukraine. Estonia will provide Javelin anti-armour missiles, while Lithuania and Latvia will provide Stinger anti-aircraft missiles. Latvia will also send military meals ready-to-eat for the Ukrainian forces. Ukraine has been building a stockpile of Javelin weapons. The addition of Stingers will give a new capability to take out Russian helicopters if needed.²⁸

Sanctions

The U.S has threatened "high-impact" measures against Russia

which may include:-

- Ban on lending to and business with Russian energy and metallurgical companies and state-controlled banks.
- Cutting Russia off from the SWIFT banking network.
- Limiting Russian access to Western financing through prohibitions on the purchase of Russian sovereign debt on the secondary market.
- Secondary sanctions are measures through which the sanctioning country punishes third-party violators by enabling the Combating America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA)and enforcing strictly.
- The shutdown of the near-complete Nord Stream II pipeline, if Germany agrees.

Russia would be aware of the critical effect of the sanctions. However, Russia may be banking on that stepping up enforcement of CAATSA sanctions would hit European firms that do Russian business in Russia hard. Russia could also use the gas market as leverage, as Europe would be severely affected. The West needs to reverse the direction of energy leverage. Russia needs European markets more than Europe needs Russian gas. Russia supplies more than 40 percent of the EU's natural gas imports. Nevertheless, Russia depends on energy exports for nearly 60 percent of all the goods and services the country sells abroad.

Military Options

Force Posturing. Invasion of Ukraine is not easy in the best of conditions. The country is approximately the size of Afghanistan. Coordinating a complex armoured operation has its chances for failure. Since World War II the Russian army has not carried out

any armoured operation. Presently, Russia has mobilised more than 100,000 troops on the Ukrainian border which include ground, naval and air forces, special forces and personnel trained in electronic warfare, cyber warfare, command and control, and logistics. General Milley, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the U.S. stated, “Given the type of forces that are arrayed, the ground manoeuvre forces, the artillery, the ballistic missiles, the air forces, all of it packaged together, if that was unleashed on Ukraine, it would be significant... and it would result in a significant amount of casualties. And you can imagine what that might look like in dense urban areas, all along roads, and so on. It would be horrific.”

NATO has increased its intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance flights over and near Ukraine to understand the Russian troop movement better and thus shed some light on Moscow’s intentions. There is the possibility that NATO members, including the U.S., would send more of their personnel in terms of trainers or advisers into the field. They would serve as a “tripwire” to deter a Russian incursion. Thus far, the U.S., U.K., Canada, Poland, Denmark, Lithuania and non-NATO member Sweden have provided training, coordinated through the Multinational Joint Commission. The idea can gain currency quickly if tensions continue to rise.²⁹

Creating Options. To prevent an armed conflict the U.S. and West must create options to prevent Russia from its invasion of Ukraine. These involve diplomatic, informational, military and economic actions. One of the military options can be to threaten Russia’s earlier attempts to establish buffer zones through so-called “frozen conflicts.” Through frozen conflicts, Russia has created two autonomous zones In Georgia: Abkhazia in the Black Sea region and Ossetia in the north. In Moldova bordering Ukraine, a small Russian force remains inside the breakaway Republic of Transnistria. If

supported by the West, these outposts of Russian expansion are vulnerable to military action by Georgia and Moldova. Threatening these outposts does not directly threaten Russia as unlike Crimea, Russia does not declare them as Russian territory. Reinforcing Moldovan and Georgian forces to create a credible threat to retake these autonomous zones would require Russia to divert its forces from any plan against Ukraine.

The U.S. and its allies could threaten to conduct a blockade of the Russian exclave Kaliningrad, surrounded by Poland and the Baltic Sea. This would stress Russian military resources, especially in conjunction with build-ups around the Russian outposts in Moldova and Georgia. Turkey could play an important role if the U.S. and West can convince Turkey that its security is also threatened by an expansionist Russia. Under the Montreux Convention, Turkey has control over the strait connecting the Black Sea and the Mediterranean Sea and regulates the passage of ships. If Turkey feels it is in imminent danger of war, it can permit or restrict the passage of any ships it chooses. Turkey could declare that war in Ukraine would present a danger to Turkey and allow grant passage to Western warships while restricting Russian passage. Such a step would quickly tilt the balance of power against Russia in the Black Sea region.

Russia has assembled the resources to give him several credible military options. The U.S. and the West have to do the same. They have to move the troops and equipment so that Russia gets the message.

Russia's Options: Complete occupation of Ukraine may not be what Russia wants. In 2008 in Georgia, Russian military columns almost reached Tbilisi before withdrawing on their timetable to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Similarly, Putin can order Russian

columns to approach Kyiv, making its vulnerability obvious, toppling the Ukrainian government and assisting a Moscow-aligned leader to appear. Russia could seize and hold significant territory in eastern and southern Ukraine, beyond Crimea and the Donbas. Russia's ideal scenario would be a partitioned Ukraine that leaves him with control of the country east of the Dnieper River, which flows roughly down the middle of Ukraine, from the Belarusian border to the Black Sea.³⁰

Putin's Endgame. Putin is bitter about the loss of Russia's Soviet empire, which he once called "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century." His goal is to reverse that history by bringing Ukraine back into the Russian fold. With Belarus he has already achieved that aim. In an essay published in July Putin wrote, "I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia." Putin, a keen student of history, would love to use the symbolic 2022, the centenary of the founding of the Soviet Union, as the perfect time to move against Ukraine. In the recent past, Putin has used force during invasions of Georgia and Ukraine and in military deployments in Syria.

At this stage after such massive deployment of forces, if Putin were to back down without firing a shot, he would look like a weak leader which is not good for an authoritarian leader. That's why U.S. President Joe Biden and many NATO allies believe some type of armed conflict is inevitable. That would give Putin more leverage over Ukraine's future at the negotiating table later. Despite many meetings and diplomatic activities the U.S., NATO, Ukraine and Russia have not moved any closer to a diplomatic solution or a reduction of tensions on the Ukrainian-Russian border. Russian officials have made clear that they are not interested in proposals focused solely on strategic stability or military exercises, or on a suspension of NATO membership for Ukraine.

Though neither Washington nor Europe is giving up hope for a diplomatic resolution, it's difficult to see what the West could offer the Russian leader instead of control of Ukraine.³¹

Conclusion and Post-Script

There is a school of thought which feels Russia has been winning in Ukraine. Ukraine is nowhere near joining NATO. Russia's annexation of Crimea is a geopolitical fact now. Putin is a master in using military force in ways that don't progress to hot war. Western powers have been signalling that they won't allow a new invasion of Ukraine to go unpunished. But judging when to act, and how, is crucial. As Hew Strachan writes, the pompous, yet vacuous rhetoric used by the west risks pushing the conflict over the line into a military one, for which there is no strategy or exit plan.³²

Hawks in the U.S. are pushing for an increase in U.S. involvement to defend Ukraine, assuming that such moves would cause Russia to recoil. The Wall Street Journal states that the best way to convey the message is to provide "more lethal military assistance to Ukraine, whose troops are fighting and dying against Russian-backed separatists in the east." Western backing also should include a "surge of NATO troops" to neighbouring Poland. Lexington Institute analyst Dan Goure recommends permanently deploying US combat units in that region, creating the ultimate tripwire that would deter Russia from making any aggressive military moves.³³

Such proposals fail to realise how seriously Russia considers Ukraine in its own security calculations. Russia has clearly demarcated its red line: incorporating Ukraine into the NATO Alliance. In late November 2021, Vladimir Putin renewed that warning, making it clear that Moscow would regard the presence of any NATO troops or weapons in Ukraine as intolerable.

There are problems in implementing the proposals of U.S. hardliners:-

- Increasing the flow of arms to Ukraine is not going to change the military balance enough to deter Russia. It will be progressively difficult to infiltrate those arms into the Ukrainian theatre after the start of the conflict, in the face of advanced Russian air defences.
- Increasing NATO forces on the Eastern flank might deter Russia from an attack on a NATO member state. But Putin was never planning to test NATO's Article 5 commitment to collective defence. It certainly won't deter action against Ukraine.
- Threat of tougher sanctions is real, but it's limited. Russia is one of the world's largest oil and gas producers. There are limits to how much Russian economic activity the U.S. can cut off without causing economic crises elsewhere, especially in Europe.

The hard reality of global geopolitics is: Is Ukraine really so important to global security that the United States should be defending it? The U.S. actions say 'NO'. If it was so important, they would have defended it in 2014. The U.S. has already stated that it would not send troops to defend Ukraine.

No one wants war, but importantly, no one wants to fight a war to prevent it. Even the actions the U.S. and its allies are taking now carry some risks. Building up forces in NATO's eastern member states could result in a miscalculation and accidental conflict. The allies could decide to take military action on their own and suck the United States into a conflict. The Baltic states and Poland are already arming Ukraine, and the Turks have been selling them advanced drones.³⁴

A Russian invasion of Ukraine would be a disaster for Russia, Ukraine, and the rest of Europe. It would disrupt the European security order and the global geopolitical situation. It is crucial to shaping the strategic environment in which diplomatic efforts take place.

Russia knows that the West will not fight for Ukraine as it is not a NATO ally. The traditional military deterrence will not work. The West has threatened massive economic sanctions but there is no historical evidence to suggest that sanctions alone can provide enough punishment to deter a major power from taking decisive military action. Putin has prepared his country to weather that storm. Russia has gathered leverage of its own like energy supplies and cyber threats, that can divide the West.³⁵

Some of Russia's concerns are understandable. George Friedman put it clearly, "Russia has been invaded in the 17th century by the Swedes, in the 19th century by the French and in the 20th century twice by the Germans. In each case, they won the war or survived it by strategic depth." But Russia's neighbours also have a reasonable historical fear of Russian aggression. Such apprehensions may be lessened by the expansion of NATO to their territory. The expansion of NATO to the East has not materialised since 2009 because of fervent opposition from leading European NATO powers of Germany, France and Italy. This is not likely to change. Germany is dependent on Russian gas. They have a long-term interest in developing Russian markets and natural resources.

For Russia, the decision to attack Ukraine is risky. There are political, geopolitical, logistical, financial and material difficulties to such an invasion. Even if military victory is achieved easily, maintaining power and keeping a regime favourable to Russia will be difficult. There is every chance that Russia may get embroiled

in a prolonged counter-insurgency operation where neighbours of Ukraine will be more than willing to provide all possible help to insurgents. Russia will not forget its experience in Afghanistan in a hurry.

There is another political question in Russia itself. Is the Russian population ready and in favour of a war against Ukraine? The Russian journalist Andrei Kolesnikov writes: The average Russian is tired of self-deception and of persuading themselves that if a war does happen, it will not impact their lives or those of family members. Russian conformists are, of course, traditionally bellicose people, but theirs is the bellicosity of propaganda television talk shows or the language of online hate. No conformists want a large-scale war; conscription is not part of the social contract, particularly at a time of accelerating inflation and economic stagnation.³⁶

Russia is not comfortable in playing second fiddle to China but has to accept geopolitical realities. That does not fit comfortably with President Vladimir Putin's Great Russian nationalism. China's wish to economically and militarily challenge Russia for dominance in Central Asia does not make them easy bedfellows.

Over the past few days, the U.S. has warned of an imminent Russian invasion of Ukraine. The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said Russia could take Kyiv in as few as three days. Clearly, U.S. intelligence might have information indicating that the Russian military will invade now. Publicly saying so might be meant to deter Russia.

The U.S. does not want a war in Ukraine. It wants to deter Russia. The U.S. is sending a very clear message, "We know your plans", by publicly demonstrating that American intelligence had penetrated Russian war plans. If the U.S. knows the timing of the invasion, it is also likely to know the movements and timing of movements of

the formations to be used. A three-pronged armoured assault, each moving hundreds of miles and being refuelled along the way, has to be coordinated in minutest details. If it's interrupted by air and missile attacks, the entire movement could collapse for want of logistical support and loss of communication. However, Russia is quite capable of reconsidering its plans. It can cancel the attack, create a new plan and look for and shut down the leak.

Moscow has not lost its leverage over Ukraine in the Donbas region. The large military presence along the border is doing enough damage to Ukraine by severely undermining its economy. The build-up of troops along the Russia-Ukraine border is not targeting Ukraine, but the West. Russia wants to force Western countries to sit down for negotiations on issues of European security. This strategy seems to be working. This is the first time, since 1991 that the West has engaged seriously with Russia to discuss European security.

Frantic diplomacy is going on. Senior French and British officials went to Moscow and the Germans are due. On February 7, 2022, French President Emmanuel Macron visited Kremlin. He tried to convince his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin on the need for de-escalation at the Ukrainian border. So far, all efforts to get Putin to blink failed. Diplomacy could take months to resolve the Ukraine crisis. But a decision by the Russian leader to pull back in the weeks or months ahead does not mean he will surrender his ultimate goal.³⁷

Dr Seth Jones, Senior Vice President, Center for Strategic and International Studies, has given out an anticipated Russian military plan. Some of them are given below.

There will be irregular operations, cyber operations, and various aspects of subversion and sabotage by Russia's intelligence services viz, the main intelligence Directorate GRU, the foreign intelligence agency SVR and various Russian Special Operations Forces.

Six types of military options that the Russians could undertake:-

- Decision not to invade but to continue to use irregular means in Ukraine, a combination of offensive cyber operations and then proxies and partners and some Russian forces operating probably out of uniform in Ukraine, including in Donetsk and Luhansk.
- Focus on formally seizing Donetsk and Luhansk.
- A conventional push up to the Dnieper River, which would be a reasonable geographic barrier.
- Seizing of the Dnieper River as well as an additional belt of land around the Black Sea, which would connect Russia, including Crimea, to Transnistria.
- Take the belt of land from Crimea along the Black Sea.
- Seizure of all of Ukraine involving all conventional forces and then irregular units operating, in the west.

Russia will start with heavy offensive cyber operations against command-and-control structures, critical infrastructure, airstrikes from Russian fixed-wing aircraft and strategic bombers against key locations in Ukraine, command-and-control centres, air defence systems, Ukrainian air systems, some conventional units on the ground to facilitate a ground advance. There will be movements of main battle tanks, towed artillery, self-propelled howitzers, multiple-launch rocket systems, short-range ballistic missiles, surface-to-air missile systems and a variety of other support vehicles and equipment that has been pushed to Yelnya and various other locations.

There has been a slight increase in the number of battalion tactical groups (BTGs) operating the Black Sea for potential amphibious operations. Russians have the capabilities to conduct amphibious operations and land at Odesa or other locations in

Ukraine There can be first wave assault from about two to 3.5 BTGs. There are airborne BTGs that could parachute into nearby airports, which would number about 6,000 to 7,500.

Some of the irregular activities can be:-

- Several Russian and Belarusian cyber perpetrators, the UNC2452, Turla, the very advanced persistent threats including 28, APT28, UNC530, UNC1151. These actors have been tied to intelligence services in Russia, Belarus and other countries
- There are paramilitary actors in Ukraine that could conduct escalated sabotage and subversion if the Russians decided to do that.
- Russian maritime vessels are operating around the fibre optic networks off the coast of Ireland. There are reports of some of the fibre optic cables going dark. Russian vessels, including submarines, potentially could cut those critical underwater communications cables.

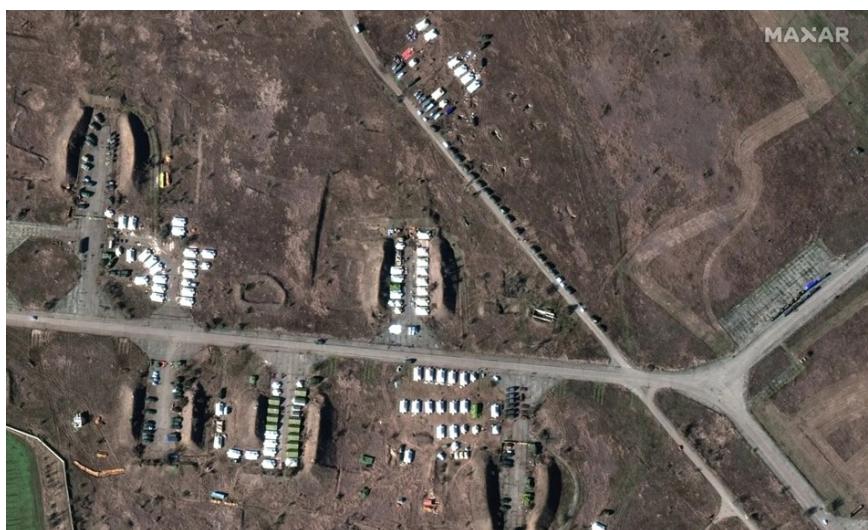
It would not be easy for Russia if there were weapons systems like cyber defence systems, electronic warfare provided to the Ukrainians.³⁸

On Friday, February 12, Satellite photos released Wednesday by Maxar Technologies show the new deployment and positioning of Russian military equipment and troops in multiple locations around Ukraine, including Crimea, western Russia and Belarus. Those deployments include troops, vehicles and other equipment in Novoozernoye and Slavne near the western coast, and more than 550 new tents for troops and hundreds of vehicles at a disused airfield in Oktyabrskoe, near the centre of the peninsula. The satellite images show additional military assets were moved to the Kursk area in

western Russia. That puts them near the strategic city of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest, which has a large Russian-speaking population.³⁹



New satellite imagery shows additional Russian military deployment in areas near Ukraine, including in Crimea on Thursday (Source: Satellite image by Maxar Technologies)



New military activity was seen at an airfield in Belarus on Thursday (Source: Satellite image by Maxar Technologies)

Post-Script

On February 12, 2022, U.S. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said a Russian invasion of Ukraine could begin at any time. He said that there's a credible" threat that an attack could happen during the Winter Olympic Games. He urged most American military and diplomatic personnel to leave Ukraine. Lloyd Austin, U.S. Defense Secretary, ordered the last contingent of American soldiers training Ukrainian troops to leave the country. The U.S. embassy in Kyiv directed most personnel to leave the country immediately. The embassy will suspend routine consular services for passports and visas on Sunday making it even more critical for Americans to leave the country now. A small group of American diplomatic personnel will move to Lviv, a Ukrainian city near the Poland border, to continue to provide emergency services. A bare minimum of staff will remain in Kyiv to facilitate communication with Washington.

The American military is trying to reassure NATO allies. Austin ordered 3,000 additional soldiers from the 82nd Airborne Division to deploy to Poland to deter Russian aggression against the alliance's eastern flank. This is in addition to 1,700 soldiers from the division to head to Poland and 300 soldiers from the XVIII Airborne Corps to Germany he ordered earlier.⁴⁰

George Friedman had stated that Russia will not be invading Ukraine but he will not bet his house on that. Some experts felt that Russia will not start operations before the end of the Beijing winter games. As of end February 2022, all these conjectures had been thrown in the wind. The invasion is underway. Times are extremely critical and the attention of the whole world will be on Ukraine.

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