

# The Ukraine-Russia Crisis: Current Developments and Prospects for European Security

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### ***The Threat of Russian Incursion***

In recent months tensions between Russia and NATO have reached a critical point as Russia has mobilised more than one hundred thousand troops along Ukraine's border. Russia wants to coerce NATO to meet its demands by mobilising these troops. One of these demands holds that NATO will not expand further and halt all new membership plans, including Ukraine. In addition, Russia wants NATO to reduce its military presence in countries close to Russia's borders, essentially returning NATO forces to where they were stationed before 1997 (Roth, 2021). Moscow states they are not planning any invasion. However, they argue that if their security demands are not met, their next step might be a military one (Kirby, 2022). The U.S. government expects that a Russian incursion into Ukraine could lead to the deaths of roughly 50.000 civilians and cause a refugee crisis in Europe (Cooper and Sanger, 2022).

Russia's recent hostility near the Ukrainian border has prompted several European countries to pledge their support to Ukraine, promising to export new defensive weapons, like Javelin anti-tank missiles, Stinger missiles, small arms, and boats (Kurmayer and Noyan, 2022). In addition, the U.S. has 8500 troops on alert to go to Ukraine in case Russia chooses to invade the country (Sullivan, 2022). The European countries and the U.S. have recently discussed their joint efforts to deter further Russian aggression against Ukraine. According to President Biden, they reached total unanimity on the subject (Tass, 2022).

### ***The Current State of the Russo-Ukrainian Crisis***

According to U.S. and Ukrainian officials, there are now at least 130.000 Russian troops at Ukraine's border. In the last two weeks, Russia has mobilised an additional 10.000 armed forces to the region, including infantry and airborne forces. According to a U.S. military assessment, some of the military units have already been set on the highest level of readiness; Russia has also mobilised a hostile array of additional military assets around Ukraine, such as 11 amphibious assault ships in the Black and Mediterranean sea, submarines in the Black Sea and Special Operations forces near and inside the Ukrainian border (Schwartz, 2022). Up to 30.000 Russian troops have been deployed in Belarus at the border with Ukraine. They perform military exercises, which are a rehearsal in repelling external aggression according to the Kremlin (McLaughlin, Pinson and Talmazan, 2022). With this number of troops at the Ukrainian border, Russia could now seize any city in Ukraine, but it is not yet enough for a complete takeover and occupation of the country. A full-scale invasion would require at least 200.000 troops, according to Andriy Zahorodniuk, former minister of defence of Ukraine (Harding and Luscombe, 2022).

Meanwhile, the United States is moving approximately 3000 troops closer to Ukraine. The troops are being sent to positions in Poland, Romania and Germany, as they have an obligation to defend other members of NATO. These troops are not intended to fight, but rather to assure NATO members in Eastern Europe that they are protected in case something happens. In total, there are about 70.000 U.S. troops permanently stationed in Europe. In addition to the permanent troops, there are 7000 additional troops in Europe on shorter rotational deployments as part of a NATO support mission called Atlantic Resolve. These troops are stationed in Poznan, Poland, and they include an aviation division with 85 helicopters and an armoured division with artillery and tanks (Sullivan, 2022).

### ***European Support to Ukraine***

Many European countries and the European Union have pledged to aid Ukraine in the conflict. Near the end of January, the European Commission proposed to support Ukraine with more than €1 billion in potential new funding, with the urge to assist Ukraine quickly. This funding still needs to be approved by E.U. countries and the European Parliament, so it is uncertain how fast Ukraine will receive the money. The E.U. could begin with a rapid disbursement to Ukraine if it gets approved. The package contains various loans and grants that should help Ukraine finance its needs from the conflict. Commission President Ursula von der Leyen strongly emphasised that “Ukraine is a free and sovereign country. It makes its own choices. The E.U. will continue to stand by its side” (Spirlet, 2022). While the European Union focuses on financial support, many European countries support Ukraine with military aid.

Poland has offered Ukraine “tens of thousands of bullets and artillery ammunition, MANPADs, light mortars, reconnaissance UAVs and other types of defensive weapons”, said Poland’s Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki. However, Poland has not disclosed any further details about the terms and conditions of this provision. Political analyst Yago Rodriguez states that Poland has possibly already sent kamikaze drones and portable GROM anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine. Moreover, the Czech Republic has provided military support in January in the form of artillery rounds. These 4006 stored 152-millimetre shells with a total value of \$1.7 were provided at no cost to Ukraine and were approved after a request from the Czech defence ministry (De Filippis, 2022). From the Baltic countries, Latvia and Lithuania have pledged to give stinger anti-aircraft missiles and related equipment. Estonia has promised to donate an undetermined amount of Javelin anti-tank missiles (De Filippis, 2022). However, Germany can veto the final destination of the weapons from Estonia because the Estonian weaponry was originally produced in Germany (Gordon and Pancevski, 2022).

From the Western European countries, The Netherlands, Spain, France and Denmark have moved troops to NATO countries surrounding Ukraine to deter Russia from possible attacks and to assure the Eastern European countries (De Filippis, 2022). In addition, The Netherlands wants to provide Ukraine with more cybersecurity support, which would entail sending a dedicated cyber team to help the country ward off possible cyber-attacks from its Eastern neighbour (Modderkolk, 2022). The United Kingdom has agreed to move 350 troops to Poland, which is in addition to 250 British soldiers already deployed in Poland (Sabbagh, 2022). They have also sent over 30 elite troops to Ukraine to assist in training Ukrainian armed forces on new anti-tank weapons supplied by the UK. An extra 1000 troops have been placed on standby to deploy to Eastern Europe in case of a refugee crisis prompted by a Russian invasion. In terms of weapons, the U.K. sent 2000 anti-tank missile launchers to Ukraine in January (WION, 2022).

Furthermore, Spain has mobilised frigates and fighter jets to the Black Sea to protect Ukraine at sea and on land (The Local, 2022). Italy has provided NATO with 78 million euros for the protection of Ukraine, and they have deployed four typhoon fighters, along with 140 armed forces in a Romanian airbase near Constanta, a stone's throw from the Ukrainian border. They will carry out daily patrol missions on the turbulent and crowded skies of the Black Sea until April (Milex, 2022). Germany has provided support by giving 5000 helmets to Ukraine, but they refuse to give any weapons because they believe diplomacy is the only viable way to solve the conflict (De Filippis, 2022). In addition, Germany is planning to send a field hospital, including the necessary training, co-financed by Germany, costing approximately 5.3 million euros (Al Jazeera, 2022).

### ***The Impact of the Russo-Ukrainian Conflict on European Security***

Russia's behaviour at the Ukrainian border has again sharpened the tense relations between Russia and the West, and the relations among Western countries. By threatening a possible invasion, Russia forces Europe and the United States to take a stance in the conflict. However, not all countries are equally eager to step in with military means to protect Ukraine. As mentioned earlier, Germany refused to deliver weapons to Ukraine at the height of the massive Russian troop build-up, which resulted in international ridicule for its meagre promise of medical supplies and helmets. As a result, the European block could produce a unified and clear response when it was needed most.

The crisis has also demonstrated that European military self-defence is not quite powerful enough for a possible conflict with Russia. Hence, the U.S. is still the most dependable actor to offer Europe a proper defence mechanism. Russia's display of power near the Ukrainian border has offered proponents of NATO not only the possibility to reassert the importance of establishing mechanisms of defence and deterrence against Russia, but it has also given the United States and NATO the opportunity to reassert their dominance in the European security architecture. In contrast to Trump, Biden is eager to deter Western enemies and protect its allies and the ideal of liberal democracy. The current conflict is a way for the U.S. to engage in matters of European security again and to influence political decision making in Europe. For example, Putin's recent actions have provided the United States with ammunition to criticise Russia and Germany's shared project, the already-completed Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. The pipeline has become a security liability, as it makes Europe more dependent on the supply of Russian gas. Consequently, the United States could force Germany to reassess the sensibility of the project (Gak, 2022).

The European Union is attempting to form a unified block against Russia. E.U. ministers have come together and decided that it is important that the E.U. should be united and clear about what they want and, more importantly, what they intend to do. They believe that it is crucial to find a diplomatic solution and meet with the Russians to discuss nonviolent outcomes for this conflict. In addition, the E.U. needs to determine what the future European security architecture should look like, with clear actions and contributions. Having a good grasp on this will be necessary to formulate an answer in response to Russia's demands or when Russia carries out its threats to Ukraine. The E.U. wants to deliberate with Russia over the security arrangements in Europe and how to improve them. This entails returning to the general principles of the Helsinki Charter, the Paris Charter, the NATO-Russia agreement, or the OSCE Vienna document on confidence-building measures. In addition, the E.U. wants to establish a more effective crisis management mechanism with Russia and establish permanent and functional conflict prevention mechanisms and trust-building measures, which would provide clarity to all parties regarding military manoeuvres (Borrell, 2022).

The eventual outcome of the conflict and its impact on European security is still difficult to determine. Russia and the Western states are still discussing the matter and attempting to find non-military solutions, so a diplomatic outcome is not off the table. However, the Western countries are reluctant to meet any of Russia's demands, and Putin scoffed at assertions that NATO is a "defensive alliance" (Herszenhorn and Leali, 2022). Hopefully, reason will prevail in the Kremlin, and Russia will choose the diplomatic route. Nonetheless, if there is an invasion, Europe and its allies need to be prepared to resist the Russian forces.

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