

## CONTEXT

During the era of the Soviet Union, Ukraine was the second most populous Russian state and had deep political, economic, and social connections to the USSR. In 1991, the Soviet Union collapsed and Ukraine became an independent, sovereign nation. Ukraine's foreign policy oscillated between pro-Western and pro-Russian. Western parts of Ukraine are dominated by a more nationalist, Ukrainian-speaking population that favors increasing Ukraine's connection with the West, like by allying with the US, joining NATO, and working with the European Union. Eastern portions of the country are largely characterized by Russian-speaking communities that favor strengthening ties with Russia rather than the West. In 2014, Ukraine's President opted to reject a proposed agreement that would increase Ukraine's political and economic ties to the Western-backed European Union. In response, protests erupted across the country, and the pro-Russian Ukrainian President was eventually ousted from office, and a vote in the Ukrainian parliament relieved him of his duties as President. In response, the Ukrainian President called upon Russia, which did not recognize the interim pro-Western Ukrainian government as legitimate, for assistance. In response, Russia invaded Ukraine, where intense fighting occurred in the eastern Donbas region of Ukraine. Eventually, two self-proclaimed pro-Russian proto-states emerged from the conflict, known as the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic. Later in 2014, Russia annexed Crimea, a portion of Eastern Ukraine with historic ties to Russian language and culture, by deploying "little green men" – unmarked Russian forces carrying no identification or insignia – throughout major political centers of Crimea, such as the Parliament. Subsequently, after Russia bloodlessly infiltrated Crimea, they held a rigged referendum in which Crimea ostensibly voted, overwhelmingly, to secede from Ukraine and join the Russian Federation as a federal subject. Given that Russia shares a border with Ukraine, Russia's expansion into Ukraine and Crimea was prompted partly by a fear of Western political and military expansion nearing Russia's borders. Vladimir Putin also views areas in Eastern Europe like Ukraine and Crimea as being of vital importance to the Russian state: there are multi-generational familial ties between Russia and Crimea. Ukraine's capital city of Kyiv is often referred to as the "mother of Russian cities." Putin wants to expand the Russian state to regain the glory of the Soviet Union. More recently, in response to Ukraine's increasingly close connection with the West, Putin's revanchist Russia has amassed north of one hundred thousand troops on the Ukrainian border, and has publicly demanded that NATO permanently refuse to consider future bids for Ukrainian membership, as well as withdraw military forces from the Eastern European region.

## INVASION

On February 21st, Russian forces moved into the Donbas region of Ukraine located on Russia's western border, ostensibly for "peacekeeping." On February 22nd, the upper house of the premier Russian legislative body voted unanimously to give Vladimir Putin the power to exercise Russia's military forces outside of the nation's borders. Subsequently, Russia formally recognized two proto-states in the Donbas region, the Donetsk People's Republic and the

Luhansk People's Republic, which had declared independence from Ukraine following the initial 2014 Russo-Ukrainian conflict. On February 24th, after months of an extensive military build-up around their mutual border, Russia launched an invasion of Ukraine. Around 6am on Thursday, February 24th, Putin publicly declared a “special military operation” in the Donbas, and mere minutes later, Russian air strikes began pummeling Ukraine. Since then, the invasion has intensified: Russia has moved closer to Ukraine’s capital city of Kyiv, and has allegedly blocked the city from the western direction. Casualty counts are still unverified, but Ukrainian officials have reported thousands of Russian casualties. Moreover, Ukraine has vowed to resist the Russian incursion: martial law has been declared, Ukrainian men between the ages of eighteen and sixty have been required to stay within the country in order to give the country a multitude of reserve military forces to draw from, and thousands of volunteers have offered to provide military services to the Ukrainian army. Poland became the first nation to publicly provide military aid in the form of ammunition to Ukraine since the beginning of the invasion; the US Pentagon claims to have delivered military aid to Ukraine, but has not publicly announced the details on that aid for security purposes. In a February 25th call between Ukrainian President Zelensky and Western leaders, including US President Biden, Ukraine implored foreign allies to provide military aid to the country as it seeks to ward off the Russian incursion for Kyiv. Biden has promised to back Ukraine, but has been firm in denying that the US will boot American soldiers on the ground, even to help evacuate American citizens living abroad in Ukraine. Ukrainian airspace has been locked down due to concerns for security; European aviation officials have subsequently expanded the lockdown for fears of missile attacks. The Ukrainian government has distributed almost twenty-thousand guns to reserve forces in the Kyiv region. As of late Friday, February 25th, no major population centers in Ukraine have been taken by the invading Russian forces, and according to Western intelligence, the initial Russian invasion is slowing down and losing momentum. Russia captured the Chernobyl zone after an intense firefight on February 24th. The dozens of workers inside the Chernobyl plant are currently being held hostage; Ukrainian leaders have denounced the taking of hostages and demanded their release. However, much of Russia’s initial invasion is currently featuring heavy use of Soviet-era military technology rather than more updated and more sophisticated weaponry available to the Russian army, and the majority — perhaps as much as 75% — of the Russian military forces amassed at the Ukrainian border has not yet been used in the Russian invasion. Some analysts speculate that Russia’s aim is to take the brunt of Ukraine’s anti-air and anti-tank missiles with outdated equipment before rolling more advanced machinery and artillery into Ukraine. President Zelensky has remained in Kyiv, delivering periodic streamed public addresses. On the evening of Friday, February 25th, he told those living in Kyiv that “this night will be very difficult, and the enemy will use all available forces to break the resistance of Ukrainians... the fate of Ukraine is being decided right now.”

## IMMEDIATE RESPONSE

Around the world, the war has drawn widespread international condemnation. Virtually every major Western world leader has condemned the invasion. The United Nations Security Council moved to condemn the invasion, but the motion was vetoed by Russia, which has permanent veto power on the Council and, for the month of February, holds the position of Presidency within the UNSC. China, a close economic and political ally of Putin's Russia, has not openly spoken out against the invasion, and abstained from the UNSC vote on condemning Russia's aggressive action. In terms of policy response, Western nations have moved to impose a range of sanctions on the Russian economy and financial sector, as well as to direct targeted sanctions towards specific political and economic elites within Russia. As of Friday, multiple nations, including the US and Canada, have declared an intent to impose targeted sanctions on Putin himself. These sorts of sanctions include, but aren't limited to, the freezing of financial assets. Militarily, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has vowed to "do what it takes" to defend the security of its Eastern European member states. NATO's Response Force, or NRF, which consists of special units forces from a variety of NATO and NATO-allied countries (including Finland, Ukraine, and Georgia), has been activated for the first time in NATO's history; selective units have been deployed to Eastern Europe. Western provisions of munitions have been vitally important for the Ukrainian efforts to repel Russian encroachments: for instance, British NLAW anti-tank missiles have been used by the Ukrainian army to pierce the armor of Russian tanks. Controversially, powerful Western nations like the US have not yet agreed to cut Russia off from the international SWIFT banking system. SWIFT, or the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, is an electronic financial messaging system run by the heads of two dozen Western central banks, including the US' Federal Reserve. Over eleven-thousand banks — comprising the vast majority of the global financial system — use SWIFT to process over forty-two million financial transactions every single day. Cutting Russia off of SWIFT would cripple their economy, by as much as up to 5% of Russia's GDP, largely because it would deny Russia the ability to sell natural gas and oil to Europe, where the majority of Russia's exports are traded to. Some worry that cutting Russia off of SWIFT could be economically harmful for Western nations, especially European nations dependent on Russian gas exports. Moreover, Russia's alternative banking system, SFPS, which was first developed in 2014, could gain increased traction in the event that Russia is locked out of SWIFT. Russia has also discussed the creation of a joint Russian-Chinese banking alternative to SWIFT in the event that SWIFT sanctions are imposed.