

Tensions rise as Russia sends troops to Ukrainian Border

Countries around the world watch intently as Russian forces rally at the border with Ukraine

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Along Ukraine's Eastern border, the spectre of invasion by Russia is becoming more tangible. Russian President Vladimir Putin's decision to send more than 125,000 troops to the border of Ukraine is being closely monitored by neighbouring countries, and those across the Atlantic, for the possibility of war between the former Soviet states.

Ukraine is currently surrounded by Russia's military along its eastern border as well as in the southern peninsula of Crimea, which was annexed by Russia in 2014. Russia has also sent troops to Belarus, Ukraine's neighbour to the north, for military exercises and there are reports that its proxy forces in the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk have been supplied with tanks and artillery in preparation for combat. The growing number of soldiers now await their next move while Russia denies it has any intentions to invade its neighbour.

Putin's encroachment on Ukraine stems from his vision of uniting the two former Soviet states, given their shared history of culture, language and politics. Since the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991, Russia has been piqued by its former satellite states as they have drifted towards relations with the West. The possibility of Ukrainian entry into the European Union was curtailed by Putin in 2013 but the admission of former satellite state Poland as well as the Baltic countries of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, brings NATO's border right up to that of Ukraine, a move that has made Moscow paranoid.

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The Ukrainian Border: A Military troops from both sides are preparing to meet at Russia's border with Ukraine as deescalation talks continue. Source: U.S. Army Europe (via Flickr)

Ukraine's flirtation with the West has already caused Moscow intervention in 2014 when Russia annexed the peninsula of Crimea and backed anti-government separatist groups during the subsequent conflict in the Donbas region which led to the deaths of an estimated 14,000 people. The conflict pushed Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky into urging NATO to accelerate Ukraine's entry into the military alliance.

The current intimidation by Russia follows an unsuccessful attempt at diplomacy between Putin and his counterparts in the West during a conference in Geneva in early January. Russia had previously set a list of demands for the West including the cessation of NATO's

expansion with a direct guarantee that Ukraine will not be added as a member of the alliance. Putin has also demanded a rollback of NATO troops in former Soviet states.

The Biden administration has expressed its concerns over Russia's military presence, calling for UN Security Council interjection. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has confirmed that the US has offered \$650m in military assistance to Ukraine.

Blinken has also been meeting continuously with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, where it appears the administration is considering its options, including appeasement of Russia's demands for the sake of peace.

US President Biden has stated

that he intends to move US troops to eastern Europe within the coming weeks as 8,500 remain on standby for deployment.

This follows the removal of all American embassy staff and their families from Ukraine.

The EU's response has been mixed. While European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen assures: "Should Russia take further aggressive action against Ukraine, the costs will be severe and the consequences serious", there hasn't been much support from individual states. Germany, who are fairly dependent on Russia for energy, has been notably withdrawn from the situation and has not provided any military aid to Ukraine, dividing NATO's response.

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Volodymyr Zelensky,
President of Ukraine

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Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelensky has remained relatively unperturbed by Russia's aggressions even accusing Washington of generating too much 'panic' over the situation. Speaking at a news conference for foreign media, he stated: "I don't consider the situation now more tense than before," emphasising that, "There are no tanks in the streets." However, Ukraine's leader did cautiously add: "I am not saying an escalation is not possible."

Renowned for his unpredictability, Putin has stated that there is "little ground for optimism" following talks between Washington, the EU and Moscow, with the latter claiming their demands have not been sufficiently met.

The White House remains apprehensive as National Security Council spokesperson Emily Horne alludes to a "distinct possibility" of a Russian invasion within the next month.

Further talks have been scheduled while, in the meantime, the soldiers on the ground standby in the snow.

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