

Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Transatlantic Responses

Key Findings - March 2022 Discussions



Putin's War

Putin has brutal, megalomaniac tendencies and is prepared to continue this as a guerrilla war for a long time. He is capable of giving the order for a tactical nuclear strike but this may not be obeyed by those around him.

Putin was never serious about diplomacy but may now have miscalculated and underestimated Western unity and resilience. Russia is now more isolated than during the Cold War.

Putin is motivated as much by EU expansion as by NATO, as he fears a more democratic modern Ukraine and other successful examples on the borders of Russia.

Putin needs to fail for the sake of Ukraine, the European security framework and the entire global rules-based order - with a message sent on Western resolve especially to China.

Putin is afraid of democracy above all else. His autocratic playbook includes information warfare, malign finance, cyber-attacks, election interference and conflict. We need a strategy to pre-empt autocrats elsewhere, disentangle our dependencies and build domestic resilience. Authoritarians at home and abroad are watching closely.

We should prepare for the unthinkable, and mitigate against accidents by working on foreign policy and defence as well as humanitarian and migration policy.

There is no historic evidence of genocide or discrimination against ethnic Russians in Eastern Ukraine, who constitute half the regional population. Though many ethnic Russians initially wanted to join Russia, they were disappointed that Moscow did not absorb the Donbass in 2014 like Crimea and instead kept the region in a debilitating frozen conflict.

Immediate Western Response

The EU, UK and US showed **swift, tough action and strong coordination** at the start of the invasion, with progress in a short space of time in terms of sanctions, military reinforcements in Eastern Europe, provision of aid and weapons to Ukraine, strengthening of hybrid security tools, diplomatic coordination and refugee support. Russia had been quickly isolated on the global stage. Ukrainian calls for more pre-emptive action were valid.

Biden has been **remarkable** in rallying regional and global actors and institutions to act against Russian aggression, showing an ongoing US commitment to European security.

Germany has displayed a **dramatic turnaround** by increasing defence spending, sending weapons to Ukraine, and suspending Nord Stream 2, heralding a historic sea-change in the nation's post-WWII stance. It was noted that rebuilding the Bundeswehr would take some time. The **Europeanisation of Germany's defence** would allay lingering fears about its past.

The **range of tools** used to pressure the Kremlin is impressive, with **soft power** cited as being as effective as hard power, including through social media, radio and TV, counter-disinformation efforts and sports and cultural exclusions.

A massive **information effort** inside Russia is important to show the real cost of war, through the Kremlin's suppression of media is problematic.

Red lines: While an attack on a NATO ally is a clear red line in terms of triggering direct Western military engagement with Russia, there is no clarity on whether systematic massacres or destruction of cities may engage Allies earlier.

Action by a smaller "**coalition of the willing**" or independent actor is possible, though risks extending the scope of the war. Some predict a clash with Putin is inevitable sooner or later.

The West has not been **not tough enough** with sanctions and other measures after the annexation of Crimea in 2014, incursions into Eastern Ukraine, Syrian bombardments, occupation of parts of Georgia, downing of the Malaysian airliner and so on.

However, there has been **no green light** to Putin to invade Ukraine and we should focus blame on the aggressor, and challenge narratives that blame NATO and the West.

The **freezing of the assets of the Russian Central Bank** is more significant than Swift. Sanctions should be broadened out to enablers, such as bankers, lawyers and accountants who work for banned entities.

UK sanctions on oligarchs and in the City of London are good, but should have been swifter. There also needs to be more transparency in the financial sector and a long-overdue investigation into Russian investment and interference in UK.

Next Steps

We need **patience** to allow sanctions to work, and **persistence** to continue as the news cycle turns, politicians worry about the cost-of-living crisis and elections, and businesses call for a return to business as usual.

Internationalising the conflict: Pressure and momentum is needed to mobilise more countries to stand up for the UN Charter and thwart Russia's efforts to keep others out of it.

We should boost the **role of civil society** in sustaining global cooperation and public support against this war.

While there is a strong case for **Ukraine and Georgia to join the EU** based on an already close relationship, this is unlikely to happen quickly due to the complexities, rules and requirements in relation to accession.

We should **prepare our populations** for the hard choices ahead and the economic and energy effects of this crisis, as we ratchet up our actions in support of Eastern Europe and sanctions.

EU should build up sovereignty in **technology and energy**, fostering the energy transition at the same time as becoming independent – more could have been done earlier on this.

Stronger European security and defence based on the Strategic Compass is now needed - this would strengthen, not weaken NATO.

US Role in Europe: While Biden is currently coordinating well with allies backed by rare bipartisan unity, the US should not necessarily be counted on by Europe in the longer term due to continuing political polarisation and populist anger in the US. The spectre of a Trumpian return to the Presidency is also real. Nonetheless, the nascent [US-EU Trade and Technology Council](#) and a new [Transatlantic Task Force](#) are important platforms for future cooperation.

UK-EU Cooperation has been improving organically in light of this crisis, though thorny problems still remain regarding the Northern Ireland Protocol and other areas. The case is clearer for a more structured system of coordination on foreign policy, security and defence, though this may be unlikely in the current political environment.

UK-EU Competition can be both a positive and negative, though a less binary approach to the relationship would be helpful.

The **UK's Indo-Pacific tilt** was not supposed to be at the expense of European engagement, but reflected recognition of a longer-term threat.

US-EU-UK Cooperation is the basis of **Keeping Channels Open** as an important triangulation in terms of dialogue, information share, strategizing & joint action. Cooperation further afield is also essential with partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America and with organisations like NATO, UN, OSCE, G7, G20, WHO, WTO, IMF and World Bank. Together, we can reshape the world order in response to new trends and build consensus to address today's biggest challenges.