



## THE SITUATION IN UKRAINE

[Note: This is a developing issue. Information in this package is accurate as at 28 February 2022.]

On 24 February 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin authorised a “special military operation” against Ukraine, a former Soviet Union territory that Russia views as within its sphere of influence even after its independence in 1991.

For months before, Russia had built up its military presence along the Ukrainian border to exert pressure on Ukraine and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)<sup>1</sup>.

On 17 December 2021, Russia publicised its proposed draft Russia-US and Russia-NATO treaties, which had three core demands: an end to NATO’s expansion; a reversion to NATO’s military posture of 27 May 1997 in Europe; and an end in Europe to the deployment of strike systems that can threaten Russia. In response to NATO’s “Open Door” policy, Russia underscored the principle of indivisible security as enshrined in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), i.e., that no state should strengthen its security at the expense of another’s. It also warned of a “military-technical response” should the US and NATO fail to provide security guarantees.

### The Military Campaign

Since November 2021, Russia has placed more along the Ukrainian border than 100,000 soldiers, along with tanks and missiles. This number gradually increased to 150,000 over the next few months.

Thousands of Russian troops participated in large-scale military exercises.

- This included a joint Russia-Belarus drill in February 2022. It was Russia’s largest military deployment in Belarus since the end of the Cold War – with around 30,000 troops, special operation forces, fighter jets, missiles, and anti-aircraft missile systems.<sup>3</sup>



Map of Ukraine (2005)<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A military alliance of 30 countries in Europe and North America.

<sup>2</sup> GRID-Arendal ([www.grida.no/resources/5330](http://www.grida.no/resources/5330)), 2005.

<sup>3</sup> NATO, 2 February 2022. “Press Conference by the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Prime Minister of North Macedonia, Dimitar Kovačevski”.

- The drill did not end after the scheduled ten days. According to Belarus' defence minister, the Russian troops sent to Belarus would remain in the country after the drills were completed because of the “escalation of the situation” in the Donbas region (which includes Luhansk and Donetsk, Ukrainian territories that are controlled by separatist groups).<sup>4</sup>

In a televised speech on 21 February 2022, Putin announced that **Russia recognises the independence of Luhansk and Donetsk**, formalised by the signing of Treaties on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with these regions, and a corresponding Presidential decree. Under the decree, Russian troops were tasked with performing “peacekeeping functions” there; tanks and other military hardware were reportedly seen moving through Donetsk.<sup>5</sup>

In the early hours of 24 February 2022, **Putin announced the launch of a “special military operation”** with the aim of demilitarising and “denazifying” Ukraine. Military strikes on Ukraine began with multiple missile and air raids, and a three-pronged invasion on a massive scale ensued. Just a day after, Russian forces reached the outskirts of Kyiv (or Kiev), Ukraine's capital.<sup>6</sup>

## History of Ukraine

Ukraine shares a close socio-cultural history with Russia. 1,000 years ago, Kyiv was the capital of the ancient state of Rus, a predecessor state of modern Russia.<sup>7</sup>

From the 13th to the 17th century, Ukraine's present territory was controlled by various polities, including Russia, Poland, and Lithuania. In 1654, the Treaty of Pereyaslavl began the process of transforming Ukraine into a vassal of Russia, which itself had also been subject to foreign rule, e.g. by the Polish during Russia's Time of Troubles. Between the late-18th century and 1991, it was mostly under Russian rule; Ukraine was part of the Soviet Union until its dissolution in 1991.<sup>8</sup>

Crimea, a part of Ukraine, was a part of the Russian Empire from 1783 and then the Soviet Union, until it was transferred to Ukraine in 1954.<sup>9</sup> Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 after a short armed conflict.

## The Disinformation Campaign

Disinformation – both against Ukraine, presumably produced by Russia, and in support of Ukraine, presumably supported by the West – has been rife. An uptick from the Russian side has been observed since November 2021.

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<sup>4</sup> The Guardian, 20 February 2022. “Russian troops will remain indefinitely, says Belarus, as fears rise of Ukraine invasion”.

<sup>5</sup> Reuters, 22 February 2022. “Putin orders Russian troops to Ukraine after recognising breakaway regions”.

<sup>6</sup> The Guardian, 25 February 2022. “Russia's war in Ukraine: complete guide in maps, video and pictures”.

<sup>7</sup> Paul Bushkovitch (ed.), 2012. “A Concise History of Russia”. Cambridge University Press.

<sup>8</sup> At various points in history, Ukraine was controlled by various polities, such as Lithuania (Grand Duchy of Lithuania) and Poland (Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth) in the 14th to 16th centuries. In the 17th to 18th centuries, it was divided between Russia, Poland, and the Ottoman Empire. In the 19th century, it was divided between Russia and Austria-Hungary. And in the 20th century, other than a short period of independence after World War I, it became part of the USSR. In 1991, Ukraine gained independence from the USSR.

<sup>9</sup> BBC News, 5 March 2020. “Ukraine profile – Timeline”.

The disinformation includes narratives that seem to be **aimed at gaining the support of Russian speakers in Ukraine, as well as to put pressure on Ukraine's government.**

For instance:

- There was a spike in media content accusing the US of planning a chemical attack in eastern Ukraine.
- In February 2022, US officials claimed they had evidence of a Russian plan to fabricate a video of a Ukrainian attack on Russian territory or on Russian-speaking people in eastern Ukraine, to be used as a pretext for a Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>10</sup>
- US officials believe that Russian intelligence agencies have worked closely with the editorial staff of five Russian-language media outlets to boost public support for a renewed Russian invasion of Ukraine. These articles blame the West for tensions with Russia over Ukraine, question the legitimacy of the Ukrainian government, and challenge the commitment of the US to its European allies.<sup>11</sup>
- Since the outbreak of fighting in Ukraine, US officials and experts have warned that Russia is creating a disinformation campaign targeting Ukrainian soldiers to discourage them and induce surrender.<sup>12</sup>

## Cyber-Attacks

Ukraine believed that it has been under constant attack from Russian and Kremlin-backed hackers since the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and expected hostile cyber-activity to increase before or during a military incursion by Russia<sup>13</sup>:

- On 14 January 2022, a cyber-attack damaged servers at Ukraine's State Emergency Service, and a message that said "Be afraid and expect the worst" was posted simultaneously on dozens of defaced Ukrainian government websites. Ukraine said "all evidence pointed to Russian responsibility"<sup>14</sup>.
- On 15 and 16 February 2022, cyber-attacks temporarily took at least 10 Ukrainian websites offline, including the websites of the Ukrainian army, the defence ministry, and major banks.<sup>15</sup> The UK and US said the Russian Main Intelligence Directorate was involved in this attack.

<sup>10</sup> The Guardian, 3 February 2022. "Russia plans 'very graphic' fake video as pretext for Ukraine invasion, US claims".

<sup>11</sup> CNN, 15 February 2022. "US accuses Moscow spies of working with Russian-language media outlets to spread Ukraine disinformation".

<sup>12</sup> Time, 25 February 2022. "Russia could be losing at its own disinformation game in Ukraine".

<sup>13</sup> Financial Times, 13 February 2022. "Ukraine shores up cyber defences in readiness for Russia attack".

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> AP News, 15 February 2022. "Cyberattacks knock out sites of Ukrainian army, major banks".

- On 25 February 2022, Ukraine’s cyber defence force issued a warning about a widespread attempt to infect citizens with malicious software. Russian-allied Belarusian hackers were blamed.<sup>16</sup>
- Russia has rejected claims that it was involved in the 14 January and mid-February 2022 cyber-attacks.<sup>17</sup>



*Warning tweet by Ukraine’s cyber defence force on 25 February 2022*

## Hybrid Attacks & the Annexation of Crimea

The tensions in Ukraine demonstrate **the need for every nation to have the ability to defend itself against external aggression**, which can take on many forms other than military confrontation.

One such form is hybrid attacks where kinetic and non-kinetic tools like disinformation or cyber-attacks may be used. This may be played out over many years. Hybrid attacks often blur the line between war and peace time, making detection, attribution, and response problematic. Anything, not just war or military conflict, can be an instrument of coercive state policy.

- Russia’s actions in Crimea leading up to Crimea’s annexation in 2014, and its current actions in Ukraine, are examples of long-term hybrid warfare campaigns.
- Before Crimea’s annexation, Russia played out an information campaign that has been estimated to be as long as ten years<sup>19</sup>. Russia used its energy exports to Ukraine and other European countries as a tool to put pressure on Ukrainian policy makers, and supplied weapons to separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine.
- Just prior to military action, Russia deployed “little green men”, masked and armed men in unmarked green army uniforms who resembled members of the Russian military, who manned roadblocks and seized government buildings, police stations, town halls, and



*“Little green men” in Crimea (2014)<sup>18</sup>*

<sup>16</sup> BBC, 26 February 2022. “Russian vigilante hacker: ‘I want to help beat Ukraine from my computer’”.

<sup>17</sup> Reuters, 19 February 2022. “Russia rejects claims it was responsible for cyberattack on Ukraine”.

<sup>18</sup> Image source: Creative Commons, Anton Holoborodko.

<sup>19</sup> NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, 2015. “Analysis of Russia’s Information Campaign against Ukraine”: Examining non-military aspects of the crisis in Ukraine from a strategic communications perspective”.

strategic points in the Crimean peninsula. Putin claimed they were members of local “self-defence groups”, before acknowledging that they were Russian<sup>20</sup>.

## The International Response

- Multiple rounds of talks between the US, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the OSCE, and Russia have failed to find a diplomatic solution to forestall a conflict.
- On 26 January 2022, the US and NATO rejected Putin’s conditions of de-escalation – including one that Ukraine should drop its NATO membership ambitions and maintain neutrality.<sup>21</sup> The US and NATO have said that NATO membership is open to any qualifying country, and stepped up support for Ukraine by sending it military equipment as well as imposing sanctions against Russia. The US and NATO have also deployed troops to bolster NATO countries’ defences.
- By 15 February 2022, many countries, including Estonia, Lithuania, Norway, Germany, Israel, the US, the UK, Japan and Singapore, have asked for their nationals to leave Ukraine. The UK is also pulling out its troops stationed in Ukraine to train security forces – no UK troops will be in Ukraine should Russia invade.
- To many, especially in Europe and the US, Putin’s announcement the start of a “special military operation” in Ukraine on 24 February 2022 was in effect a declaration of war:
  - Ukraine’s Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said Putin had “launched a full-scale invasion” and that “this is a war of aggression”.<sup>22</sup>
  - NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said this “brutal act of war” shattered peace in Europe.
  - US President Joe Biden said Putin “chose this war” and had exhibited a “sinister” view of the world in which nations take what they want by force.<sup>23</sup>

### Singapore’s Position (ca 28 February 2022)

- Singapore has strongly condemned Russia’s unprovoked attack on Ukraine.
- The sovereignty, political independence and the territorial integrity of all countries, big and small, must be respected.
- We strongly urge Russia to cease this offensive military action immediately, and to work for a peaceful settlement in accordance with the UN Charter and international law.
- We also call for safe and unhindered access for humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and all those in need.

<sup>20</sup> Brookings, 7 July 2014. “Watch Out for Little Green Men”.

<sup>21</sup> Al Jazeera, 26 January 2022. “US and NATO deliver responses to Russian demands over Ukraine”; and BBC, 26 January. “Ukraine crisis: US rejects Russian demand to bar Ukraine from Nato”.

<sup>22</sup> Al Jazeera, 24 February 2022. “World reacts to Russia’s attack on Ukraine”.

<sup>23</sup> AP, 25 February 2022. “Russia presses invasion to outskirts of Ukrainian capital”.

- We continue to value our good relations with Russia and the Russian people. However, we cannot accept such violations of sovereignty and territorial integrity of another sovereign state. We will continue to work with our ASEAN and international partners to take a strong stance against the invasion of Ukraine, and to end further violence and bloodshed, and to de-escalate tensions.
- Singapore intends to act in concert with many other like-minded countries to impose appropriate sanctions and restrictions against Russia.



- Unless we as a country stand up for principles that are the very foundation for the independence and sovereignty of smaller nations, our own right to exist and prosper as a nation may similarly be called into question one day.<sup>24</sup>

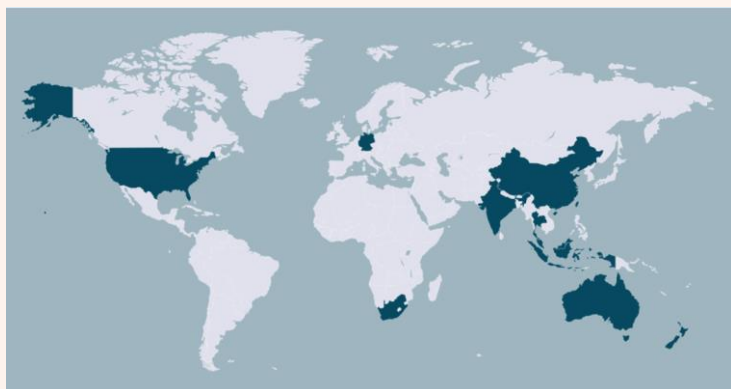
*[Note: For the latest on Singapore's position on this issue, please refer to MFA's website.]*

## Key Lessons for Singapore

*What can we learn from this ongoing issue?*

- 1 **We should not depend on others for our defence.** That is why Singapore built our own defence, based on two pillars: Deterrence and Diplomacy.
  - **Deterrence.** We rely on the military strength of the SAF to act as a deterrent against aggression from other countries and to defend our national interests by imposing manpower and materiel costs on potential aggressors. Our national interests include the safety and stability of our country and citizens, as well as the security of our sea lines of communication vital to maritime trade – the life-blood of Singapore. A strong military force reduces the capacity of others to decisively take over Singapore.
  - **Diplomacy.** A prudent foreign policy and the use of diplomatic engagement are key to complement deterrence. This allows us to shape international opinion in ways that will benefit Singapore, such as adherence to international law and a rules-based order. In addition, diplomacy enables access to training spaces and advanced defence technologies for the SAF.

<sup>24</sup> MFA, 28 February 2022. "Minister for Foreign Affairs Dr Vivian Balakrishnan's Ministerial Statement on the Situation in Ukraine and its Implications".



*The SAF's training and exercise footprints in the world  
(2018)*



*Launch ceremony of our first Invincible-class  
submarine in Kiel, Germany (February 2019)*

## 2

**Small countries are easily disadvantaged when caught in the middle of contending big powers.** Apart from investing in self-defence, small countries need to leverage international networks and multilateral institutions.

- Rule of law is especially important for a small country – but countries can choose to break it. When squeezed between larger powers or blocs, a smaller country can be easily “sacrificed” if the larger contending powers or blocs decide to disregard its interests<sup>25</sup>.
- **But we do not choose sides, we uphold principles.**
- To protect Singapore and our interests, we must also work hard to:
  - build and maintain a strong international network of friends;
  - actively participate in international organisations which are relevant to us;
  - support key regional organisations and platforms such as ASEAN; and
  - maintain strong relationships with our neighbours to the best extent possible.

## 3

The events in Eastern Europe also demonstrate the relevance and importance of Total Defence. This is why **we have our own Military Defence, built upon National Service (NS)**, as one of the cornerstones of our defence strategy.

- A steady and consistent approach to building military capabilities is key to **Military Defence**. It would be very hard to restart NS or build new capabilities only when we see new threats.
- After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Lithuania, which had abolished conscription in 2008, attempted to reintroduce compulsory conscription. However, the Lithuanian government faced challenges as its society was not prepared for it.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> MFA, 2014. “MFA: Press Release: Remarks by Minister for Foreign Affairs K Shanmugam, 2nd Minister for Foreign Affairs Grace Fu, SMS for Foreign Affairs Masagos Zulkifli and SPS for Foreign Affairs Sam Tan in Parliament during the Committee of Supply Debate on 5 March”.

<sup>26</sup> Sweden also reintroduced conscription in 2017, and France brought back National Service in 2018.

- Hybrid threats like disinformation and cyber-attacks will grow with increasing digital adoption. Hence, **Psychological and Digital Defence are key**. As citizens, we can all play our part, as Total Defence espouses, to be vigilant online, discerning when consuming media and information, and remain united as a society. We also have a responsibility to be conscious of friends and family who might be susceptible to such influences, and to educate them accordingly.
- Every individual's will to resist such attempts is crucial – so is having Singaporeans understand our national interests and positions, and the agendas of our adversaries. **With every Singaporean united, committed and ready to defend our home, we can be more psychologically resilient and better prepared for threats of the future.**

“What happened in Ukraine in the early stages is a salutary lesson on “grey zone” threats – incipient, then it cascades, extrapolates and blows up. And when you try to mount the defence, you are finished.”

– *Minister for Defence Dr Ng Eng Hen at Committee of Supply 2020*

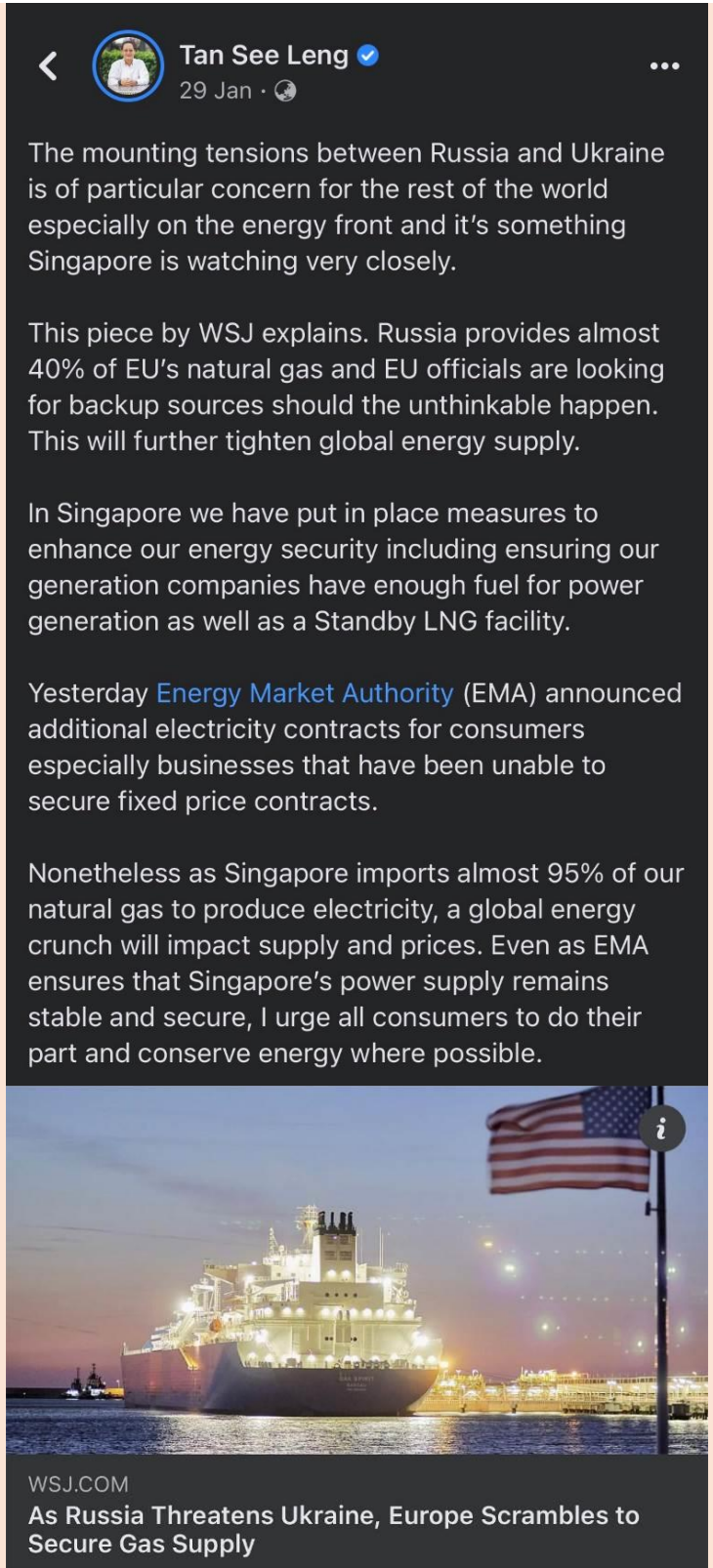




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The seemingly remote events in Ukraine have a **potential impact on Singapore.**

- **As a small and open economy, we are susceptible to global demand and supply shocks,** as seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. Going forward, global energy prices may spike due to the Russia-Ukraine tensions – and as a result, energy supply and prices in Singapore may be affected.
- A secure and reliable supply of energy is critical to Singapore’s survival and economic competitiveness. The government has put in place measures to enhance energy security and resilience, and embarked on longer-term plans to diversify our energy sources.
- Every Singaporean can also play a part, contributing to our **Economic Defence.** We can conserve energy where possible, adopt energy saving habits, or choose energy efficient appliances.



*Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Trade and Industry Dr Tan See Leng’s Facebook post on Singapore’s energy security*

