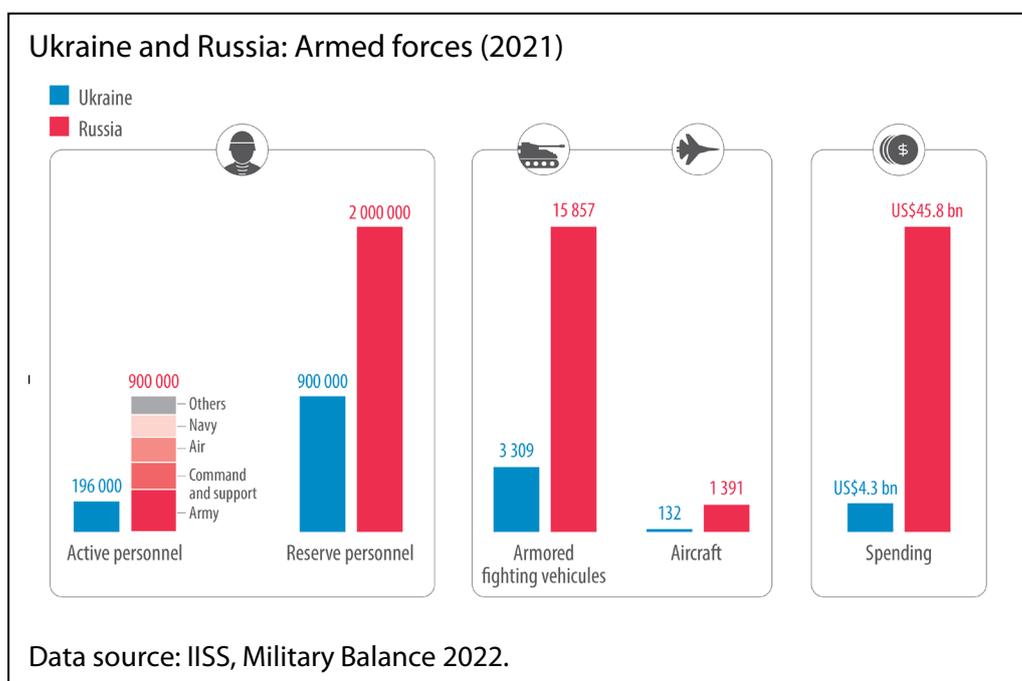# Russia's war on Ukraine: Military balance of power

Although Russia's invasion of Ukraine began on 24 February 2022, it was preceded by long and repetitive military build-ups at the border, as well as by joint Russian-Belarusian military exercises on Belarusian territory. While Ukraine defends its territory with a much more motivated army, it is nevertheless smaller than and not as well equipped as the Russian forces. Military aid is being provided by EU Member States and other like-minded countries, including the United States, Canada and United Kingdom.

The attack

Russian forces entered Ukraine mainly around the country's borders with Russia and Crimea, while Kyiv was attacked via Belarusian territory. The offensive has been much slower than Russia initially appeared to expect. As of 20:00 CET on 3 March 2022, Russia had taken control of land along the northern and south-eastern Ukrainian border with Russia, as well border regions north-west of Crimea. Russia has occupied only one regional capital to date (Kherson, 290 000 inhabitants). Russia also bombed cities including Kyiv, Kharkiv, Chernihiv and the Azov Sea city of Mariupol, which is reportedly 'near to humanitarian catastrophe'.

The invasion is a flagrant violation of United Nations Charter Article 2 (4) prohibiting 'use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state'. Ukraine, which is not a member of any military alliance, defends itself in accordance with UN Charter Article 51 establishing an inherent right to individual or collective self-defence in case of an armed attack against a UN member.

Balance of power

With 900 000 troops, the Russian armed forces are over four times greater in number than the Ukrainian forces, which consisted of 196 000 troops in 2021. The Russian army can deploy 280 000 troops, with other armed forces, such as the navy, or the 180 000-strong command and support structures, being limited in scope for use in the war on Ukraine. It is estimated that there are currently 150 000 Russian soldiers present in Ukraine, while around 20 000 remain ready in reserve. Crucially, however, the Russian army is better equipped. Prior to the invasion, Russia disposed of 15 857 armoured combat vehicles, in comparison to Ukraine's 3 309 – almost five times more, as well as over ten times the number of aircraft (1 391) compared with the

Ukraine and Russia: Armed forces (2021)

Data source: IISS, Military Balance 2022.

Ukrainians (132). In January 2022, Ukraine reorganised its Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) with a new reserve force, which in mid-February 2022 were reportedly aiming at reaching 1.5-2 million members. The actual number of TDF soldiers is unknown. In stark contrast to questions regarding the morale of the Russian army, the Ukrainian forces are highly motivated.

EN

Cyber aspects

In the weeks preceding the war, Russia attacked Ukrainian websites in the context of its hybrid war on the country. In the past, cyber-attacks have cut off electricity networks in Kyiv. However, such attacks are not currently being seen, leading to speculation, with possible explanations ranging from Ukrainians protecting their information technology (IT) network, to possible use of Ukrainian IT infrastructure by Russian military forces. However, cyber-attack remains possible. At the same time, Ukraine has so far been able to communicate effectively with the world to provide information about the situation in the country. Ukraine is mobilising its compatriots to attack Russian websites related to the Kremlin-through the 'Ukraine IT Army', while other independent groups (including Anonymous and Cyber Partisans), have declared responsibility for attacks against Russia's banks, state media and a Belarusian railway network used to move troops from Russia to Ukraine.

Russia's military expenditure is traditionally high, equalling US$62.2 billion in 2021 – over 14 times greater than Ukraine's US$4.3 billion. Following Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, Russian military expenditure reached as much as 5.4 % of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016, and has fallen below 4 % of GDP only twice. Ukraine, with its smaller economy, decided to invest its resources more peacefully, with military expenditure averaging 3.2 % of GDP in 2014-2020, although still well above EU levels.

NATO response

A meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Heads of State and Government issued a statement on Russia's attack on Ukraine on 25 February 2022, expressing solidarity with the Ukrainian people and their democratically elected institutions, and condemning Russia's full-scale invasion, described as a 'terrible strategic mistake, for which Russia will pay a severe price, both economically and politically, for years to come'. As invasion has consequences for NATO's deterrence and defence posture, consultations under Article 4 of the NATO Treaty have taken place, and defensive land and air forces in eastern NATO countries, as well as maritime assets across the NATO area, have been deployed. The commitment to collective defence under Article 5 of the NATO Treaty has been reconfirmed. The NATO Secretary General invited Finland, Sweden and the EU to join the meeting.

During a 24 February 2022 press briefing, US President Joe Biden stressed that there will not be a direct military confrontation between the USA and Russian forces. However, if the conflict extends to the Euro-Atlantic area, the USA 'will defend every inch of NATO territory' and meet its Article 5 commitments. The statement was followed by deployment of additional US troops to European NATO states.

EU response

The European Council immediately condemned 'the Russian Federation's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine', calling for an immediate ceasefire and withdrawal of Russian forces. This was followed by a series of EU sanctions. Among the financial assistance to Ukraine, the Council approved two decisions providing Ukraine with €500 million for military aid and equipment. In a historic move, the EU will provide €450 million (CFSP 2022/338), to be financed by the European Peace Facility, for military equipment designed to deliver lethal force. A further €50 million (CFSP 2022/339) is for equipment and supplies not designed to deliver lethal force, such as personal protective equipment, first aid kits and fuel. A majority of EU Member States are delivering weapons or military aid in some form to Ukraine.

European Parliament position

In its resolution of 1 March 2022, the Parliament condemned Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine and demanded that Russia cease all military activities and withdraw from the country. The Parliament called on EU Member States to accelerate provision of defensive weapons for Ukraine. The Parliament also supported increased EU-Ukraine intelligence cooperation regarding the ongoing war and called for the EU institutions to work towards granting Ukraine EU candidate country status. However, mutual defence and solidarity clauses in the EU Treaties only apply to Member States.

Article 42(7) TEU (Mutual defence clause) obliges EU Member States to aid and assist 'by all means in their power' a Member State that has become a 'victim of armed aggression on its territory'. Article 222 TFEU (Solidarity clause) stipulates that EU members 'shall act jointly' upon request by the relevant state authorities, if another Member State suffers a terrorist attack, natural or man-made disaster.