

# Why Has Putin Invaded Ukraine?

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**By Danyal Hussain**

LONDON, England—After months of escalating tensions and desperate diplomacy, Russia today launched all-out war on Ukraine. President Vladimir Putin ignored international condemnation and sanctions to press ahead with the invasion with simultaneous attacks coming from the south, east and north, by both land and air.

The president gave an extraordinary address to the Russian nation this morning, in which he declared a “special military operation” to “demilitarize” and “de-Nazify” Ukraine.

Putin also issued a chilling warning to any country thinking of coming to Ukraine’s aid, vowing “consequences greater than any you have faced in history.”

His words come amid anger at the Western response to Russian aggression, with a former general and German defense minister accusing the West of ignoring the looming threat of Putin over the past decade.

General Sir Richard Shirreff, ex-deputy supreme commander of NATO, said today: “You only have to listen to what Putin has been saying since 2014. This has been on the cards for some time—but the people who should have been listening have been ignoring it.”

Here, we look at the reasons behind Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, including some of his outlandish justifications— and how it could affect you.

## **Why did Vladimir Putin link Ukraine to neo-Nazis when declaring war?**

In a bizarre and historically inaccurate address on Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed he was “Ridding Ukraine” of “neo-Nazis” by invading.

He repeated the claims today as he announced Russian soldiers had entered Ukraine. He told the Ukrainian army: “Your ancestors fought the Nazis. Don’t obey the orders of the Nazi Junta in Kyiv. Lay down your arms and go home.”

The comments, which were widely panned, are an example of a common Russian media tactic, to portray a rival state as a nation that welcomes Nazism.

One example of this was posts from the Russian Foreign Ministry on social media that said Ukraine and the U.S. had voted against a UN resolution condemning the glorification of Nazism.

Though both countries did refuse to back the resolution, they later condemned Nazism and said the resolution was driven by Russian propaganda.

The U.S. claimed the document was a “thinly veiled attempt to legitimize Russian disinformation campaigns.”

There have been concerns raised about neo-Nazis and the rise of the far-right in Ukraine, with Azov, a nationalist battalion, now a unit within the nation’s military.

The issue was raised again when a great-grandmother pictured wielding an AK-47 in preparation for an invasion was revealed to have been taught how to use the weapon by the group. The Azov battalion has been accused of neo-Nazism and attacking LBTQ and Roma communities.

However, the far-right remains a minority in the country, with far-right groups failing to hit the 5% minimum needed to gain entry into parliament in the 2019 elections.

Putin seems to now be peddling a conspiracy that has spiked since last November, with pro-Kremlin social media accounts linking Ukraine to Nazism as tensions rose between neighbors.

Keir Giles, an expert on the country, who wrote a NATO report on its information warfare, told the BBC that Russia is “swift to label its adversaries and victims in Europe as Nazis.”

“We have seen this not only in Ukraine, but also in Russia’s vilification of the Baltic states,” he said.

### **What are the historical and geographic reasons Russia is citing for its invasion of Ukraine?**

Putin believes that controlling Ukraine would give Russia a buffer zone to protect it from invasion. In the past 500 years, Russia has been invaded several times from the west, with armies coming across a vast area of flat land called the European Plain. Poland invaded in 1605, the French came under Napoleon in 1812 and the Germans did so in both world wars.

The European Plain stretches to 2,000 miles near the Russian border and offers a straight route to Moscow. To combat these geographical constraints, Putin, like other Russian leaders before him, has attempted to set up buffer zones and areas of Russian influence around his nation through expansion.

Historically, nations like Kazakhstan, Poland and Ukraine have all been annexed by Russia for security reasons and Putin has claimed that the current invasion of Ukraine has similar motivations.

## Is Putin trying to “recreate” the Soviet Union?

At the end of the Second World War, Russia occupied vast swathes of Central and Eastern Europe. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the expansion of NATO since the war has led to security fears in Moscow.

Putin has previously said that the fall of the USSR robbed Russia of its place among the world’s great powers and put it at the mercy of the West. Restoring this power and rebuilding Russia on the world stage has been the main aim of his 22 years in power.

He has long been obsessed with returning Ukraine to Moscow’s fold, in the name of Russia’s greatness. For many Russians of his generation, who were raised on Soviet propaganda, the USSR disintegrating and its spheres of influences vanishing remains an open wound.

For Putin, a KGB officer based in East Germany at the time the Soviet Union was gradually collapsing—between 1989 and 1991—this was a personal defeat.

The Russian leader has said many times that he suffered the same misery as his compatriots when the Soviet empire crumbled, recently claiming he was forced to drive a taxi to make ends meet when he returned to his homeland.

Putin has claimed that the end of the Soviet Union was the “greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”—despite Russia living through two world wars.

He has called NATO’s expansion “menacing” and claimed that the prospect of Ukraine joining the body is an existential threat to his country.

Since 1997, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Slovenia, Croatia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Albania and Bulgaria have all joined Nato. To Putin and his supporters, this is proof of the West inching closer to Russia.

However, General Sir Richard Shirreff, ex-deputy supreme commander of NATO, warned today that the invasion of Ukraine proves Putin is determined to restore the Soviet Union.

Sir Richard said that Putin will look to occupy Ukraine—and potentially look to other countries in the region.

### **The following extracts are from a Putin essay on Ukraine last year.**

- Russians and Ukrainians are one people.

“During the recent Direct Line, when I was asked about Russian-Ukrainian relations, I said that Russians and Ukrainians were one people—a single whole. These words were not driven by some short-term considerations or prompted by the current political context. It is what I have said on numerous occasions and what I firmly believe. I therefore feel it necessary to explain my position in detail and share my assessments of today’s situation.”

- True sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia.

"I am confident that true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia. Our spiritual, human and civilizational ties formed for centuries and have their origins in the same sources, they have been hardened by common trials, achievements and victories. Our kinship has been transmitted from generation to generation. It is in the hearts and the memory of people living in modern Russia and Ukraine, in the blood ties that unite millions of our families. Together we have always been and will be many times stronger and more successful. For we are one people. Today, these words may be perceived by some people with hostility. They can be interpreted in many possible ways. Yet, many people will hear me. And I will say one thing—Russia has never been and will never be 'anti-Ukraine.' And what Ukraine will be—it is up to its citizens to decide."

■ The two nations are descendants of Ancient Rus.

"Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarusians are all descendants of Ancient Rus, which was the largest state in Europe. Slavic and other tribes across the vast territory—from Ladoga, Novgorod, and Pskov to Kiev and Chernigov—were bound together by one language (which we now refer to as Old Russian), economic ties, the rule of the princes of the Rurik dynasty, and—after the baptism of Rus—the Orthodox faith. The spiritual choice made by St. Vladimir, who was both Prince of Novgorod and Grand Prince of Kiev, still largely determines our affinity today. The throne of Kiev held a dominant position in Ancient Rus. This had been the custom since the late 9th century. The Tale of Bygone Years captured for posterity the words of Oleg the Prophet about Kiev, 'Let it be the mother of all Russian cities.' "

■ The name 'Ukraine' is an old Russian word.

"The name 'Ukraine' was used more often in the meaning of the Old Russian word 'okraina' (periphery), which is found in written sources from the 12th century, referring to various border territories. And the word 'Ukrainian,' judging by archival documents, originally referred to frontier guards who protected the external borders."

■ The bill on indigenous people will sow "seeds of discord."

"Lastly, as early as May of this year, the current president introduced a bill on 'indigenous peoples' to the Rada. Only those who constitute an ethnic minority and do not have their own state entity outside Ukraine are recognized as indigenous. The law has been passed. New seeds of discord have been sown. And this is happening in a country, as I have already noted, that is very complex in terms of its territorial, national and linguistic composition, and its history of formation. There may be an argument: if you are talking about a single large nation, a tri-une nation, then what difference does it make who people consider themselves to be—Russians, Ukrainians, or Belarusians. I completely agree with this. Especially since the determination of nationality, particularly in mixed families, is the right of every individual, free to make his or her own choice. But the fact is that the situation in Ukraine today is completely different because it involves a forced change of identity. And the most despicable thing is that the Russians in Ukraine are being forced not only to deny their roots, generations of their ancestors but also to believe that Russia is their enemy. It would not be an exaggeration to say

that the path of forced assimilation, the formation of an ethnically pure Ukrainian state, aggressive towards Russia, is comparable in its consequences to the use of weapons of mass destruction against us. As a result of such a harsh and artificial division of Russians and Ukrainians, the Russian people in all may decrease by hundreds of thousands or even millions.”

He said: “The Russians don’t hang around. They’ll look to establish overwhelming force so we have to assume the worst. There will be multiple attacks from different axes. This is a full blown military offensive to occupy Ukraine.”

### **Why did Putin describe Ukraine as “not even a country”—and why do Russians believe the nations should be one?**

Russia’s origins date back to a collection of ninth century tribes known as Kievan Rus, which made its home in Kiev and other towns now in Ukraine. Because of this, many Russians see Ukraine as being an important part of their own nation.

Dr. Björn Alexander Düben, Assistant Professor at the School of International and Public Affairs at the London School of Economics, explained: “Ukraine’s sentimental and spiritual appeal to many Russians derives from the fact that the Kievan Rus—a medieval state that came into existence in the 9th century and was centred around present-day Kiev—is regarded as a joint ancestral homeland that laid the foundations for both modern Russia and Ukraine.”

As far back as 2008, according to Russian and US media, Putin told his then US counterpart George W. Bush that “Ukraine is not even a country.”

During his end-of-year press conference in December, Putin again raised eyebrows by saying Ukraine was “created” by Vladimir Lenin, the founder of the Soviet Union.

Months earlier, in a long article called “On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians,” he said that Kyiv’s decisions are driven by a Western “anti-Russia” plot.

Analyst Stanovaya said that Putin has always believed that the Ukrainian people are themselves pro-Russians that have been “the subject of manipulation.”

She said that in the Kremlin’s “understanding, war would not be an attack on Ukraine, but a liberation of the Ukrainian people from a foreign occupier.”

As a former Soviet republic, modern-day Ukraine has deep social and cultural ties with Russia. In cities like Odessa, Russian is the dominant language, while Russians are the majority ethnic group in nearly all of Ukraine’s major cities.

However, Kiev existed before Moscow and Ukrainian nationalism predates the Soviet Union by 100 years. In fact, some elements of Ukrainian history even go back to the Middle Ages.

Timothy Snyder, a history professor at Yale University, reacted to Putin’s bizarre claims on Monday. He said: “It’s very strange when you’re surrounded by the reality of Ukrainian history, to hear a distant tyrant declare that the thing doesn’t exist. Obviously he’s wrong.”

## **How did the current tensions between Russia and Ukraine and the West start?**

The current difficulties date back to the overthrow in 2014 of the pro-Moscow Ukrainian government of Viktor Yanukovich, prompting fears in the Kremlin that the country was moving into the orbit of the West.

Putin now claims Ukraine is a puppet of the West and says that it was never a proper state.

In 2014, he responded by sending in troops to annex Crimea while Russian-backed separatist rebels seized territory in eastern Ukraine in bloody fighting with the Ukrainian military.

The history of Crimea, part of Ukraine that was annexed by Russia in 2014, has been marked by fighting and conquest.

From the 5th century BC and for almost 2,000 years Crimea was a Greek settlement. It later became part of the Roman Empire, the Byzantine Empire and the Empire of Trebizond.

It was acquired by the Kievan Rus, becoming part of what is modern-day Ukraine in the medieval period. However, it was then conquered by the Golden Horde, the Khanata and the Ottoman Empire.

In 1774 the Ottomans were defeated by Russia and traded Crimea to Catherine the Great. Crimea was annexed into Russia in 1783.

Eventually, this led to the Crimean War, a conflict between 1853 and 1856 in which Russia fought an alliance of the UK, France, the Ottoman Empire and Sardinia.

Crimea was an independent Soviet state from 1921 to 1945, then a province of Russia from 1945 to 1954 and then a province of Ukraine—until it was annexed by Russia in 2014.

In January last year, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged US President Joe Biden to let Ukraine join Nato.

An angered Russia responded by sending troops near the Ukrainian border for training exercises, with the size of the deployment steadily increasing. The US threatened sanctions if Russia invaded Ukraine.

## **Is Putin taking advantage of “weak” Western leaders in Joe Biden and Boris Johnson?**

Some, particularly Republicans in the US, believe that Putin is taking advantage of the “weakness” of US President Joe Biden by launching his invasion.

Biden was slammed on January 19 when he referred to Russian troops potentially entering Ukraine as a “minor incursion” and has been criticized since for moving slowly on sanctions.

As Russia escalated troop presence on the border, former U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Nikki Haley said the Biden administration had failed to deliver on a promise of swift and severe sanctions.

She said: "Ukraine is a test of western resolve. It's not just about Putin. The Chinese communists and Iranian jihadists are watching too. It's a major leadership moment for Biden. So far, he's failing."

Dr. Mark Shanahan, an associate professor at the Department of Politics and International Relations at Reading University, said: "The sense in Europe at the moment- much closer to the action—is that the president is still too indecisive."

Former President Trump claimed that Putin never would have invaded Ukraine if he were still president, and said that Russia has become "very very rich" under Biden.

"If properly handled, there was absolutely no reason that the situation currently happening in Ukraine should have happened at all," Trump said in a statement Tuesday. "I know Vladimir Putin very well, and he would have never done during the Trump Administration what he is doing now, no way!"

Trump also hit out against Biden's "weak sanctions." The Biden administration has faced sharp criticism for so far only sanctioning five Russian figures in Putin's inner circle and hitting only two Russian banks. Senator Ted Cruz describes the sanctions as "appeasement that only increases the chances of military conflict."

As Russian forces invaded Ukraine today, Biden was again slammed for showing "weakness" by failing to publicly address the situation.

He was accused of "encouraging" Putin's invasion of Ukraine today by imposing "pathetic sanctions" that the Russian leader completely ignored.

The Prime Minister came under withering friendly fire this morning over "weak" economic measures targeting cronies of the Kremlin autocrat before his tanks crossed the border.

Mr. Johnson this week unveiled measures targeting just three people and five banks after Putin recognized two breakaway areas in Ukraine's east—and is preparing to introduce more now that a full-scale incursion is underway.

Tory MP Tom Tugendhat, a former soldier and chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, told the BBC today: "I'm afraid weak sanctions like the ones that were imposed on Monday just encourage others to believe we are weak because we're clearly not willing to do anything serious. So what that did, I'm afraid on Monday, was it didn't deter, but encouraged, because it gave the suggestion or made clear that we weren't willing to do anything serious. If we are going to do sanctions, as I say, we need to do them extremely hard and extremely early."

He added: "This is a vile act of war and an aggression which really cannot be tolerated by any party."

Tory MP Bob Seely, a member of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee (FAC), previously said Britain was "a decade behind the times" on the threat posed by Russian financial influence.

The PM also came under fire after he was forced to cancel a phone call to discuss the Ukraine crisis with Putin at the start of the month because of Partygate.

The call between the Prime Minister and the Russian president was cancelled after Moscow reportedly rejected a request for a brief delay.

## **Did the West miss its chance to stop Russia and Putin more than 10 years ago?**

There is a growing feeling among experts that the Ukraine invasion should have been foreseen and stopped earlier.

Former German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said today: "I'm so angry at us for historically failing. After Georgia, Crimea and Donbass, we have not prepared anything that would have really deterred Putin."

General Sir Richard Shirreff said that Putin "absolutely" wants to restore the Soviet Union and warned that the Russian leader's goal had been clear since 2014.

He said: "You only have to listen to what Putin has been saying since 2014. The most appropriate security settlement for Europe is a new Yalta. He sees Russia dominating eastern Europe as the Soviet Union did in communist time. This has been on the cards for some time—but the people who should have been listening have been ignoring it. We should mobilize the forces, such as we've got, as I'm afraid the cupboard is pretty bare after a decade-plus of cuts. Our government must be examining carefully what needs to be done to reinforce the East and send the most powerful signal that NATO is ready and willing to defend its territory."

The invasion of Ukraine is not the first time Russia has moved in on nearby states.

In 2008, Putin invaded Georgia during the opening ceremony of the Beijing Olympics. Around 40,000 soldiers and 1,200 armored vehicles entered the semi-autonomous region of South Ossetia before stopping about 35 miles short of Tbilisi, Georgia's capital.

Russia justified the invasion by claiming that it was required to protect Osseitians from Georgian 'genocide.' However, no evidence of genocide was found by impartial observers.

Some have also claimed that Russia was emboldened during Donald Trump's presidency and his public disapproval of NATO. Putin was further bolstered by the U.S. failure in Afghanistan.

Peter Hahn, a professor of history at The Ohio State University, and an expert on U.S. diplomacy, told Newsweek: "The Trump Administration weakened the foundation of NATO. Biden's withdrawal from Afghanistan did nothing to repair the breach."

## **What has happened now?**

Earlier this week, Putin decided to recognize the two Russian-backed regions in east Ukraine—Donetsk People's Republic and Luhansk People's Republic—as independent states.

He ordered troops into the two regions to "maintain peace"—crossing the red line set by the West by deploying Russian forces on Ukrainian territory.

Then, in another escalation, the first explosions sounded in Ukraine's cities before dawn on Thursday as Putin launched his long-anticipated military operation in Ukraine.

In a televised address as the attack began, Putin warned other countries that any attempt to interfere would "lead to consequences you have never seen in history."

U.S. President Joe Biden declared that the world will "hold Russia accountable."

NATO secretary-general Jens Stoltenberg condemned Russia's action as a violation of international law and a threat to European security.

Ukraine's foreign ministry said Russia's intent was to destroy the state of Ukraine, a Westward-looking democracy intent on moving out of Moscow's orbit.

By midday Thursday, the skies over Kiev swarmed with Russian attack helicopters which seized Gostomel air base—though Ukrainian forces launched a fight-back, with ground forces moving in to retake the air field as jets streaking over the city, followed by reports that up to four Russian choppers had been shot out of the air.

Meanwhile Russian tanks, driving out of Crimea, broke through Ukrainian lines near Kherson and were moving towards the Dnieper River where they linked up with more helicopters and seized power plants—with a Russian flag seen raised over Kakhovka Hydroelectric plant in the early afternoon.

Ukrainian forces appeared to be putting up a stiff resistance around Kharkiv, in the east, where multiple Russian tanks and armoured vehicles were pictured having been destroyed by Kiev's forces—with bodies lying in the streets. Two Russian soldiers were also captured by Kiev's forces in the area.

Border guard units said they were fighting for control of Sumy, also in the east, against Russian forces. Earlier in the day, they had reported coming under attack from Belarus as Russian and Belarusian tanks rolled across the border and opened fire.

It came after cruise missiles, guided bombs and GRAD rockets took out targets from east to west—aimed at airfields, military bases, ammo dumps, and command posts including in the capital. Six Russian jets were shot out of the sky over the eastern Donbass region, Ukraine claimed.

Estimates of dead and injured were almost non-existent as of early afternoon. One Ukrainian official said "hundreds" had been killed in early fighting, while another put the death toll at 40 Ukrainians and 50 Russians. Ukrainian police said fighting is going on "in almost the entire country" and could not give an estimate of the dead.

### **What did Putin say after announcing's today's invasion?**

Putin said the military operation was needed to protect civilians in eastern Ukraine—a claim the US had predicted he would falsely make to justify an invasion.

The Russian leader also accused the US and its allies of ignoring Russia's demands to block Ukraine from ever joining NATO and offer Moscow security guarantees.

Mr. Putin said Russia does not intend to occupy Ukraine but will “demilitarize” it. Soon after his address, explosions were heard in the cities of Kyiv, Kharkiv and Odesa. Russia said it was attacking military targets.

He told Ukrainian service members to “lay down their arms and go home,” saying Russia could not exist with a “constant threat emanating from the territory of Ukraine” and clashes between Russian and Ukrainian soldiers was “inevitable.”

### **Could Russian aggression drag the US, UK and the rest of world into a new land war in Europe?**

Ukraine is not a member of NATO, so the alliance’s members—including the UK—will not play a direct role in fighting.

The UK has supplied anti-tank weapons to the Ukrainian army and other support is being considered.

But Russian aggression in eastern Europe is likely to increase anxiety among NATO’s members. This could lead to a further build-up of forces, potentially increasing tensions even further in the region.

General Sir Richard Shirreff, ex-deputy supreme commander of NATO, has said Britain’s first line of defence is now the border of former Soviet states who fear they could be next after the invasion of Ukraine.

He said: “There is a possibility that we as a nation will soon be at war with Russia. We in this country must recognize that our security starts not on the white cliffs of Dover—it starts in the forests of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.”

Sir Richard has said today’s invasion must change Boris Johnson’s “mind-set”—warning that he believes Putin is bent on restoring the USSR, which was split into 15 republics when it imploded in 1991.

And Putin delivered his own threat to the rest of the world as he announced the invasion today, saying: “To anyone who would consider interfering from the outside—if you do, you will face consequences greater than any you have faced in history.”

### **How will the invasion affect gas prices in the UK?**

Britons already feeling the squeeze have been warned to expect huge price hikes on everyday items due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Shoppers who have been battered by eye-watering costs over the pandemic were told petrol, gas and wheat could be set to skyrocket as the war kicked off.

Analysts predict huge price hikes, with petrol set to rocket to more than 170p per liter, bills leaping by £700 and the price of bread to go up by 20p.

Chair of the Foreign Affairs Committee Tom Tugendhat was quick to warn petrol will soar past £1.70 per liter this morning.

The Tory MP told the BBC’s Today program: “The Russian people are still flying using planes with Rolls Royce and General Electric engines. The money still

needs to be transferred and the cost of transferring that money still has an effect on the Russian Exchequer. The decisions made around Europe are absolutely going to shape the way Vladimir Putin sees this because the reality is that if we leave this to stand, if we let this pass, you can forget about petrol at £1.70 a liter, which is where it's heading now. It will be significantly higher."

Meanwhile the RAC also warned the cost of petrol could rocket, with one analyst from the firm saying it could hit 155p due to the war.

The firm's fuel spokesman Simon Williams said: "Both petrol and diesel reached new record levels yesterday. Unleaded is nearly 149.5p a liter and diesel almost 153p. Russia's actions will now push petrol pump prices up to £1.50 very soon. The question then becomes where will this stop and how much can drivers take just as many are using their cars more and returning to workplaces."

He continued: "If the oil price was to increase to \$110 there's a very real danger the average price of petrol would hit £1.55 a liter. This would cause untold financial difficulties for many people who depend on their cars for getting to work and running their lives as it would sky rocket the cost of a full tank to £85. At \$120 a barrel—without any change to the exchange rate which is currently at \$1.35—we would be looking £1.60 a liter and £88 for a full tank."

World oil prices on Thursday topped \$100 for the first time in more than seven years due to supply fears after major producer Russia attacked Ukraine.

European benchmark Brent North Sea crude surged more than eight percent to \$105.79 per barrel—the highest level since 2014.

U.S. contract West Texas Intermediate reached \$100.54 per barrel, also a peak last seen more than seven years ago. That capped a meteoric rise over almost two years since crude fell into negative territory for the first time.

In early 2020, oil briefly turned negative following the onset of the coronavirus pandemic that shut offices and factories—and grounded planes worldwide.

The market tumbled also on scarce storage facilities and a Saudi-Russia price war. WTI slumped to minus \$40.32, meaning that producers paid buyers to take the oil off their hands.

Brent tanked to a low \$15.98. Oil prices since recovered, rocketing last year to around \$70 per barrel as economies reopened from lockdowns, sparking a surge in demand for crude. The highs for Brent and WTI are above \$147.

Sarah Coles, senior personal finance analyst, Hargreaves Lansdown, said: "Millions of people have fallen into the fuel poverty gap, and war between Ukraine and Russia could push even more of us over the edge. Falling real wages and massive price increases means the fuel poverty gap has hit £779 million. It would now take a £258 cut in fuel bills for someone to escape fuel poverty. And this is even before the full impact of April's price hike has fed through into the calculations—let alone the risk of war pushing prices up significantly again in October. The timing of the forecast means the government has only factored in half of the impact of April's incredible 54% price rise. It has also added in the

burn-now-pay-later loan from the government and the council tax rebate—both of which offer a boost up front, but nothing in subsequent months. There's also the risk that we could see prices rise significantly again in October, when the cap is reviewed, if the Russia Ukraine war pushes wholesale gas prices sky high. Despite all this, the number of people in fuel poverty is still falling. This owes a great deal to how it is measured, which means that by expanding the Warm Home Discount, it doesn't matter if incomes fall and fuel bills rocket, the number officially in fuel poverty will drop. It means that to understand the horrible pressure on low income households, it's important to look beyond improving fuel poverty figures, and understand how life is actually getting harder."

### **How will the invasion impact energy and food prices in the UK?**

The war could also indirectly hamper the energy sector in Britain amid a knock on effect if gas is shut off from Europe.

The UK only gets five per cent of its gas from Russia but any move to cut off supply—possibly in response to Western sanctions—could hit prices because it is impacted by the global market.

Putin may "weaponize" his gas supplies to hurt Europe which would cause the wholesale cost to skyrocket and see a surge in prices everywhere amid high demand.

The energy regulator Ofgem warned any rise could lead to a further £700 hike in the price cap in October, on top of the £700 rise coming into effect in April.

But Britain should be safe from the supply of gas being shut off, but the EU would be hammered because it gets around half its stock from there.

UK gas supply mainly comes from the North Sea—with the system being set up in the 1960s—but resources have shrunk since 2000.

Norway gives around a third through huge pipelines while the rest is sent from countries such as Qatar, the U.S. and the Caribbean as liquefied natural gas.

There are also heightened fears for the cost of bread due to Ukraine being a massive exporter of wheat across the world.

The two countries account for around 29 per cent of global wheat exports, 19 per cent of world corn supplies and 80 per cent of world sunflower oil exports.

It left traders worried the military engagement will impact crop movement and trigger a mass scramble by importers to replace supplies from the Black Sea region.

Tory MP Mr. Tugendhat said: "You can forget about bread at 80, 90, £1 a loaf . . . 10 per cent of the world's wheat is grown in Ukraine and the idea that this year's going to be a good crop, I'm afraid, is for the birds."

He added: "This is absolutely one of those moments where we're going to see the cost-of-living crisis driven by war."

Gordon Polson, Chief Executive of the Federation of Bakers, told MailOnline: "Currently around 60-70 per cent of wheat used in the UK is grown in this country. But given how big a player Ukraine is globally, there could be an impact on wheat prices worldwide. At this time however, it is impossible to predict if, or how, UK bread prices will be impacted."

Around 70 per cent of Russia wheat exports went to buyers in the Middle East and Africa in 2021, according to Refinitiv shipping data.

Traders said the tensions earlier this week had already caused some buyers to divert vessels to other suppliers over concerns that any outbreak of war would lead to lengthy loading delays.

A lack of supplies from the Black Sea region could lift demand for the bread-making ingredient from the US and Canada.

World food prices already hover near 10-year highs, led by strong demand for wheat and dairy products, the U.N. food agency said late last year.

Susannah Streeter from financial services company Hargreaves Lansdown said: "Russia and Ukraine make up 29 per cent of wheat exports, 19 per cent of exported corn and 80 per cent of sunflower oil exports with Turkey and Egypt the largest importers from the region. Although the UK isn't among the main markets for these exports, our food prices are still likely to go up because fewer supplies from the region would hit global food prices, which will impact the cost of food supplied to the UK too. Already one of the most active contracts for wheat traded in Chicago is up 5.6 per cent today at its highest level since mid-2012. Food producers do try and absorb rapid wholesale increases, but many have already warned that shelf prices will have to rise and that was before the full scale invasion of Ukraine. Commodity traders are keeping a close watch on what's happening at ports in the Black Sea, where grain is shipped. For the moment Russia has kept its key ports open for navigation, but ships in the smaller Azov sea have already been stopped, where ports of smaller capacity operate. The worry is that restrictions could soon be imposed on Black Sea ports too which is likely to send grain prices even higher than the rises we have seen today in international markets."

### **Will the UK be hit by Russian hackers?**

Britain may not yet be at war with Russia but Putin's invasion of Ukraine could spark an immediate cyber-conflict that could knock out UK TV, broadband and phone networks as well as systems used by banks and the NHS, experts warned today.

GCHQ's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) urged UK organisations to "bolster their online defences" and warned that there has been an "historical pattern of cyber attacks on Ukraine with international consequences."

Ukrainian banking and government websites were last week briefly knocked offline by a spate of distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks which the US and Britain said were carried out by Russian military hackers—something the Russians denied. This will prompt concerns that the same sort of attack could now be attempted in the UK.

DDoS attacks try to crash a website by bombarding it with superfluous requests at the same time—and this surge of simple requests overloads the servers, causing them to shut down. In order to leverage the number of requests necessary, hackers will often resort to botnets—networks of computers brought under their control with malware.

Defense Secretary Ben Wallace also said the UK will launch retaliatory cyber attacks on Russia if it targets Britain's computer networks, and that "offensive cyber capability" was being developed from a base in North West England.

It comes after Home Secretary Priti Patel warned over the weekend that the UK Government expects to see "cyber attacks aimed at the West," while NCSC chief executive Lindy Cameron told of a "heightened cyber threat."

And in recent weeks the Financial Conduct Authority watchdog has written to the chief executives of UK banks warning them to brace for Russian-sponsored cyber attacks and to ensure their security systems are updated.

### **IN FULL: Putin's declaration of war on Ukraine**

Dear citizens of Russia! Dear friends!

Today, I again consider it necessary to return to the tragic events taking place in the Donbass and the key issues of ensuring the security of Russia itself.

Let me start with what I said in my address of February 21 this year. We are talking about what causes us particular concern and anxiety, about those fundamental threats that year after year, step by step, are rudely and unceremoniously created by irresponsible politicians in the West in relation to our country. I mean the expansion of the NATO bloc to the east, bringing its military infrastructure closer to Russian borders.

It is well known that for 30 years we have persistently and patiently tried to reach an agreement with the leading NATO countries on the principles of equal and indivisible security in Europe. In response to our proposals, we constantly faced either cynical deception and lies, or attempts to pressure and blackmail, while the North Atlantic Alliance, in the meantime, despite all our protests and concerns, is steadily expanding. The military machine is moving and, I repeat, is coming close to our borders.

Why is all this happening? Where does this impudent manner of speaking from the position of one's own exclusivity, infallibility and permissiveness come from? Where does the disdainful, disdainful attitude towards our interests and absolutely legitimate demands come from?

The answer is clear, everything is clear and obvious. The Soviet Union in the late 80s of the last century weakened, and then completely collapsed. The whole course of events that took place then is a good lesson for us today as well; it convincingly showed that the paralysis of power and will is the first step towards complete degradation and oblivion. As soon as we lost confidence in ourselves for some time, and that's it, the balance of power in the world turned out to be disturbed.

This has led to the fact that the previous treaties and agreements are no longer in effect. Persuasion and requests do not help. Everything that does not suit the hegemon, those in power, is declared archaic, obsolete, unnecessary. And vice versa: everything that seems beneficial to them is presented as the ultimate truth, pushed through at any cost, boorishly, by all means. Dissenters are broken through the knee.

What I am talking about now concerns not only Russia and not only us. This applies to the entire system of international relations, and sometimes even to the US allies themselves. After the collapse of the USSR, the redivision of the world actually began, and the norms of international law that had developed by that time—and the key, basic ones were adopted at the end of the Second World War and largely consolidated its results—began to interfere with those who declared themselves the winner in the Cold War.

Of course, in practical life, in international relations, in the rules for their regulation, it was necessary to take into account changes in the situation in the world and the balance of power itself. However, this should have been done professionally, smoothly, patiently, taking into account and respecting the interests of all countries and understanding our responsibility. But no—a state of euphoria from absolute superiority, a kind of modern form of absolutism, and even against the background of a low level of general culture and arrogance of those who prepared, adopted and pushed through decisions that were beneficial only for themselves. The situation began to develop according to a different scenario.

You don't have to look far for examples. First, without any sanction from the UN Security Council, they carried out a bloody military operation against Belgrade, using aircraft and missiles right in the very center of Europe. Several weeks of continuous bombing of civilian cities, on life-supporting infrastructure. We have to remind these facts, otherwise some Western colleagues do not like to remember those events, and when we talk about it, they prefer to point not to the norms of international law, but to the circumstances that they interpret as they see fit.

Then came the turn of Iraq, Libya, Syria. The illegitimate use of military force against Libya, the perversion of all decisions of the UN Security Council on the Libyan issue led to the complete destruction of the state, to the emergence of a huge hotbed of international terrorism, to the fact that the country plunged into a humanitarian catastrophe that has not stopped for many years. civil war. The tragedy, which doomed hundreds of thousands, millions of people not only in Libya, but throughout this region, gave rise to a massive migration exodus from North Africa and the Middle East to Europe.

A similar fate was prepared for Syria. The fighting of the Western coalition on the territory of this country without the consent of the Syrian government and the sanction of the UN Security Council is nothing but aggression, intervention.

However, a special place in this series is occupied, of course, by the invasion of Iraq, also without any legal grounds. As a pretext, they chose reliable information allegedly available to the United States about the presence of weapons

of mass destruction in Iraq. As proof of this, publicly, in front of the eyes of the whole world, the US Secretary of State shook some kind of test tube with white powder, assuring everyone that this is the chemical weapon being developed in Iraq. And then it turned out that all this was a hoax, a bluff: there are no chemical weapons in Iraq. Unbelievable, surprising, but the fact remains. There were lies at the highest state level and from the high rostrum of the UN. And as a result—huge casualties, destruction, an incredible surge of terrorism.

In general, one gets the impression that practically everywhere, in many regions of the world, where the West comes to establish its own order, the result is bloody, unhealed wounds, ulcers of international terrorism and extremism. All that I have said is the most egregious, but by no means the only examples of disregard for international law.

In this series, and promises to our country not to expand NATO by one inch to the east. I repeat—they deceived me, but in popular terms, they simply threw it away. Yes, you can often hear that politics is a dirty business. Perhaps, but not to the same extent, not to the same extent. After all, such cheating behavior contradicts not only the principles of international relations, but above all the generally recognized norms of morality and morality. Where is justice and truth here? Just a bunch of lies and hypocrisy.

By the way, American politicians, political scientists and journalists themselves write and talk about the fact that a real “empire of lies” has been created inside the United States in recent years. It’s hard to disagree with that—it’s true. But do not be modest: the United States is still a great country, a system-forming power. All her satellites not only resignedly and dutifully assent, sing along to her for any reason, but also copy her behavior, enthusiastically accept the rules he proposes. Therefore, with good reason, we can confidently say that the entire so-called Western bloc, formed by the United States in its own image and likeness, all of it is the very “empire of lies.”

As for our country, after the collapse of the USSR, with all the unprecedented openness of the new modern Russia, the readiness to work honestly with the United States and other Western partners, and in the conditions of virtually unilateral disarmament, they immediately tried to squeeze us, finish off and destroy us completely. This is exactly what happened in the 90s, in the early 2000s, when the so-called collective West most actively supported separatism and mercenary gangs in southern Russia. What sacrifices, what losses did all this cost us then, what trials did we have to go through before we finally broke the back of international terrorism in the Caucasus. We remember this and will never forget.

Yes, in fact, until recently, attempts have not stopped to use us in their own interests, destroy our traditional values and impose on us their pseudo-values that would corrode us, our people from the inside, those attitudes that they are already aggressively planting in their countries and which directly lead to degradation and degeneration, because they contradict the very nature of man. It won’t happen, no one has ever done it. It won’t work now either.

Despite everything, in December 2021, we nevertheless once again made an attempt to agree with the United States and its allies on the principles of ensuring security in Europe and on the non-expansion of NATO. Everything is in vain. The U.S. position does not change. They do not consider it necessary to negotiate with Russia on this key issue for us, pursuing their own goals, they neglect our interests.

And of course, in this situation, we have a question: what to do next, what to expect? We know well from history how in the 1940s and early 1941s the Soviet Union tried in every possible way to prevent or at least delay the outbreak of war. To this end, among other things, he tried literally to the last not to provoke a potential aggressor, did not carry out or postponed the most necessary, obvious actions to prepare for repelling an inevitable attack. And those steps that were nevertheless taken in the end were catastrophically belated.

As a result, the country was not ready to fully meet the invasion of Nazi Germany, which attacked our Motherland on June 22, 1941 without declaring war. The enemy was stopped and then crushed, but at a colossal cost. An attempt to appease the aggressor on the eve of the Great Patriotic War turned out to be a mistake that cost our people dearly. In the very first months of hostilities, we lost huge, strategically important territories and millions of people. The second time we will not allow such a mistake, we have no right.

Those who claim world domination, publicly, with impunity and, I emphasize, without any reason, declare us, Russia, their enemy. Indeed, today they have great financial, scientific, technological and military capabilities. We are aware of this and objectively assess the threats constantly being addressed to us in the economic sphere, as well as our ability to resist this impudent and permanent blackmail. I repeat, we evaluate them without illusions, extremely realistically.

As for the military sphere, modern Russia, even after the collapse of the USSR and the loss of a significant part of its potential, is today one of the most powerful nuclear powers in the world and, moreover, has certain advantages in a number of the latest types of weapons. In this regard, no one should have any doubts that a direct attack on our country will lead to defeat and dire consequences for any potential aggressor.

At the same time, technologies, including defense technologies, are changing rapidly. Leadership in this area is passing and will continue to change hands, but the military development of the territories adjacent to our borders, if we allow it, will remain for decades to come, and maybe forever, and will create an ever-growing, absolutely unacceptable threat for Russia.

Even now, as NATO expands to the east, the situation for our country is getting worse and more dangerous every year. Moreover, in recent days, the leadership of NATO has been openly talking about the need to accelerate, speed up the advancement of the Alliance's infrastructure to the borders of Russia. In other words, they are hardening their position. We can no longer just continue to observe what is happening. It would be absolutely irresponsible on our part.

Further expansion of the infrastructure of the North Atlantic Alliance, the military development of the territories of Ukraine that has begun is unacceptable for us. The point, of course, is not the NATO organization itself—it is only an instrument of U.S. foreign policy. The problem is that in the territories adjacent to us, I will note, in our own historical territories, an 'anti-Russia' hostile to us is being created, which has been placed under complete external control, is intensively settled by the armed forces of NATO countries and is pumped up with the most modern weapons.

For the United States and its allies, this is the so-called policy of containment of Russia, obvious geopolitical dividends. And for our country, this is ultimately a matter of life and death, a matter of our historical future as a people. And this is not an exaggeration—it is true. This is a real threat not just to our interests, but to the very existence of our state, its sovereignty. This is the very red line that has been talked about many times. They passed her.

In this regard, and about the situation in the Donbass. We see that the forces that carried out a coup d'état in Ukraine in 2014, seized power and are holding it with the help of, in fact, decorative electoral procedures, have finally abandoned the peaceful settlement of the conflict. For eight years, endlessly long eight years, we have done everything possible to resolve the situation by peaceful, political means. All in vain.

As I said in my previous address, one cannot look at what is happening there without compassion. It was simply impossible to endure all this. It was necessary to immediately stop this nightmare—the genocide against the millions of people living there, who rely only on Russia, hope only on us. It was these aspirations, feelings, pain of people that were for us the main motive for making a decision to recognize the people's republics of Donbass.

What I think is important to emphasize further. The leading NATO countries, in order to achieve their own goals, support extreme nationalists and neo-Nazis in Ukraine in everything, who, in turn, will never forgive the Crimeans and Sevastopol residents for their free choice—reunification with Russia.

They, of course, will climb into the Crimea, and just like in the Donbass, with a war, in order to kill, as punishers from the gangs of Ukrainian nationalists, Hitler's accomplices, killed defenseless people during the Great Patriotic War. They openly declare that they lay claim to a number of other Russian territories.

The entire course of events and analysis of incoming information shows that Russia's clash with these forces is inevitable. It is only a matter of time: they are getting ready, they are waiting for the right time. Now they also claim to possess nuclear weapons. We will not allow this to be done.

As I said earlier, after the collapse of the USSR, Russia accepted new geopolitical realities. We respect and will continue to treat all the newly formed countries in the post-Soviet space with respect. We respect and will continue to respect their sovereignty, and an example of this is the assistance we provided to Kazakhstan, which faced tragic events, with a challenge to its statehood and integrity. But Russia cannot feel safe, develop, exist with a constant threat emanating from the territory of modern Ukraine.

Let me remind you that in 2000-2005 we gave a military rebuff to terrorists in the Caucasus, defended the integrity of our state, saved Russia. In 2014, they supported the Crimeans and Sevastopol residents. In 2015, the Armed Forces used to put a reliable barrier to the penetration of terrorists from Syria into Russia. We had no other way to protect ourselves.

The same thing is happening now. You and I simply have not been left with any other opportunity to protect Russia, our people, except for the one that we will be forced to use today. Circumstances require us to take decisive and immediate action. The people's republics of Donbass turned to Russia with a request for help.

In this regard, in accordance with Article 51 of Part 7 of the UN Charter, with the sanction of the Federation Council of Russia and in pursuance of the treaties of friendship and mutual assistance ratified by the Federal Assembly on February 22 this year with the Donetsk People's Republic and the Luhansk People's Republic, I decided to conduct a special military operation .

Its goal is to protect people who have been subjected to bullying and genocide by the Kiev regime for eight years. And for this we will strive for the demilitarization and denazification of Ukraine, as well as bringing to justice those who committed numerous, bloody crimes against civilians, including citizens of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, our plans do not include the occupation of Ukrainian territories. We are not going to impose anything on anyone by force. At the same time, we hear that recently in the West there are more and more words that the documents signed by the Soviet totalitarian regime, which consolidate the results of the Second World War, should no longer be carried out. Well, what is the answer to this?

The results of the Second World War, as well as the sacrifices made by our people on the altar of victory over Nazism, are sacred. But this does not contradict the high values of human rights and freedoms, based on the realities that have developed today over all the post-war decades. It also does not cancel the right of nations to self-determination, enshrined in Article 1 of the UN Charter.

Let me remind you that neither during the creation of the USSR, nor after the Second World War, people living in certain territories that are part of modern Ukraine, no one ever asked how they themselves want to arrange their lives. Our policy is based on freedom, the freedom of choice for everyone to independently determine their own future and the future of their children. And we consider it important that this right—the right to choose—could be used by all the peoples living on the territory of today's Ukraine, by everyone who wants it.

In this regard, I appeal to the citizens of Ukraine. In 2014, Russia was obliged to protect the inhabitants of Crimea and Sevastopol from those whom you yourself call "Nazis." Crimeans and Sevastopol residents made their choice to be with their historical homeland, with Russia, and we supported this. I repeat, they simply could not do otherwise.

Today's events are not connected with the desire to infringe on the interests of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. They are connected with the protection

of Russia itself from those who took Ukraine hostage and are trying to use it against our country and its people.

I repeat, our actions are self-defense against the threats posed to us and from an even greater disaster than what is happening today. No matter how difficult it may be, I ask you to understand this and call for cooperation in order to turn this tragic page as soon as possible and move forward together, not to allow anyone to interfere in our affairs, in our relations, but to build them on our own, so that it creates the necessary conditions for overcoming all problems and, despite the presence of state borders, would strengthen us from the inside as a whole. I believe in this—in this is our future.

I should also appeal to the military personnel of the armed forces of Ukraine.

Dear comrades! Your fathers, grandfathers, great-grandfathers did not fight the Nazis, defending our common Motherland, so that today's neo-Nazis seized power in Ukraine. You took an oath of allegiance to the Ukrainian people, and not to the anti-people junta that plunders Ukraine and mocks these same people.

Don't follow her criminal orders. I urge you to lay down your weapons immediately and go home. Let me explain: all servicemen of the Ukrainian army who fulfill this requirement will be able to freely leave the combat zone and return to their families.

Once again, I insistently emphasize: all responsibility for possible bloodshed will be entirely on the conscience of the regime ruling on the territory of Ukraine.

Now a few important, very important words for those who may be tempted to intervene in ongoing events. Whoever tries to hinder us, and even more so to create threats for our country, for our people, should know that Russia's response will be immediate and will lead you to such consequences that you have never experienced in your history. We are ready for any development of events. All necessary decisions in this regard have been made. I hope that I will be heard.

Dear citizens of Russia!

Well-being, the very existence of entire states and peoples, their success and viability always originate in the powerful root system of their culture and values, experience and traditions of their ancestors and, of course, directly depend on the ability to quickly adapt to a constantly changing life, on the cohesion of society, its readiness to consolidate, to gather together all the forces in order to move forward.

Forces are needed always—always, but strength can be of different quality. The policy of the "empire of lies," which I spoke about at the beginning of my speech, is based primarily on brute, straightforward force. In such cases, we say: "There is power, mind is not needed."

And you and I know that real strength lies in justice and truth, which is on our side. And if this is so, then it is difficult to disagree with the fact that it is the strength and readiness to fight that underlie independence and sover-

eighty, are the necessary foundation on which you can only reliably build your future, build your home, your family, your homeland. .

Dear compatriots!

I am confident that the soldiers and officers of the Russian Armed Forces devoted to their country will professionally and courageously fulfill their duty. I have no doubt that all levels of government, specialists responsible for the stability of our economy, financial system, social sphere, heads of our companies and all Russian business will act in a coordinated and efficient manner. I count on a consolidated, patriotic position of all parliamentary parties and public forces.

Ultimately, as it has always been in history, the fate of Russia is in the reliable hands of our multinational people. And this means that the decisions made will be implemented, the goals set will be achieved, the security of our Motherland will be reliably guaranteed.

I believe in your support, in that invincible strength that our love for the Fatherland gives us.