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Blinded by Bias

Chapter 3 | Western Perceptions

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of Russia before 24 February 2022.*

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Western Perceptions

What Happened Before the Full-scale Invasion of February 2022: the Buildup

In the period preceding the full-scale invasion, Western governments treaded carefully in response to the renewed buildup of Russian troops, seeking to avoid escalation of what may constitute another Russian exercise in coercive diplomacy. As the crisis dragged on between April 2021 and February 2022, urgency increased among allies. The US started implementing a strategy of declassifying this intelligence in what came to be dubbed as intelligence diplomacy, in order to convince allies and the public of the necessity to prepare a response against the Russian threat.¹ As one former senior US Department of Defense official stated:

*"And then we spent October, November, January, and first couple weeks of February, downgrading enormous amounts of very sensitive intelligence to share with allies, and with the public, because we took the threat very seriously."*²

On 2 November, President Biden sent CIA Director Bill Burns to Moscow, according to former senior US Department of Defense official, with the mission to *"tell the Russians that we had pretty exquisite intelligence suggesting that they were planning and mobilising for a large-scale invasion of Ukraine"*.³ US Five Eyes intelligence partners Canada and the United Kingdom shared US concerns publicly. In late January, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau spoke of the risk of an impending invasion: *"We do fear an armed conflict in Ukraine. We are very worried about the position of the Russian government and the fact that they are sending soldiers to the Ukrainian border."*⁴ Similarly, UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson highlighted the danger of a *"renewed invasion"*, referring to *"declassified compelling intelligence exposing Russian intent to install a puppet regime in Ukraine."*⁵

At first, The Five Eyes' sense of urgency did not resonate with allies across the European continent. Despite numerous consultations between NATO foreign and defence ministers between October 2021 and January 2022, there was little immediate sense of urgency to act.⁶

¹ Banco et al., *"Something Was Badly Wrong"*.

² Interview 9

³ Interview 9

⁴ David Ljunggren, 'Canada, Echoing U.S., Says It Fears Armed Conflict Could Erupt in Ukraine', *Americas, Reuters*, 19 January 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/canadas-trudeau-says-russian-aggression-toward-ukraine-unacceptable-2022-01-19/>.

⁵ Boris Johnson, 'PM Statement on Ukraine: 25 January 2022', Prime Minister's Office, 25 January 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-statement-on-ukraine-25-january-2022>.

⁶ U. S. Embassy Kyiv, 'Secretary Antony J. Blinken at a Press Availability at the NATO Ministerial', U.S. Embassy in Ukraine, 2 December 2021, <https://ua.usembassy.gov/secretary-antony-j-blinken-at-a-press-availability-at-the-nato-ministerial/>; NATO, 'Extraordinary meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs', NATO, 7 January 2022, https://www.nato.int/cps/fr/natohq/news_190472.htm; Council of the European Union, 'Informal Meeting of Foreign Affairs Ministers - Gymnich', Consilium, 13 January 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2022/01/13-14/>; Council of the European Union, 'Informal Meeting of Defence Ministers', Consilium, 12 January 2022, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/fac/2022/01/12-13/>.

"We are very worried about the position of the Russian government and the fact that they are sending soldiers to the Ukrainian border."

“The worst would not happen.”

French President Emmanuel Macron, for example, remained confident in a diplomatic solution to the rising tensions, asserting that “He [Putin] told me that he would not initiate an escalation.”⁷ French intelligence assessments from the Direction du Renseignement Militaire (DRM) and the Direction Générale de la Sécurité Extérieure (DGSE) remained sceptical of the possibility of war and Putin’s intentions. According to Vice-Chancellor Robert Habeck, so too was the German foreign intelligence service, the German Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND), as it failed to convey the likelihood of a full-scale invasion to decision-makers. Instead, Robert Habeck stated that the intelligence service reported the buildup of Russian troops along the border as “an exercise.”⁸ He also added that: “The worst would not happen.” This assessment was shared by other European governments. In an address to parliament two weeks before the invasion, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi di Maio suggested that “Some dynamics would seem for now to reduce the scope of the risk of a full-scale Russian invasion or offensive against Ukraine.”⁹ While not ruling out limited military aggression against Ukraine, the Italian government deemed a diplomatic outcome of the crisis more likely. Similarly, Portuguese Minister of Foreign Affairs Augusto Santos Silva told reporters on 24 January 2022: “We are far from considering that the political and diplomatic path has been exhausted. On the contrary, it is underway and must be continued.”¹⁰ Only NATO allies in close proximity to Russia—the Baltics, Poland, Norway and Romania—shared the Five Eyes’ concerns of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In the words of Latvian President Egils Levits: “In recent weeks, Russia has significantly intensified the threat of a military invasion of Ukraine. Its rhetoric is extremely aggressive, without any respect for another country’s sovereign and international law.”¹¹ Similarly, Minister of Foreign Affairs Gabrielius Landsbergis stated that Lithuania was “convinced that a real war is a likely possibility.”¹² According to Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki it was these countries’ geographical proximity and history with Russia that made them more aware of the threat posed by Russia and more open towards supporting Ukraine: “We realise, like few in Europe, the value of security, the importance of alliances, support of neighbours in a situation of threat, and we want to provide this support to the Ukrainian state.”¹³ Concluding their analysis of the unfolding situation along the border, the Norwegian Intelligence Service put it clearly and concisely: “In 2022, there is a real risk of Russia once again invading Ukraine.”¹⁴

⁷ Giorgio Leali, ‘Macron and Kremlin Spar over Outcome of Meeting on Ukraine’, *POLITICO*, 8 February 2022, <https://www.politico.eu/article/putin-macron-kremlin-ukraine-talks-crimea/>.

⁸ ‘Habeck beklagt Fehleinschätzungen des BND bei Ukraine-Invasion’, *DIE WELT*, 24 August 2023, <https://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article247065878/Habeck-beklagt-Fehleinschaetzungen-des-BND-bei-Ukraine-Invasion.html>.

⁹ *Audizione del Ministro Degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale e del Ministro della Difesa sulla crisi tra Russia e Ucraina: Hearing at Commissioni riunite e congiunte*, Senato della Repubblica XVIII Legislatura (2022). <https://www.senato.it/service/PDF/PDFServer/DF/407563.pdf>.

¹⁰ ‘Portugal garante “resposta muito pesada” da UE caso Rússia avance sobre a Ucrânia’, CNN Portugal, 1 January 2022, <https://cnnportugal.iol.pt/augusto-santos-silva/ministerio-dos-negocios-estrangeiros/portugal-garante-resposta-muito-pesada-caso-russia-avance-sobre-a-ucrania/20220124/61eeee0f0cf2c-c58e7df00e7>.

CNN Port., ‘Portugal garante “resposta muito pesada” da UE caso Rússia avance sobre a Ucrânia’.

¹¹ ‘Statement by the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, on the Threat of Russian Aggression against Ukraine and Demands on NATO’, President of the Republic of Latvia, 26 January 2022, <https://www.president.lv/en/article/statement-president-latvia-egils-levits-threat-russian-aggression-against-ukraine-and-demands-nato>.

¹² “War Is Likely” Says Lithuanian FM, Calling for “Unbearable” Sanctions on Russia’, *Lrt.Lt*, 24 January 2022, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1596174/war-is-likely-says-lithuanian-fm-calling-for-unbearable-sanctions-on-russia>.

¹³ ‘Premier w Kijowie: cała Europa i cały świat zachodni muszą się zjednoczyć na rzecz suwerenności, niepodległości i nienaruszalności terytorialnej Ukrainy’, Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów, 1 February 2022, <https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/premier-w-kijowie-cala-europa-i-caly-swiat-zachodni-musza-sie-zjednoczyc-na-rzecz-suwerennosci-niepodleglosci-i-nienaruszalnosci-terytorialnej-ukrainy>.

¹⁴ *Focus 2022* (Norwegian Intelligence Service, 2022), 33, https://www.etterretningstjenesten.no/publikasjoner/fokus/fokus-english/Focus2022.pdf/_attachment/inline/da948a6e-a831-492c-8a70-f52ee75cf164:df-10b1758adb85a99d3a370081ef8222dd947b07/Focus2022.pdf.

Threat perception across the NATO alliance, thus, varied greatly prior to the full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Despite efforts by the US and the UK to persuade allies of an impending invasion with classified and declassified intelligence, many European states and leaders were not convinced of the likelihood of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine (see Figure 1 Perceptions of the likelihood of a full-scale invasion).

Figure 1. Perceptions of the likelihood of a full-scale invasion¹⁵



Full-scale invasion deemed unlikely	Full-scale invasion deemed likely
Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece Hungary, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Türkiye	Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, United Kingdom, United States

The Five Eyes community and those European states in close geographical proximity to Russia believed in the likelihood of a full-scale Russian invasion. In contrast, many Western European states and those with closer ties to Russia did not consider a full-scale invasion likely. The classifications of countries' threat assessment of a full-scale invasion into 'unlikely' or 'likely' are a simplification of the likelihood designations used by intelligence organisations. The UK Defence Intelligence, for instance, assigns seven likelihoods ranging from a 'remote chance' representing a 0-5% likelihood, to a 'realistic possibility' (40-50%) up to 'almost certain' (95-100%). The public statements that were manually coded by our team of analysts did not allow for such finer-grained classifications. Instead, they informed our dichotomous classification of states into 'full-scale invasion deemed unlikely' (coded 'unlikely' and 'likely – small-scale') and 'full-scale invasion deemed likely' (coded 'likely – full-scale').¹⁶

Many Western European states and those with closer ties to Russia did not consider a full-scale invasion likely.

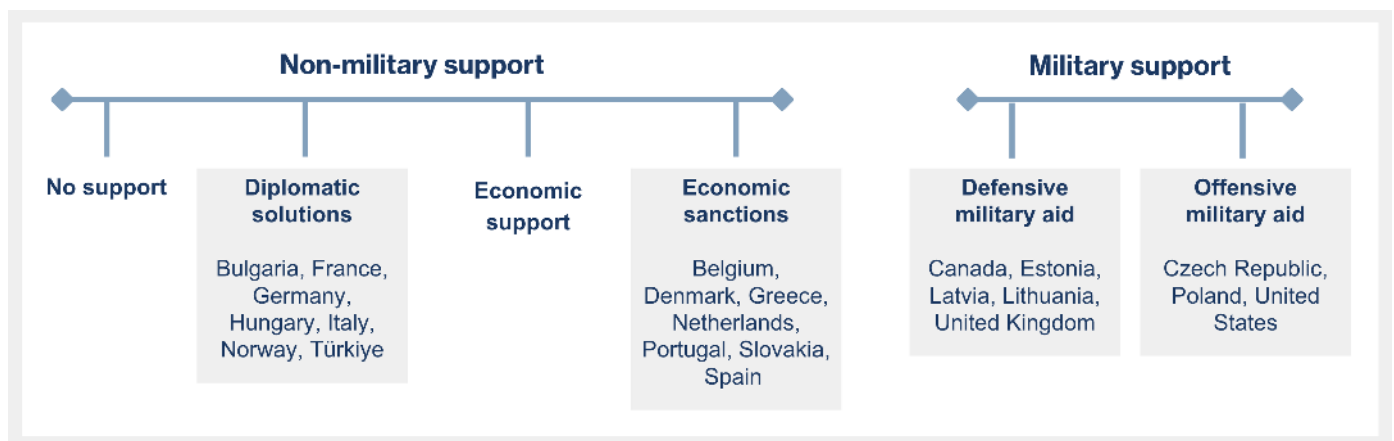
¹⁵ No conclusive data was found for Croatia, Denmark and Iceland. Albania, Luxembourg, Montenegro and North Macedonia were excluded from the analysis.

¹⁶ 'Defence Intelligence – Communicating Probability', Ministry of Defence, 17 February 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/defence-intelligence-communicating-probability>.

Support for Ukraine: Doves, Deer, Buzzards and Wolves

Based on different perceptions of the likelihood of an invasion, NATO allies developed their individual and collective responses to the Russian threat against Ukraine. In the months from the first April buildup leading up to the invasion, many governments offered various forms of diplomatic and economic support, such as the EU financing military medical units, including field hospitals, engineering, mobility and logistics units, and support on cyber, while at the same time preparing for the imposition of economic sanctions.¹⁷ Only a few countries, provided defensive or offensive military aid to Ukraine such as the US sending *Stinger* anti-aircraft missiles, anti-tank missiles, small arms, boats, drones, artillery and ammunition (see Figure 2).¹⁸ Defensive and offensive military aid are defined based on definitions by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE),¹⁹ and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI).²⁰

Figure 2. Western support to Ukraine in the pre-invasion phase of the war



¹⁷ 'European Peace Facility: Council Adopts Assistance Measures for Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and the Republic of Mali - European Commission', accessed 26 March 2025, https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/european-peace-facility-council-adopts-assistance-measures-georgia-republic-moldova-ukraine-and-2021-12-02_en.

¹⁸ Elias Yousif, 'U.S. Military Assistance to Ukraine', *Stimson Center*, 26 January 2022, <https://www.stimson.org/2022/u-s-military-assistance-to-ukraine/>.

¹⁹ Defensive military aid is defined as small arms and light weapons (SALW) and includes the following: "revolvers and self-loading pistols; rifles and carbines; sub-machine guns; assault rifles; and light machine guns. Light weapons are broadly categorized as those weapons intended for use by several members of armed or security forces serving as a crew. They include heavy machine guns; hand-held under-barrel and mounted grenade launchers; portable anti-aircraft guns; portable anti-tank guns; recoilless rifles; portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems; portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems; and mortars of calibres less than 100 mm."

²⁰ 'SIPRI Arms Transfers Database - Sources and Methods', SIPRI, accessed 21 November 2024, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/armstransfers/sources-and-methods>. Offensive military aid is defined as heavy weaponry and includes the following: aircraft; air defence systems; anti-submarine warfare weapons; armoured vehicles; artillery (naval, fixed and mobile); mortars of calibres equal to or above 100mm; engines; missiles; sensors; and satellites. Offensive military aid is defined as heavy weaponry and includes the following: aircraft; air defence systems; anti-submarine warfare weapons; armoured vehicles; artillery (naval, fixed and mobile); mortars of calibres equal to or above 100mm; engines; missiles; sensors; and satellites.

Based on their threat perception of Russia, assessment of the likelihood of an invasion, and the type of support provided to Ukraine, NATO allies can be divided into groups of Doves, Deer, Buzzards, and Wolves, as visualised in Table 2. Doves perceived neither an existential threat from Russia nor a high likelihood of a full-scale invasion, and did not provide military support to Ukraine. Deer saw Russia as an existential threat and perceived the likelihood of an invasion to be high. Fearing inadvertent escalation, however, they only provided non-military support to Ukraine. Buzzards did not consider Russia to constitute an existential threat, but considered a full-scale invasion likely and provided military support to Ukraine. Wolves, in turn, provided military support to Ukraine, as they considered Russia to be an existential threat to their country and thought a full-scale invasion to be likely.

Table 2. National political leadership opinion on support for Ukraine, perceived likelihood of an invasion and perceived threat of Russia



	Non-military support	Military support	
Full-scale invasion deemed unlikely	<div>Doves</div> <div>Russia non-existential threat</div> <div>Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Spain, Türkiye</div>	No countries	
Full-scale invasion deemed likely	<div>Deers</div> <div>Russia existential threat</div> <div>Norway, Romania</div>	<div>Buzzards</div> <div>Russia non-existential threat</div> <div>Canada, Czech Republic, United Kingdom, United States</div>	<div>Wolves</div> <div>Russia existential threat</div> <div>Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland</div>

Note: an existential threat is defined as endangering the survival of the state

Doves. The largest group consists of NATO member states that did not consider a full-scale invasion likely and did not perceive Russia as an existential threat to their country. In their support for Ukraine in the months leading up to the invasion, Doves emphasised the search for diplomatic solutions. Here, the use of sanctions was considered the stick and was kept in reserve only to be implemented after a possible Russian invasion. Many of these Doves regarded the 2014 and 2015 Minsk Agreements and diplomatic efforts as the basis for a solution to the rising tensions on the Ukrainian border. German Minister of Foreign Affairs Annalena Baerbock, for example, stated in parliament that “There is only one solution to the

Russian aggression, and that is called diplomacy,” highlighting the importance of discussions being held in various forums: in the Strategic Dialogue between the US and Russia, the NATO-Russia Council, the OSCE, and the Minsk Format.²¹ Similarly, Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Luigi Di Maio hailed the “negotiating efforts that are being developed in the Normandy format composed of France, Germany, Ukraine and Russia, and in the Trilateral Contact Group coordinated by the OSCE.”²² Additionally, France’s President Emmanuel Macron put a lot of political capital into continuing bilateral conversations with Putin.²³ A few days before the invasion, Macron publicly announced that Putin was willing to talk and meet with US President Joe Biden, to no avail.²⁴

Meanwhile, in coordination with the G7 and the EU, the United States was driving the preparation of economic sanctions to be imposed in the event of Russian military aggression.²⁵ In an attempt to show strength and unity, heads of government around Europe repeated the same message, in the words of Spanish President Pedro Sánchez: “In the event of a possible military intervention, it will have massive and extremely serious consequences for its economy in terms of sanctions by the European Union.”²⁶

There was no agreement on the magnitude of these sanctions, however, between Doves and more forward-leaning states. While the US and the UK advocated for cutting Russia off from the international financial system through SWIFT, this option was set aside fearing the financial consequences it could have for Western businesses.²⁷ The German coalition government was divided over imposing sanctions on Nord Stream 2, undermining the credibility of energy-related sanctions against Russia.²⁸ Thus, while an attempt was made to signal the imposition of unified economic sanctions in the event of military aggression, the specifics of these sanctions remained unclear.

For some Doves, a historically closer political alignment with Russia played a role in their threat perception and support for Ukraine. Most notably, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán opposed economic sanctions against Russia: “We support the independence of Ukraine, but we are not at all happy about the sanctions against the Russians. We think that Ukraine has the right to its own national existence, and Hungary has the right to maintain

²¹ *Plenarprotokoll 20/10*, Deutscher Bundestag 10 (2022). <https://dserver.bundestag.de/btp/20/20010.pdf#P.477>.

²² *Audizione del Ministro Degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale e del Ministro della Difesa sulla crisi tra Russia e Ucraina*, 5.

²³ Joseph Downing, ‘Ukraine: Why Emmanuel Macron’s Open Line to Moscow Has Not Delivered the International Prestige He Expected’, *The Conversation*, 14 March 2022, <http://theconversation.com/ukraine-why-emmanuel-macrons-open-line-to-moscow-has-not-delivered-the-international-prestige-he-expected-178855>.

²⁴ Eglantine Staunton, ‘A Useful Failure: Macron’s Overture to Russia’, *Survival* 64, no. 2 (2022): 20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338.2022.2055819>.

²⁵ Banco et al., “‘Something Was Badly Wrong’”.

²⁶ ‘Joint Appearance by the President of the Government of Spain, Pedro Sánchez, and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Finland, Sanna Marin, before the Media at Moncloa Palace’, La Moncloa, 26 January 2022, https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/lang/en/presidente/intervenciones/Paginas/2022/20220126_joint-appearance.aspx.

²⁷ Piotr Buras, ‘The EU’s Unforgivable Failure’, *ECFR*, 19 January 2022, <https://ecfr.eu/article/the-eus-unforgivable-failure/>; Martin Greive and Moritz Koch, ‘Russland: Swift-Sanktionen vom Tisch’, *Handelsblatt*, 17 January 2022, <https://www.handelsblatt.com/politik/international/ukraine-krise-swift-sanktionen-vom-tisch-eu-und-usa-ruecken-vom-ausschluss-russlands-aus-globalem-finanzsystem-ab/27982580.html>.

²⁸ Joseph Nasr and Sarah Marsh, ‘In Ukraine Crisis, Germany Faces Tough Decisions over Gas Pipeline’, *Europe, Reuters*, 20 January 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/ukraine-crisis-germany-faces-tough-decisions-over-gas-pipeline-2022-01-20/>.

reasonable relations with Russia.”²⁹ Similarly, when asked about the Russian buildup of troops, Turkish President Recep Erdoğan referred to the close ties between both countries: “Türkiye has relations with Russia in a peaceful manner that has not existed in its history. These relations between Russia and Türkiye continue to develop on a political, military, economic and cultural basis.”³⁰ These close ties could make Türkiye the mediator of peace, according to Erdoğan: “Therefore, we can be the mediators for peace to come between Russia and Ukraine, especially for peace to prevail.”³¹ Finally, in Bulgaria Russia’s buildup of military troops and subsequent invasion exposed old societal and political divides about the country’s stance towards Russia.³² Political and societal divisions hindered the provision of substantial political and military support for Ukraine.

Deer. Norway and Romania deemed an invasion likely and perceived Russia as an existential threat, but did not provide Ukraine with military support in the buildup to the invasion. Perhaps perceiving an increased threat against their own country, these Deer feared further escalation of the crisis. In its 2022 threat assessment, the Norwegian Intelligence Service designated Russia the main military threat to the country:

“The modernised Russian armed forces pose the main military threat to Norway’s sovereignty, population, territory, key functions in society and infrastructure. The Russian armed forces are geared to operate across the entire conflict spectrum, from peace to crisis and war.”³³

Similarly, Romanian President Klaus Iohannis expressed the threat Russia could pose to Romania:

“Romania has 600 kilometres of borders with Ukraine, so we must be prepared for any possible scenario. The crisis is not just about Ukraine, security on the Black Sea, or European security, but about security of the Euro-Atlantic area. [...] We must be prepared for an attack scenario.”³⁴

Norway and Romania form an exception to the group of existentially threatened states. While they perceived a great likelihood of a Russian invasion, their responses were limited. Under existential threat of Russia, Norway and Romania seemed to be more concerned with the risk of inadvertent escalation that could endanger their countries. In the words of Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre: “We could talk about confidence-building measures,

²⁹ ‘Orbán Viktor Válaszai a Felmerült Újságírói Kérdésekre’, Magyarország Kormánya, 22 December 2022, <https://kormany.hu/beszedekek-interjuk/miniszterelnok/orban-viktor-valaszai-a-felmerult-ujsgiroi-kerdesekre-20211222>. A position that was later repeated by Minister of Finance Péter Szijjártó ‘Szijjártó Péter: Magyarország Ellenzi Az Ukrajnai Helyzet Élezését, Támogatja a Diplomáciai Megoldást’, Magyarország Kormánya, 24 January 2022, <https://kormany.hu/hirek/szijarto-peter-magyarorszag-ellenzi-az-ukrajnai-helyzet-elezeset-tamogatja-a-diplomaciai-megoldast>.

³⁰ ‘Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Rusya ve Ukrayna Arasında Bir Barışın Hâkim Olmasına Biz Ara Bulucu Olabiliriz’, Türkiye Cumhuriyeti İletişim Başkanlığı, 21 January 2022, <https://www.iletisim.gov.tr/turkce/haberler/detay/cumhurbaskani-erdogan-rusya-ve-ukrayna-arasinda-bir-barisin-hakim-olmasına-biz-arabulucu-olabiliriz>.

³¹ Türkiye Cumhuriyeti İletişim Başkanl., ‘Cumhurbaşkanı Erdoğan: Rusya ve Ukrayna Arasında Bir Barışın Hâkim Olmasına Biz Ara Bulucu Olabiliriz’.

³² Svetoslav Todorov, ‘Ukraine Invasion Rekindles Divisions Over Russia in Bulgaria’, Balkan Insight, 25 February 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/02/25/ukraine-invasion-rekindles-divisions-over-russia-in-bulgaria/>.

³³ *Focus* 2022, 30.

³⁴ Madalin Necsutu and Svetoslav Todorov, ‘Romania, Bulgaria to Strengthen Security Amid Ukraine War Fears’, BalkanInsight, 26 January 2022, <https://balkaninsight.com/2022/01/26/romania-bulgaria-to-strengthen-security-amid-ukraine-war-fears/>.

“The crisis is not just about Ukraine, security on the Black Sea, or European security, but about security of the Euro-Atlantic area. [...] We must be prepared for an attack scenario.”

disarmament and avoiding behaviour that makes one neighbour unsafe for the other.”³⁵ Likewise, Romanian Prime Minister Klaus Johannis was primarily concerned with maintaining deterrence on NATO's eastern flank, while stressing the need to decrease tensions in the region.³⁶ In an effort to avoid further escalation, both countries emphasised the importance of finding a diplomatic solution and supported the imposition of economic sanctions.

Buzzards. Buzzards did not perceive Russia as an existential threat to their country, but did deem it likely that an invasion would take place. Unlike Doves and Deer, Buzzards did provide Ukraine with both defensive and offensive military aid. In addition to worrying about the territorial integrity of Ukraine itself, these states were concerned with the broader implications of a Russian invasion on European security and the integrity of the international liberal order. In the words of US President Joe Biden: “We made clear to the international community the full implications of that threat, not just for Ukraine, but for core tenets of the UN Charter and the modern international order.”³⁷

Similarly, referring to the European unity after the fall of the Iron Curtain, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson noted:

“We will not reopen that divide by agreeing to overturn the European security order because Russia has placed a gun to Ukraine's head. Nor can we accept the doctrine—implicit in Russian proposals—that all states are sovereign, but some are more sovereign than others.”³⁸

Spearheading this group of Buzzards was the US, committing in December 2021 to a \$200 million multi-phase aid package for Ukraine, in addition to increasing its 2022 commitment under the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative by \$50 million to \$300 million.³⁹ The deliveries incrementally brought in small arms, ammunition, *Javelin* anti-tank systems, bunker-defeat M141 munitions and transport helicopters on 29 January 2022.⁴⁰ Likewise, US' Five Eyes partners the UK and Canada provided Ukraine with small arms and ammunition, and next-generation light anti-tank weapons (NLAW), respectively.⁴¹ The Czech Republic too provided military aid to Ukraine in the form of 152 mm artillery ammunition. According to Minister of Defence Jana Černočová, Czech support to Ukraine was driven by common

³⁵ Nettavisen Nyheter and NTB, 'Biden Fikk Høre Om Norges Naboskap Med Russland', Nettavisen, 28 January 2022, <https://www.nettavisen.no/12-95-3424237667>.

³⁶ 'Reuniunea informală a miniștrilor apărării din statele membre ale UE', Ministerul Apărării Naționale, accessed 4 November 2024, https://www.mapn.ro/cpresa/17229_reuniunea-informala-a-mini%C8%99trilor-apararii-din-statele-membre-ale-ue; Necsutu and Todorov, 'Romania, Bulgaria to Strengthen Security Amid Ukraine War Fears'.

³⁷ 'Statement on the United Nations Security Council Meeting on the Situation in Ukraine | The American Presidency Project', accessed 3 October 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-united-nations-security-council-meeting-the-situation-ukraine>.

³⁸ Johnson, 'PM Statement on Ukraine'.

³⁹ Monique Beals, 'Ukraine Receives Second Batch of Weapons from US: "And This Is Not the End"', Text, *The Hill*, 23 January 2022, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/590986-ukraine-receives-second-batch-of-weapons-from-us-and-this-is-not-the-end/>; 'U.S. Congress Includes \$300 Million for Ukraine, Addresses China in Massive Defense Bill | Reuters', accessed 26 March 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/us-congress-includes-300-million-ukraine-addresses-china-massive-defense-bill-2021-12-07/>.

⁴⁰ 'US Delivers 300 More Javelins to Ukraine', January 26, 2022, <https://kyivindependent.com/us-delivers-300-more-javelins-to-ukraine/>; Joseph Trevithick, 'Here's What Those "Bunker-Defeat" Rockets The U.S. Sent To Ukraine Are Actually Capable Of', *The War Zone*, 26 January 2022, <https://www.twz.com/44021/heres-what-those-bunker-defeat-rockets-the-u-s-sent-to-ukraine-are-actually-capable-of>.

⁴¹ Joe Biden, 'Statement on the United Nations Security Council Meeting on the Situation in Ukraine |', *The American Presidency Project*, accessed 4 November 2024, <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/statement-the-united-nations-security-council-meeting-the-situation-ukraine>; Claire Mills, 'Detailed Timeline of UK Military Assistance to Ukraine (February 2022-Present)', *House of Commons*, n.d., accessed 4 November 2024, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9914/CBP-9914.pdf>.

Buzzards did not perceive Russia as an existential threat to their country, but did deem it likely that an invasion would take place.

historical roots in the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the potential influx of refugees in the event of an escalation.⁴²

Wolves. Four states perceived Russia as an existential threat to their country and believed in the likelihood of an invasion. Fearing they could be next, they provided military support to Ukraine. Like a wolf defending its pack against bears, these states were resolute in protecting not only their territory and citizens against the Russian threat, but also extending support to Ukraine. Key drivers for these Wolves—Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland—were their shared histories and experiences with Russia. In a speech to parliament, Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs expressed this regional sentiment:

“Russia is Latvia’s largest neighbour and at the same time the one that poses the greatest political challenge. We are under no illusions about this. We know our neighbour and we have witnessed Russia’s behaviour for centuries. It has been particularly violent during the 20th century.”⁴³

Or as then-Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas expressed it: “[What] we have long suspected to be the case is now very clearly being spelt out: Russia’s aim is to restore its political and military influence over its neighbours.”⁴⁴ While their histories with Russia made them uniquely aware of potential threats posed by Russia, their warnings did not find much traction with all allies in the alliance.⁴⁵ Because of the urgency they felt, these states were among the first to provide Ukraine with military aid. In a joint statement, the Baltic states announced on 21 January 2022 that they had received approvals to provide Ukraine with US-made weapons. In an attempt to strengthen Ukraine’s defensive capabilities, Estonia provided Ukraine with *Javelin* anti-armour missiles, while Latvia and Lithuania transferred *Stinger* anti-aircraft missiles.⁴⁶ Likewise, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki promised on 1 February to provide “Ukraine with several dozen thousand pieces of artillery shells and ammunition, anti-aircraft missile sets, but also light mortars and reconnaissance drones and other types of defensive weapons.”⁴⁷

⁴² Tereza Šidlová and Martina Machová, ‘Žádost Ukrajiny o České Vojáky Bychom Brali Velmi Vážně, Říká Černochová - Seznam Zprávy’, 22 January 2022, <https://www.seznamzpravy.cz/clanek/domaci-politika-za-dost-ukrajiny-o-ceske-vojaky-bychom-brali-velmi-vazne-rika-vernochova-186342>.

⁴³ Edgars Rinkēvičs, ‘Speech by Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkēvičs at the Annual Foreign Policy Debate in the Latvian Parliament (Saeima)’, Latvian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 27 January 2022, <https://www.mfa.gov.lv/en/media/5285/download?attachment>.

⁴⁴ Kaja Kallas, ‘Prime Minister’s Political Statement on the Security Situation in Europe’, Republic of Estonia Government, 19 January 2022, <https://valitsus.ee/en/news/prime-ministers-political-statement-security-situation-europe-19012022>.

⁴⁵ Robyn Dixon, ‘Baltic Nations Long Warned about Russia. Now, Maybe the West Is Listening.’, *Washington Post*, 12 October 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/10/12/baltics-poland-russia-warnings-nato/>.

⁴⁶ ‘Baltic Defence Ministers Issue a Joint Statement on Sending Weapons to Ukraine’, Republic of Estonia Ministry of Defence, 21 January 2022, <https://kaitseministeerium.ee/en/news/baltic-defence-ministers-issue-joint-statement-sending-weapons-ukraine>.

⁴⁷ Kancel. Prezesa Rady Minist., ‘Premier w Kijowie’.

Fearing they could be next, they provided military support to Ukraine.

Conclusion: Ignoring a Clear and Present Danger

In the years, months, and weeks leading up to the invasion of Ukraine, there were signals that could have been interpreted by Western decision-makers as indicative of a credible Russian threat. Russia had repeatedly stated its interest in controlling the country, having formally warned NATO members of its intentions. It was widely perceived that Russia possessed the capability to invade Ukraine—although the scale of such an invasion was contested, and it had shown military resolve in similar situations in the past. Despite best efforts by the US and the UK to share available intelligence with allies, threat perception across many members of the alliance remained limited. Many states did not perceive a high likelihood of a full-scale invasion and deliberately limited their responses to seeking a diplomatic solution complemented with preparations to impose economic sanctions should Russia carry out a minor incursion. Only a few decision-makers and their advisors considered a full-scale invasion of Ukraine likely, with some of them considering Russia as an existential threat to their own country. Only these states provided Ukraine with military aid before the invasion unfolded. Compared to the levels of support seen after the invasion, however, even the response of these countries paled in comparison. The following chapters take a closer look at the perceptions of key decision-makers and their advisors, in more detailed case studies, starting with NATO HQ, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and the US.

Only a few decision-makers and their advisors considered a full-scale invasion of Ukraine likely.

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