

Editorial: The Invasion of Ukraine is a Wake-up Call

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The world woke up on Thursday 24 February to the news of a full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine. Land forces are penetrating Ukrainian territory on multiple fronts along the Russian and Belarusian border, as well as from within occupied Ukraine, and aerial bombardment of military targets and urban centres is underway.

It is the most flagrant act of aggression seen in Europe since World War II and a clear violation of international law that confirms the warnings issued by Western intelligence since late last year.

Faced with this crisis, solidarity with the Ukrainian people in the face of foreign invasion must guide the response.

Some of the most powerful words spoken on the escalating conflict thus far had followed Russia's recognition of the Ukrainian separatist regions, Donetsk and Luhansk, as independent states on Sunday 20th February. Speaking at the UN Security Council, Kenyan UN Ambassador Martin Kimani warned against any attempt to redraw the borders of nations based on a backward view of history shaped by "dangerous nostalgia".

A firm rejection of "irredentism and expansionism", he called on Russia to respect the territorial integrity of Ukraine warned that bloody wars and domination are the only consequences of attempts to define states based on "ethnic, racial or religious homogeneity".

The statement was a cogent reminder of the core values underpinning a rule-based international order: whatever your reading of history, war cannot be the answer. It makes an irrefutable case for standing with Ukraine, and for a peaceful, rule-based multilateral order.

For Europe however, appeal to these principles is not sufficient. It is faced with conflict and hard power on its borders. For too long, European countries have attempted to sidestep geopolitics. The events of today demonstrate once again how the world has entered a new geopolitical era. It is not enough for Europe to speak the language of power, it must learn to act. In this watershed moment, Europe's answer to an imperialist power willing to wage war will define its future path.

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The starting point must be solidarity with Ukraine, meaning a resolute and united response underlined by material support. The European sanctions announced ahead of the invasion must be ratcheted up to include the financial system and energy ties and exert maximum pressure on the Russian state and elite.

Solidarity should mean more than words. The European Union should be prepared to support Ukraine and its people in the face of invasion. This ranges from providing what material support possible to support the country's defence as well as maximum humanitarian assistance and preparing to accommodate the people who will be displaced by this war.

Europe will need to determine the lessons it draws from what should be a wake-up call.

Vladimir Putin's speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007 announced his aspirations to restore Russian power to that of the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War. Ever since, Russia has been increasingly assertive internationally.

In hours after the launch of the invasion, brave individuals in Russia risked arrest and repression to protest against the actions of the undemocratic Putin regime. It is a reminder that it is not the Russian people who started this war, but the kleptocrat who rules over them.

Putin is backing up his words with actions, but Europe as a whole struggles to recognise this point. The countries of Eastern Europe may not harbour any doubts. But, from the City of London to the factories of Italy and Germany, business and elite interests in Western Europe have often trumped geopolitical concerns. This can no longer be the case. Such a break will come with economic and social costs. European leaders should be prepared to explain why they are a price worth paying.

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There are also deeper questions to consider. If the Cold War has returned, what about its guiding logic? Russia remains the world's number one nuclear power, is the doctrine of mutually assured destruction back? If so, what does that mean for the many post-Soviet countries lying outside the NATO umbrella? Europe does not have answers to these hard military questions, but they cannot be ignored.

The invasion of Ukraine should not be seen in isolation. Europe is surrounded by conflict. Borders are being redrawn in the Caucasus, the Middle East, and North Africa. Tensions are rising in the Balkans, seen in the potential secession of Republika Srpska from Bosnia-

Herzegovina. Throughout the Sahel, an arc of instability reaches across the breadth of the African continent. Russia, Turkey and many smaller players have shown themselves willing to make facts on the ground. In all these places, Europe is often left as a bystander.

To return to the immediate crisis, today in Ukraine, the principles of international law, sovereignty and freedom are under threat. Europe must urgently react with solidarity and determination.



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