

# FOREIGN POLICY BRIEF: CANADA'S RESPONSE TO UKRAINE-RUSSIA CONFLICT

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In 2014, Canada's defense minister under then-Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Jason Kennedy, refused the provision of military equipment to aid the Ukraine government in its fight against pro-Russia separatists, despite the Canadian military having a surplus of equipment. However, Canada has loaned Ukraine a total of \$400 million between 2014 and 2015, which was repaid with interest as of 2020. As Russia continues to invade and occupy parts of Ukraine's territories, the government of Ukraine has pleaded for help from Canada and its NATO allies. Considering Canada's previous attempts in supporting Ukraine, construct a policy brief on what you believe Canada's next steps should be. Consider the type of sectoral sanctions to impose, provision of military equipment, whether providing more loans is beneficial, and other ways Canada can offer its support. You may want to consider the following information when constructing your brief:

- Operation Unifier is the Canadian Armed Forces contribution to the security of Ukraine in coordination with the Ukrainian Armed Forces.
- In January 2022, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau agreed to loan up to \$120 million in the face of Russia's ongoing attempts to destabilize Ukraine, and continues to explore other ways to get involved.
- Ukraine has requested more aid in the form of weapons and military equipment, and severe sectoral sanctions.
- As of February 2022, Putin has carried out various military operations, including bombing Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and other cities. Putin has also threatened a nuclear attack if the West intervenes.

## **Executive Summary**

This policy brief offers two approaches that the Canadian government can consider supporting the Ukrainian government's war effort against the ongoing Russian invasion. The proposed policies have their implications and should be considered in light of the rapidly changing circumstances. The low-risk policy suggests the Canadian government start providing

necessary shelters and transportation to Ukrainian refugees. This policy is an addition to Canada's ongoing refugee assistance policy (Government of Canada 2022). The high-risk policy suggests the Canadian government, in addition to expanding the loan to the Ukrainian government and strengthening its sanctions against Russia, continues to send necessary military equipment to support the Ukrainian government. This option

intends to contain the Russian invasion by sustaining the Ukrainian war effort.

### **Introduction**

On February 24, Russia invaded Ukraine. This invasion has led millions of Ukrainians to flee their country (BBC News 2022). Ukraine's democracy and national independence are also in danger (Stein 2022). This dire situation is a result of Russia's intention to contain NATO expansion in Eastern Europe and exert their sphere of influence in Ukraine (Duncan 2022). As a member of the U.N. and NATO, Canada has offered loans to the Ukrainian government in addition to its condemnation of and sanction on Russia (Stober 2022). Russia has strong military power and nuclear capacity, so any action stemming from NATO members must be carried out with care not to escalate the war further (Stein 2022).

### **Approach and Results**

My research heavily depends on analyzing the current, ongoing news report on the war and the Canadian government's response to the Russian invasion. Analysis of Russian military progress in its invasion is also considered. My analysis

shows that Russia does not take issue with countries attending to the needs of refugees, but Putin is highly sensitive to NATO responses to the war (Stein 2022; Duncan 2022). Ukraine's No-Fly-Zone request to NATO was rejected for fear of escalating the conflict (Erlanger and Jakes 2022). Likewise, Ukraine's request to join NATO and ask for their military involvement have all been rejected for the same reason (Erlanger and Jakes 2022). These examples warn that Canada should be prudent in deterring the Russian invasion and avoiding an escalation of conflict.

### **Policy Recommendation**

**Low-Risk Approach:** This approach rests on the liberal theory of justice. The Canadian government should immediately send humanitarian aid and accept refugees in support of all people who are in need of help because of the ongoing war. Refugees should be granted humanitarian support in Canada because Canada is morally required to do so (Carens 2015). This is because the people of Ukraine are also humans like citizens of Canada, and Canada has no reason to claim that its democratic ideals of human rights and protection of individual lives should only be applied to Canadians and not other human beings. As such, Canada needs to

reach out and help and impose no restrictions, for Canada has not only been a country that has accepted refugees but also because it ought to. To do so, Canada needs to mobilize every necessary transportation for Ukrainian refugees and send them to the appropriate receiving end in Europe.

**High-Risk Approach:** This approach seeks to strengthen Canada's current actions supporting the Ukrainian government's war effort (Blanchfield 2022). First, Canada should bolster its financial and energy sanctions against Russia, Putin, and high-ranking Russian officials. Second, Canada should expand financial loans to the Ukrainian government. The first policy will continue to sabotage the Russian economy, while the second will continue to assist the Ukrainian army's defence against Russian aggression (Fix and Kimmage 2022; Witt et al. 2022). Both policies protect the Ukrainian people from the Russian attack by forcing Russia into a war of exhaustion and ultimately seeking a peace talk with the Ukrainian government. Signs of Russian invasions show that they are slowing down, and it is imperative that Canada

continue to support the Ukrainian army to fight for more opportunities to exhaust the Russian army (Witt et al. 2022). In addition to these measures, Canada can also consider offering more military equipment to the Ukrainian government. Many NATO members are currently doing so (Stein 2022). If so, Canada should continue to send more lethal and effective weapons that will help slow down and stop the Russian army, such as anti-tank and anti-air missiles (Connolly 2022). However, this approach should be used with caution, especially in light of Russia's nuclear threat (Stein 2022).

### **Policy Implications**

**Low-Risk Approach:** The implication for this approach is low. Even though Russia has violated its agreements with Ukraine during their negotiations, Russia has agreed not to attack refugees (Stein 2022). Thus, offering refugees shelters and later a passage to Canada and/or other European countries would not provoke a political backlash and avoid escalating any regional tension between NATO and Russia. However, the economic cost of providing shelters for and accepting refugees into Canada may be high. Nevertheless, Canada should not attend to only economic

losses at the expense of human lives. Further, by settling down in Canada, Ukrainian refugees could produce more economic growth for Canada in the long run (Studin 2017).

**High-Risk Approach:** Canada runs the danger of escalating more tension by supporting the Ukrainian army by sending arms and strengthening ongoing sanctions. This is especially critical when Russia threatens to use nuclear power in light of NATO's aid to the Ukrainian government, and Putin has the highest power and is determined to achieve his geopolitical goals (Stein 2022; Fix and Kimmage 2022). Further, it is not impossible that Putin could break the nuclear deterrence when he sees the situation becoming dire for Russia, especially when Russia suffers from economic sanctions and when NATO increases its collective force of interference in the region (French 2022; Fix and Kimmage 2022). Moreover, sanctions against Russia could strengthen Putin's legitimacy in Russia, lead to more domestic innovations, and could embolden Putin's aggression (Finkel et al. 2022). Sanctions that are long-term and severe

aimed at a regime change in Russia as opposed to sanctions to end the war could close diplomatic possibilities between Russia and Ukraine (Stanley 2022).

### **Conclusion**

The two policies can be executed jointly. However, while it is imperative that Canada protect democracies and Ukraine's sovereignty, it should consider the outcome where Russia could escalate the conflict due to Canada's actions. Thus, while I believe that the high-risk approach could support the Ukrainian war effort to deter Russian invasion, it will be much safer for the world and much more helpful for the Ukrainian people if Canada offers more help to refugees. Canada, then, needs to use the strength in areas that will yield the highest benefits to the victims of this war and not subscribe to a doctrine that may lead to more victims.

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