

# “We must face down the clear and present threat posed by Russia”

Moscow’s campaign against Ukraine and fellow democracies is undermining the very foundation of European security. And so, it is vital we face down the clear and present threat posed by Russia.

The Prime Minister will spearhead diplomatic efforts by talking to President Putin and travelling to the region in the coming days. Tomorrow, the UK will join talks at the UN Security Council to apply pressure on Russia to pursue the path of diplomacy. I will be flying out to Moscow within the next fortnight.

The stakes are high. Over 100,000 troops are now massed on Ukraine’s border. Russia has attacked Ukraine before, illegally annexing Crimea in 2014 and bringing war to the Donbas region, so the danger is real.

This malign activity goes beyond the borders of Ukraine. Russia is using its influence to fan the flames of discord in the Western Balkans. Russian forces are continuing to arrive in Belarus for a so-called “joint exercise” close to NATO’s borders. In recent days, Russia has intensified its brinkmanship by planning naval exercises off the Irish coast and increasing its naval presence in the Baltic Sea, prompting Sweden to send troops to reinforce one of its islands.

That is why we are reinforcing our diplomatic efforts with deterrence. We are offering NATO additional fast jets, warships and military specialists. We are doubling troop numbers to Estonia and have the HMS Prince of Wales on standby to move should tensions rise further. We are NATO’s biggest spender in Europe on defence and prepared to deploy our forces in line with that.

The United Kingdom is proud to be stepping up to take the lead in defence of freedom and democracy through credible deterrence and diplomacy. Even at the height of the Cold War, we were able to agree on the principles of a more secure Europe. Over more than four decades, we made huge advances towards a freer and safer world through agreements ranging from the 1975 Helsinki Final Act to the 1995 Dayton Agreement and the 2014 Minsk Protocol.

Yet Russia is jeopardising this hard-won progress with its reckless behaviour and unjustified aggression. It could not be more important for Russia to engage diplomatically rather than on the battlefield. That is why we have said many times, alongside our allies in NATO and through the G7 Presidency, that any further Russian invasion of Ukraine would be a massive strategic mistake with severe costs, including an unprecedented package of coordinated sanctions with our partners.

Our quarrel is not with the Russian people, but the policies pursued by their leaders. They repress freedom and democracy, seeking to silence courageous organisations like Andrei Sakharov’s ‘Memorial’, which has fought for decades

for human rights. And now they risk landing ordinary Russians in an intractable quagmire to rival the Soviet-Afghan war and Chechnya.

There is a way out of this situation. It lies in respecting our past achievements and sticking to our longstanding commitments to respect each other's borders. That can only start with Russia de-escalating, ending its aggressive campaign and engaging in meaningful talks. We are serious about improving security for all. In the last week, the US and NATO have presented substantive proposals on areas for discussion that would increase transparency and reduce risk. Together, we are urging Russia to sit down for proper negotiations, based on the key principles of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. The alternative can only end in tragedy: with an incursion leading inevitably to huge suffering and severe economic consequences through sanctions.

The ball is in Russia's court. I will continue to make the case with our allies and directly to Moscow for a diplomatic solution. But I am also ready to take the necessary steps to spell out the consequences of continued belligerence.

Ukraine has the right to determine its own future. However, President Putin made clear in his manifesto last summer – "On the Historical Unity of Russians and Ukrainians" – that he believed "the true sovereignty of Ukraine is possible only in partnership with Russia". We cannot turn a blind eye to any attempt to impose that partnership by force.

What happens in Europe matters for the world. Over 30 years ago, we joined our partners in Moscow, where we agreed that fundamental freedoms like human rights are "matters of direct and legitimate concern to all". That same principle drives us today to stand steadfast with Ukraine in support of its future as a free democracy.

At this critical time, we are joining forces with our allies to show that there can never be rewards for aggression. By standing up for our ideas and ideals, we will together ensure the world is a freer, richer and safer place.