nexus insights

02/22

SINGAPORE'S PRINCIPLED STAND ON RUSSIA'S INVASION OF UKRAINE

[Note: This is a developing issue. Information in this package is accurate as at 14 March 2022.]

Key Points

- Singapore cannot accept Russia's **violations of international law and the principles in the UN Charter**. This violation sets a dangerous and unacceptable precedent for small countries.
- Singapore is taking a **principled stand** on this issue because the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of all countries must be respected.
- This stand is consistent with the way **Singapore has always conducted its foreign policy**, which is to uphold international law, promote a rules-based international order, and the peaceful resolution of disputes.
- Unless we **stand up for the principles which are core to our survival** as an independent, sovereign nation, Singapore's right to survive and prosper as a nation may similarly be called into question one day.
- Safeguarding our national interests may come at a cost, but **Singaporeans** must come together and **stand united in the face of potential repercussions**.

Background

Map showing the Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine. Adapted from The Washington Post.

Since 24 February 2022, Russia has used military force to invade Ukraine from multiple directions.

According to the United Nations (UN), Ukraine has suffered over 600 civilian deaths and over 1,700 injuries as of 13 March 2022.[1] The US military estimated that the number of Ukrainian military casualties was between 2,000 and 4,000.

Over 2 million Ukrainians have since fled the country, and others have taken shelter in subway stations or makeshift bunkers.

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[1] Source: The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR). Data was correct as at 13 March 2022. However, OHCHR specified that the real numbers of civilian casualties could be higher.

Why this matters to Singapore

Russia's unprovoked military invasion of Ukraine is an existential issue to Singapore. It is unacceptable for any power to violate a country's sovereignty, political independence and territorial integrity by force.

Unless we stand up for these principles, **our right to survive and prosper** as an independent, sovereign nation **may similarly be called into question one day**.

A world order based on "might is right" or an act of aggression justified on the basis that a country's independence was the result of "historical errors and crazy decisions" would be detrimental to our security and survival. This is why Singapore has strongly condemned Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine.

What does taking a principled stand mean?

1 **Taking positions based on our own national interests**. We **maintain an independent foreign policy** and do not allow others to define our interests for us.

2 We **act consistently in adherence to these principles** that are in the long term interests of Singapore. **We do not succumb to external pressure to take sides**.

Singapore is a staunch supporter of international law and the principles enshrined in the UN charter, and we take any violations of these core principles seriously, whenever and wherever they occur.

According to the UN Charter, member countries have to abide by the purposes and principles of the UN:

1. To uphold the **sovereign equality** of states;
2. To **respect** their **territorial integrity** and **political independence**;
3. To **refrain** in our international relations **from the threat or use of force** in any manner inconsistent with the purpose and principles of the United Nations;
4. To uphold the resolution of disputes by **peaceful means** and in conformity with the **principles of justice and international law**;
5. The **right to self-determination** of peoples which remain under colonial domination and foreign occupation;
6. **Non-interference** in the internal affairs of States;
7. **Respect** for **human rights** and **fundamental freedoms**;
8. **Respect** for the **equal rights of all without distinction** as to race, sex, language, or religion;
9. **International cooperation** in solving international problems of an economic, social, cultural, or humanitarian character; and
10. The **fulfilment in good faith** of the obligations assumed in accordance with the Charter.

This is **not the first time** Singapore has been vocal about **condemning invasions**, especially when smaller states have been invaded by bigger powers. For instance, Singapore spoke out when: (1) Indonesia invaded East Timor in December 1975; (2) Vietnam invaded Cambodia in

December 1978; (3) Iraq invaded Kuwait in August 1990; and (4) Russia annexed Crimea in March 2014[2] (see Table 1).

Table 1: Singapore's consistent opposition of the violation of other countries' sovereignty.

Case	Singapore's Position
1978 Vietnam invasion of Cambodia *(UNGA Resolution A/RES/34/22 in 1979 and subsequent resolutions thereafter)*	**Voted Yes from 1979 to 1989** Called for immediate withdrawal of foreign forces.
1979 USSR invasion of Afghanistan *(UNGA Resolution A/RES/ES-6/2)*	**Voted Yes** Called for immediate withdrawal of foreign troops.
1983 US invasion of Grenada *(UNGA Resolution A/RES/38/7)*	**Voted Yes** Called for withdrawal of foreign troops.
1990 Iraq invasion of Kuwait *(UNSC Resolutions 660 and 661 [1990])*	Condemned the invasion at the General Debate of the 45th UN General Assembly.
2014 Annexation of Crimea *(UNGA Resolution A/RES/68/262)*	**Voted Yes** Called upon all States "to desist… from actions aimed at the…disruption of the national unity and territorial integrity of Ukraine".
2022 Russia invasion of Ukraine *(UNGA Resolution A/RES/ES-11/1)*	**Voted Yes** Demanded full withdrawal of Russian forces.

In taking a **principled approach to diplomacy**, Singapore sends a clear message that we will **act on principle**, and **do not take sides**. This makes us a relevant and reliable partner amidst the evolving global geopolitical situation.

Why does Russia's irredentist claims[3] of Ukraine matter to Singapore?

Despite its shared cultural and economic history, Ukraine has **ethnonational identities distinct from Russia**.

On 1 December 1991, a referendum on the Act of Declaration of Independence was held in Ukraine.[4] **Ukraine was globally recognised as an independent state** from then on.

However, Russian president Vladimir Putin continued to view parts of Ukraine as 'stolen' from the Russian 'motherland' – a **concept** that has **no basis in international law**.

Linguistic division in Ukraine

Ukrainian
Russian

Map showing the linguistic preferences in Ukraine. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

He justified the annexation of Crimea in 2014 as its 'return to motherland'. For the invasion of Ukraine in 2022, it was partly aimed at stopping Ukraine's "genocide" against the majority Russian-speaking population in the Donbas region, east of Ukraine.[5]

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[2] In 2014, when Russia invaded Crimea, Singapore strongly objected, stating that "Russian troops should not be in Ukraine in breach of international law" and that "the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine must be respected". However, Singapore has also realised that the UNSC may not be able to undertake any meaningful actions for Ukraine given the fact that Russia enjoys a veto as a permanent member of the Council.

[3] Irredentist claims occur when a country makes a territorial claim of another country based on a national, ethnic, or historical basis.

[4] On 24 August 1991, Ukrainian citizens expressed overwhelming support for independence. In the referendum, 31,891,742 voters (or 84.18% of the electorate) took part, and among them 28, 804,071 (or 92.3%) voted "Yes".

[5] Ukrainian dominates in the western and central regions, while more people speak Russian in eastern and southern Ukraine.

The use of such rhetoric reminds us that **domestic unity** and **cohesion** are **paramount**, as any fractures can be exploited by adversaries.

Singapore's Response

Singapore has strongly condemned Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine and has **imposed sanctions and restrictions** to limit Russia's capacity to conduct war against Ukraine and undermine its sovereignty. The Singapore Red Cross has also undertaken **fundraising efforts** to support affected communities in Ukraine. While we continue to value good relations with Russia, we cannot accept their violation of another country's sovereignty and territorial integrity. This is what Singapore has done:

1. **Co-sponsored a UN Resolution** on the "situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression". The resolution called on Russia to immediately end its **violations of international law** and **abuses**. [6]

2. **Banned or restricted:**
(a) **local banks and financial institutions** from carrying out transactions and providing services to Russian banks and institutions. [7]
(b) the **export of weapons or items** that can contribute to Russia's **offensive cyber operations**. [8]

3. **Fundraising efforts to support affected communities in Ukraine**

Singapore Red Cross has raised over $3.3 million from public fundraising.

As the attacks continue, many nations have come together to implement a wide range of sanctions – targeting banks, oil refineries, and military exports – to constrain Russia's war-waging capacity. [9] The swift, collective actions from the international community appears to have some success at limiting Russia's sustainment in war-fighting capacities as Russia reportedly requested military and economic assistance from China on 14 March 2022. [10]

> " *It is important that all countries, especially the small states, send a clear signal that* ***we are united for peace, and we are united to defend the principles of the (UN) charter, and that we are united to uphold international law.*** "
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> – Burhan Gafoor, Singapore's Permanent Representative to the UN, during an emergency special session of the UN General Assembly in New York on 5 March 2022

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[6] In an emergency session of the UN's general assembly on 3 March 2022, 141 of the 193 member countries voted for the resolution, 35 abstained, and five voted against. Singapore was among the 141 countries that voted for UN resolution. The only countries that voted no in support of Russia were: Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, and Syria.

[7] Banks and financial institutions in Singapore are prohibited from doing business with four Russian banks: (1) WTB Bank Public Joint Stock Company; (2) The Corporation Bank for Development and Foreign Economic Affairs Vnesheconombank; (3) Promsvyazbank Public Joint Stock Company; and (4) Bank Rossiya.

[8] These goods comprise all items in the Military Goods List and specified categories in the Dual-Use Goods List of the Strategic Goods (Control) Order 2021.
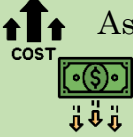
[9] For example, many countries, including Singapore, have barred some of Russia's banks from the SWIFT international payments system, while the EU, the US, and Canada have closed its airspace to Russian aircraft.

[10] As reported by *Reuters* and *CNN* on 14 March 2022, among the assistance Russia requested was pre-packaged, non-perishable military food kits, underscoring the basic logistical challenges faced by the Russian military forces.

Potential Impact of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on Singapore

It is important that Singapore take this stand even though it **may come at some cost and pain,** and **requires** some **sacrifice**.

Whilst Ukraine is far away from us, the invasion has far-reaching effects on global recovery, supply chains, and increased inflationary pressures on energy costs.

1. **Supply chain disruptions** for key commodities such as oil and metals.

Rising freight and logistics costs due to the consequent sanctions.

2. **Inflation and rising costs**

As Singapore imports most of its energy needs, there will be an **upward price pressure in electricity and petrol**.

3. **Possible disruptions to businesses**

Retaliatory sanctions could **disrupt** the **movement** of **cargo.**

Complex vetting process on financial transactions and more inspections on goods.

4. **Cybersecurity threats with potential retaliation in cyber space**

Targeted cyber-attacks on computer networks**.**

State-sponsored disinformation campaigns could undermine credibility and **sow discord and distrust**.

What Can Singaporeans Do?

Be **prepared for rising costs,** and **save and conserve whenever possible**.
- Adopt **energy saving habits**, or choose energy efficient appliances.

Keep ourselves updated by checking information from **reputable news sources** and **avoid spreading misinformation** on the situation.
- Apply a **critical eye** to what you read and share, as content could be out of date, or even misrepresented.
- Think **before sharing**.

Donate to the Singapore Red Cross Ukraine Humanitarian Crisis Response at: giving.sg/Singapore-red-cross-society/Ukraine-crisis

Finally, safeguarding our national interests may come at a cost. **Singaporeans** must come together and **stand united and to weather the potential repercussions together**.

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