



# This week's big news



**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was an actor and comedian before entering politics.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine

President Vladimir Putin of Russia

**Ukraine fact file**



**The Ukrainian flag**

- **POPULATION** 43.9 million
- **SIZE** 233,032 square miles
- **LANGUAGES** Ukrainian is spoken by 67% of the population, and about 30% speak Russian
- **LAND** Mostly level plains, with Carpathian Mountains to the west and Black Sea to the south
- **TYPE OF MONEY** Hryvnia
- **INDUSTRY** Natural gas, iron and steel, farming

## Global concern over Russia and Ukraine

On February 21, Russia sent troops into a neighboring country called Ukraine, bringing the two nations to the brink of war. In recent weeks, Russian President Vladimir Putin had placed about 150,000 to 190,000 military troops at the Ukrainian border. Governments around the world, including the US, have condemned Russia's move, calling it a violation of international law and a threat to peace in Europe.

### What is happening?

Putin recognized the independence of two regions in eastern Ukraine, Donetsk and Luhansk, and authorized Russian troops to enter them. These areas are controlled by separatists, people who want the regions to break away from Ukraine. The separatists are supported by Russia, and Putin said his troops were there to help them. In response, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy urged his people to remain calm. "We are on our own land," he reassured Ukrainians. US President Joe Biden and many European leaders supported Zelenskyy and said that Donetsk and Luhansk are part of Ukraine. They accused Putin of using these regions as an excuse to move troops into Ukraine and said this was part of Russia's plan to fully invade the

nation. The US and its allies warned Putin that Russia would face serious consequences if it further invades Ukraine.

### What is Russia and Ukraine's history?

Both nations were part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, also called the Soviet Union) from 1922 to 1991. The USSR consisted of 15 countries that were run as one state, with Moscow, in Russia, as the capital. As the USSR collapsed in 1991, Ukraine declared its independence. Since coming to power in 1999, Putin has said that he believes Ukraine is part of Russia and has tried to take over parts of that nation. Over the past several weeks, as Russia has moved troops to the Ukrainian border, tensions there have grown.



The countries share a long border.

### Why would Russia invade Ukraine?

Putin has frequently expressed regret that the Soviet Union failed, and Western experts believe he wants to expand Russia's power in the region and the world. Many world leaders believe Putin wants to prevent Ukraine from strengthening its relationship with the US. He has said that Ukraine should not be allowed to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a military alliance of

27 European countries, two North American countries (the US and Canada), and one Eurasian country (Turkey). Its mission is to keep peace in Europe. Putin views NATO as a rival for power in Europe. If Ukraine were to join NATO, it would give the US and other NATO countries greater power in the region Putin wants to control.

### How is the US involved?

The US wants to maintain the balance of power in Europe and ensure security for countries that belong to NATO or that NATO supports, including Ukraine. Ukraine is not currently part of NATO but would like to be. Biden also said the US would help defend Ukraine because of America's commitment to democracy. "It's about standing for what we believe in, for the future that we want for our world, for liberty, the right of countless countries to choose their own destiny," Biden said.

### What will happen next?

On February 22, Biden said the US was imposing serious economic sanctions (punishments) against Russia and would make them harsher if necessary. Putin continued to deny plans to invade Ukraine, but the Ukrainian military was preparing for a fight. Countries including the US, UK, France, Poland, Estonia, and Latvia have troops ready to support Ukraine.