

House of Commons FAC Inquiry: Russia

Summary

- i. The UK has not set out clear long-term objectives for its Russia policy. Its modest goals – to deter Russian attacks on the UK and its allies, and to support Ukraine ‘for as long as it takes’ – have only been partly achieved.
- ii. The UK’s 2025 National Security Strategy says that Russia and other authoritarian adversaries have multi-year plans to out-compete liberal democracies in every domain. The UK and its partners need a similar long-term and comprehensive strategy to deal with Russia.
- iii. In the absence of evidence of significant change in Russia’s attitudes to its neighbours and democratic countries, the UK and its partners should maintain economic and military pressure on Russia, with or without the support of the US administration.
- iv. The UK should not be afraid of change in Russia; it should promote it. Putin’s regime has murdered British citizens, invaded Russia’s neighbours and poses a continuing threat to European security; it is quite likely (though far from certain) that a successor regime would be better.
- v. If positive systemic change in Russia occurs, the UK and its partners must be ready to respond with agility. But there is a risk that cuts to FCDO resources will reduce the regional expertise needed to spot and exploit opportunities. FCDO Research Analysts are a vital but undervalued resource.
- vi. Russia has become increasingly dependent on Belarus, China, Iran and North Korea for various forms of support during the war. China is a vital economic and industrial partner, but it still supplies Ukraine with some key components for drones and other weapons systems. Russia’s bargain with North Korea – providing Russian help to its nuclear and ballistic missiles programmes in return for North Korean munitions and troops – is a threat to security in North-East Asia.
- vii. Other countries, including India, the US and some European countries, have wittingly or unwittingly helped Russia, whether by buying Russian oil and gas, blocking sanctions or reducing military supplies to Ukraine.
- viii. Russia, sometimes with Chinese help, has been able to use anti-colonialist narratives to win support for its neo-colonial war against Ukraine.
- ix. Russia’s effectiveness and value as a security partner vary from region to region. It has been notably successful in helping anti-Western juntas in the Sahel and other parts of Africa.
- x. The main influence on Russian foreign policy is nothing that the West does, but Putin’s own world view, in particular his belief that Russia is destined to ‘gather Slavic lands’ and his paranoid view of Russia as a ‘besieged fortress’.
- xi. Russia regards itself as in a state of conflict with the collective West. Countries on Russia’s borders have probably accepted that premise, and are preparing

accordingly; countries further away have not. The majority of UK citizens regard Russia as a threat, but neither the government nor the private sector have taken the actions necessary to deter or mitigate that threat.

- xii. Russia is unlikely to mount a full-scale invasion of a NATO country, but if it thought that NATO was vulnerable to splits, it might try a small-scale, deniable operation against NATO territory; if allies could not agree to respond, NATO's mutual defence guarantee would be shown up as hollow.
- xiii. Russia has not achieved its objectives of ending Ukraine's existence as an independent state and destroying its culture and identity. It is unlikely to achieve them, even if the West ends its support to Ukraine: Ukrainians will fight on. Even so, the conditions for a ceasefire do not exist: Putin is convinced that he can achieve a military victory eventually.
- xiv. Any solution that included international recognition of Russia's territorial gains and a return to normal commercial relations would be extremely dangerous for democratic states and states with aggressive neighbours.

International Relationships

How should we judge the UK's current foreign policy approach towards Russia?

1. It is hard to know how to judge the UK's current foreign policy approach towards Russia, because the government has not set out clear objectives for its Russia policy. It appears that the British government will resist Russian pressure; but it does not aim to shape the development of Russia in any particular direction. On his August 24th visit to Kyiv, Andy Burnham said "Russia should be in no doubt of our resolve. We will not back down until there is a just and lasting peace." Seemingly, the UK hopes that Russia will wear itself out, without the UK and its allies having to take the initiative in order to defeat it.
2. It is unlikely, however, that an approach based on strategic patience alone will be enough to secure a "just and lasting peace". Anything that leaves Russia in control of Ukrainian territory and Ukrainian citizens, and with its forces able to renew the war at a time of Putin's choosing, would neither be just nor lasting. The latest visit to Moscow by US peace envoys Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff showed that Putin continues to believe that he will eventually defeat Ukraine.
3. Successive British prime ministers and foreign secretaries have set out aims focused on deterring Russian attacks on the UK and its allies, and helping Ukraine to resist Russia 'for as long as it takes'. These are modest goals, but have only been partly achieved. While Russia has not launched an overt military attack on any of the UK's NATO allies, it is waging an increasingly dangerous campaign of sabotage, terrorism and assassination against targets both in the

UK and in other NATO countries. The German government has attributed the use of armed drones at Leipzig airport on August 4th to individuals associated with Russian intelligence agencies. At the same time, Russia is continuing to gain ground in Ukraine, albeit at a very high cost in troops and materiel, and has stepped up its attacks on Ukrainian civilian targets.

What should the UK's long-term approach to engagement with Russia be, and how should we work with international partners to action this approach?

4. Reacting firmly to actual or potential hostile Russian activity is certainly necessary, but it will not change Russian strategic objectives. It is instructive to contrast the UK's approach (and that of its partners) with what the National Security Strategy 2025 says about the approach of Russia itself and other adversaries: "Authoritarian states are putting in place multi-year plans to out-compete liberal democracies in every domain, from military modernisation to science and technology development, from their economic models to the information space". The FCDO, and the government as a whole, need a similar comprehensive and long-term strategy. The aim should be to win the systemic competition with Russia (and other authoritarian adversaries) and to create conditions that could produce change in Russia's system of governance.
5. In the absence of evidence of real change in Russia's hostile approach to its neighbours and to European democracies, and as long as Russia remains under the control of Putin or a successor with a similar neo-imperialist ideology, the UK should work with the largest possible coalition of like-minded Western countries to maintain economic and military pressure on Russia and to counter Moscow's efforts to exert influence over its neighbours and to weaken the EU and NATO. Routine diplomatic contact with Russia should continue: a complete end to communication would not help the UK to achieve its aims. But the government should not attempt another 'reset', or encourage economic re-engagement by British firms, unless there is demonstrable and substantive change in Russia.
6. The UK will have an important role to play in any coalition to maintain pressure on Russia, but it should be willing to share leadership with partners, including Ukraine, the Nordic and Baltic states, Poland and Germany, many of which have deep insights into Russian policy and/or can make important material contributions to deterring and containing Russia. It should work with its partners to try to maintain a common front with the US administration, but in the event that the US pursues an unsatisfactory peace deal with Moscow at the expense of Ukrainian and European security (as seems quite likely at present), the UK's priority should be alignment with European partners on the front line of the

confrontation with Russia, including Ukraine. In particular, if the US relaxes sanctions in order to re-engage with Russia economically, the British government should do whatever it can, with its European partners, to maintain the effectiveness of restrictive measures, in order to prevent the Kremlin from restoring the Russian economy and rebuilding its military power.

7. The UK should not be afraid of change in Russia. It is in the interests of the Kremlin to make the West fear instability in Russia more than the continuation of the present regime and its policies. In Putin's 26 years in power, however, Russia has invaded Georgia and Ukraine and been responsible for the murder of UK citizens as well as individuals in several other European states. While a new regime in Russia could make the international situation worse, the history of change in the Soviet Union shows that it is just as likely to include leaders less hostile to the UK and its allies, or at least less reckless in their use of force.
8. The UK's long-term objective, in coalition with like-minded partners, should be to promote positive change in Russia, by disrupting the sources of the current regime's power. It should not shy away from cultivating potential alternative leaderships, if it can identify them. In an ideal world, such alternatives would come from the democratic opposition, including those in exile; but first steps towards normalisation of relations should not depend on the new regime's democratic credentials, but on what it does externally: at a minimum, withdrawing from illegally occupied territory in Ukraine and elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, and dismantling its influence operations and sabotage networks in the West.
9. If positive systemic change does occur, the UK should be ready to respond to it in a way that maximises the chances of it being sustainable. That will require policy agility. Perhaps it was inevitable that the kind of hardliners who had supported the coup against Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in 1991 would ultimately gain power in Russia; but a different outcome might also have been possible: many Russians in the early 1990s wanted accountability for Soviet crimes and hoped that Russia itself would become 'a normal country'. If the West had adopted different policies, more supportive of the establishment of the rule of law, and less associated with the immiseration of large parts of the population and with economic reforms that transferred enormous wealth to a few oligarchs, it might have been harder for Putin to persuade the Russian people subsequently that the West in the 1990s was their enemy.

How will the FCDO2030 restructure and funding settlement likely influence the UK's long-term approach?

10. There is a significant risk that the cuts will reduce, again, FCDO expertise on Russia and its neighbours – something that was allowed to wither after the Cold War. Effective policy-making in relation to Russia (or any other country) starts from in-depth understanding of the roots of foreign policy, the domestic situation and public opinion, the economy, and elite groupings and their interests. It is only since 2014 and, in particular, since 2022 that the FCDO has strengthened its Eastern Research Group – the cadre of permanent research analysts with deep knowledge of the former Soviet space, who provide continuity while their other diplomatic colleagues are often rotated through jobs in unrelated areas. Experts will not always get the answers right (very few foresaw the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, for example), but their absence will increase the risk of getting the answers seriously wrong. With the UK's diplomatic presence inside Russia reduced in size and increasingly constrained in what it can do and where it can go, the FCDO (and the intelligence agencies) should invest more in UK-based expertise to interpret news, social media output and data coming from within Russia.

How dependent is Russia on key international partners, and how cohesive and durable are these partnerships?

11. Its war of aggression against Ukraine has made Russia increasingly dependent on its international partners – in particular, Belarus, China, Iran and North Korea.

12. **Belarus** provided Russia with a platform from which to launch its initial thrust towards Kyiv in February 2022, and though Belarus has not joined in the fighting itself, the presence of Russian forces on Belarusian territory obliges Ukraine to defend its north-western border. As Katia Glod of the New Eurasian Strategies Centre and others have analysed, Belarusian defence industry contributes to the Russian war effort, Russia can use Belarusian training grounds to train its forces, and Moscow is deploying nuclear weapons in Belarus that threaten Europe (as well as Ukraine). In addition, Minsk has been an active participant in hybrid warfare against Europe, in particular by actively encouraging illegal migrants to use its borders as an entry point to Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, in an effort to increase social tensions in those countries.

13. While proclaiming its neutrality and its desire for a peaceful end to the conflict, **China** has become a vital contributor to Russia's war effort and its economic survival. Although Russia continues to acquire some components for high tech weapons systems illicitly from the West, Ukrainian and other reporting, based on analysis of the remnants of weapons found in Ukraine, shows that a very large proportion of chips, motors, optics and other electronic components come from

China. China has also become a critical market for Russian hydrocarbons exports, as European purchases from Russia have shrunk since 2022. A 2025 report by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington noted the asymmetry in the relationship: while Russia accounted for 6.1 per cent of China's imports and 3.2 per cent of its exports in 2023, China accounted for 52.8 per cent of Russia's imports and 32.7 per cent of its exports. As the authors said, "While Russia is *a* partner for China, China is *the* partner for Russia."

14. Despite the closeness of the relationship, however, including the frequent meetings between Vladimir Putin and Xi Jinping, Russia and China are not allies. While trade between China and Ukraine has declined in aggregate since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukrainian imports of Chinese dual-use goods such as electric batteries and fibre-optic cables (both essential for Ukraine's drone production) increased dramatically between 2025 and 2026, according to the Observatory of Economic Complexity. Sources in the Ukrainian defence industrial sector complain that China charges Ukraine more than it charges Russia for the same dual-use goods, but they acknowledge that it continues to supply them. China does not want Russia to lose the war (as the Chinese foreign minister, Wang Yi, told the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, in July 2025); but it does not seem to want a quick Russian victory either.
15. Russia's war in Ukraine has been convenient for China in some respects. It has diverted Western and particularly European attention away from the Indo-Pacific region; and (albeit to a lesser extent than America's ill-considered war against Iran) has consumed US munitions that might have been used in a conflict in the Indo-Pacific region. But China has not endorsed the attack on Ukraine or recognised Russia's seizure of Ukrainian territory (not even Crimea). Unlike Belarus, Iran and North Korea, which have consistently voted with Russia against UN General Assembly resolutions reaffirming international commitment to Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders, China has always abstained.
16. **Iran** made an important contribution to Russia's defence industrial effort in the early stages of the war. The *Shahed* drones manufactured by Iran were ahead of anything Russia could produce when they were first used against Kyiv in the autumn of 2022. Iran then helped Russia to establish production of the *Shahed* at Alabuga in Tatarstan, with a factory opening in July 2023. Russia has subsequently developed the *Shahed* (known as *Geran* or 'Geranium' in Russian), improving on Iran's original systems, with the latest models being powered by jet engines, for example. Although Russia and Iran are not formally allies, Russia has

reciprocated Iran's technical and material assistance, providing military technology and intelligence to Tehran to help it in its war with the US and Israel. *The Financial Times* reported on September 1st 2026 that Russia had supplied Iran with technological help and advice to enable it to develop a supersonic cruise missile of a kind that could be used against US ships in the Gulf.

17. Though in many respects Russian and Iranian interests are aligned – both are essentially anti-Western – there are also areas of competition. Both are major producers of oil and gas; when conflict or sanctions constrain the production of one, and the price rises, the other can profit, if conditions are right. In particular, from March to June 2026 the US granted waivers to allow some Russian oil cargoes to be sold, reducing the shortfall on global markets caused by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz – which also stopped most Iranian oil exports. Ideologically, the Islamic Republic and Russia share a socially conservative outlook, but Russia has traditionally been nervous about Iran's influence on Muslims in Russia (who make up almost 15 per cent of the population).
18. **North Korea** is a treaty ally of Russia, unlike China and Iran. The original 1961 Soviet-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance contained a mutual defence commitment, whereby in the event of an armed attack on one of them, the other would “immediately extend military and other assistance with all the means at its disposal”. This commitment re-appeared in the June 2024 Russia-North Korea Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, though qualified with references to the UN Charter and Russian and North Korean domestic legislation.
19. North Korea has become a major supplier of materiel for the Russian war effort, in particular artillery ammunition. In May 2025, Sam Cranny-Evans of the Royal United Services Institute estimated that North Korea could have provided up to 40 per cent of the artillery rounds fired by Russia from October 2023, when North Korean ammunition supplies to Russia were first observed, until April 2025. North Korea's help was crucial at a time when Russia's own defence industry was still in the process of increasing production, and could not keep up with demand. North Korea has also reportedly supplied ballistic missiles.
20. In line with the 2024 treaty, when Ukrainian troops mounted an incursion into Russia's Kursk oblast' in the summer of 2024, North Korea sent some 11,000 troops to fight alongside the Russians; the BBC has calculated, based on imagery of North Korea's memorial complex, that around 2,300 were killed. North Korea has reportedly been asked for more troops – perhaps 30-50,000 –

who would mostly be deployed in support roles in Russia, freeing more Russian troops for assaults within Ukraine.

21. In return for this aid, Russia is reportedly providing North Korea with sophisticated military technology. In particular, it is believed to have provided ballistic missile technology for North Korea's programme to develop a nuclear-armed inter-continental ballistic missile, and nuclear reactors for submarines to carry the missiles.
22. Without these close partners, Russia would be in a much weaker position militarily. But there are other countries that, wittingly or unwittingly, also make a significant contribution to the continuation of the war. **India** has become a major purchaser of Russian crude oil: in February 2022 it imported none, but in June 2026 it imported more than 2.6 million barrels per day, accounting for over half of its total oil imports. Since Ukraine began its campaign of drone and missile strikes on Russian oil refineries, India has also been exporting petrol and other refined products back to Russia.
23. In Europe, Putin has found allies – **Hungary's** former prime minister, Viktor Orbán, until he lost power in April 2026; and subsequently **Slovakian** prime minister Robert Fico – to delay or water down EU sanctions. The **Belgian** government has repeatedly blocked efforts by other European governments to use immobilised Russian central bank assets held by the Belgian-based company Euroclear to fund Ukraine. Belgium's position has forced the EU to find Byzantine work-arounds that put the burden of supporting Ukraine on European tax-payers rather than the Russian state.
24. In the **US**, Donald Trump's administration has more often than not been helpful to Putin, notably by putting pressure on Ukraine to concede territory to Russia – including land that Russia has not been able to capture through four and half years of military action – and by ending US military supplies to Ukraine (unless other countries pay for them).

What are the scope and trajectory of Russia's global influence, including in the Global South, Central Asia and through multilateral organisations such as BRICS and ASEAN? What, if any, influence does the UK have with these groupings?

25. One of Russia's few successes since the full-scale war began in 2022 has been in promoting its narrative in the global south. There have been mis-steps: deceitful methods of recruiting citizens of Asian and African countries to serve in the Russian army or in Russian defence industry have created something of a

backlash. But on the whole, Russia has been able to use ‘anti-colonialist’ narratives to persuade countries in the global south to support Russia’s neo-colonial war against Ukraine.

26. Russia’s efforts are often complemented by China’s: China’s international broadcasting output is on a huge scale, and generally repeats the Russian version of events in Ukraine uncritically. As a July 2026 analysis by Reporters Without Borders commented: “Beijing has... reproduced and amplified Russian propaganda through outlets such as CGTN while allowing Russian state media to disseminate their messaging freely within a globally coordinated propaganda apparatus that reaches countries and regions where China enjoys greater influence.”
27. Countering Russia’s narrative success is partly matter of Ukrainian and Western diplomatic efforts, but just as important is the use of soft power instruments, including the BBC World Service. Cuts to the BBC World Service undermine UK influence and help Russia: when the BBC ended its Arabic service in 2023, its FM frequency in Beirut was immediately taken by Russia’s Sputnik Arabic service; BBC Monitoring later reported on Russia’s deployment of anti-Western narratives through Sputnik’s Arabic language broadcasts.
28. As the BBC has separately reported, Russia also offers training to journalists from the global south, designed to cast doubt on (for example) Russian war crimes committed in Ukraine, or to ensure favourable media coverage of Russian military support for juntas in countries in the Sahel. The BBC’s charitable arm, BBC Media Action, provides competition, including through its ‘Pursuit of Truth’ programme to support young journalists. But it has been hit by loss of funding, caused by reductions in the UK’s aid budget (and those of other international partners) and the closure of USAID, which used to be a major donor.
29. Russia is not having things all its own way. In Central Asia, its influence is in decline – partly because China is now the dominant economic power in the region, while the Russian economy is weakening, and partly because countries like Kazakhstan have their own interests that are being damaged by the war, and their own fears about Russia’s expansionist ambitions. In 2014, after the annexation of Crimea, Putin said that Kazakhstan had never been a state before the collapse of the Soviet Union – comments seen by the Kazakh authorities as an implicit threat. In July 2026 the Kazakh president, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, called on Putin to freeze the war – a rare public criticism of Russia.

30. With its partners, the UK could step up its efforts to compete with Russian narratives, both at the governmental level and through the media in countries susceptible to Russian influence. But it would require additional resources; and this may not be the top priority, set against the importance of pushing Russia back in Ukraine and deterring it from attacking other parts of Europe.

How effective and credible is Russia as a security partner, considering its military footprint overseas and perceptions of its ability to support allied regimes?

31. The demands of the war against Ukraine have probably had some impact on Russia's ability to support its more distant partners, like Venezuela and Cuba. Ultimately, it was unable to keep Bashir al Asad in power in Syria (though it has managed to negotiate shared use of its key port and airbase in Syria with the new government there). But it has supplanted Western countries as the main security partner of a number of countries in the Sahel and elsewhere in Africa, primarily through the use of small groups of mercenaries, originally from the Wagner Group and now the Afrika Korps. Russia's inability to prevent the US and Israeli attack on Iran has perhaps been balanced by the help it has given Tehran, which has enabled Iranian forces to inflict significant damage on US bases in the Middle East. The poor performance of a number of Russian weapons systems, most notably its vaunted air defence systems, is likely to deter some potential customers for Russian weapons. But its practical help for North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programmes has enabled it to strengthen relations with Pyongyang (to some extent at least, at the expense of China).

How are US and European foreign policy shaping Russia's international behaviour, alliances, and strategic posture, and what are the potential consequences for international relations and security?

32. Nothing provokes Putin like the weakness of his adversaries. Past US and European failure to punish Russian aggression against Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 almost certainly encouraged him to think that he could get away with the full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Every time the West hesitated to supply Ukraine with additional weaponry, or restricted the use of weapons already supplied, Russia was emboldened. The hostility of the Trump administration to European governments, including Trump's repeated threats to seize Greenland, increases the risk that Putin will test NATO.
33. At the same time, Western economic sanctions have contributed to a major reorientation of Russian economic relations towards China. In 2015, the EU was Russia's largest single trade partner by far; now China is the dominant partner.

34. Overall, however, Western foreign policy has had less impact on Russia's international behaviour than Putin's personal world view has. Two key elements in it are his belief in gathering 'Slavic lands' – in particular, Ukraine and Belarus, but also parts (at least) of the Baltic states and perhaps also Poland – under Moscow's umbrella (a view exemplified in his July 2021 article 'On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians', which provided a pseudo-historical justification for the invasion of Ukraine a few months later); and his paranoid view of Russia as a 'besieged fortress' surrounded by enemies.

To what extent can current tensions be characterised as a form of conflict between Russia and the West?

35. There is little doubt that Russia regards itself as engaged in a conflict with the West: Russian leaders say so. Since the start of the full-scale war, former Russian president and current deputy chair of the Russian Security Council Dmitry Medvedev has regularly threatened to attack Western countries in response to their support for Ukraine, most recently on September 2nd 2026. Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov said on September 6th 2026 that German attribution to Russia of the drone attack at Leipzig airport was "by and large the start of a real war", and accused German chancellor Friedrich Merz of "in effect, declaring war on us". If your adversary says that it is at war with you, you need to assume that it is and that it could act accordingly, even if you are not obliged to respond to its actions symmetrically.

How do threat perceptions, preparedness levels and risk calculations differ across European states?

36. It is hard to give an exhaustive account, but the differences are considerable. At one extreme, Finland is very aware that there is a Russian threat to Finland, and that it would get worse if Russian forces were no longer tied up in Ukraine. Consequently, its level of preparedness is very high, with its standing forces capable of being filled out with rapidly mobilisable and well-trained reserves. It has well-prepared defences, including huge bomb shelters for the population. Other Nordic and Baltic countries generally have similar 'whole of society' approaches to dealing with the threat from Russia, even if their physical preparations are less advanced than Finland's. These countries also believe, however, that their level of preparedness will deter Russia; they find it irritating that many of their partners further West are more afraid of a Russian attack than they are.

37. At the other extreme, Spain, which has refused to commit itself to the new NATO target of spending 3.5 per cent of GDP on defence by 2035, sees much less of a threat from Russia, is much less prepared to meet one, and is more concerned about other risks.

38. The UK population has a reasonably high perception of the Russian threat: according to a YouGov poll in June 2026, 61 per cent of respondents regarded Russia as “generally a hostile threat to Britain and countries in Europe”. The UK’s level of preparedness lags well behind that of countries geographically closer to Russia, however. It is short of air defences; much of its critical national infrastructure is vulnerable to sabotage, and there is a lack of redundancy in its systems (exemplified by the fact that the accidental failure of one electricity substation near Heathrow airport in March 2025 closed the airport for 16 hours and led to the cancellation or diversion of over 1,300 flights).

What is the likelihood that Russia would seek to test NATO’s collective defence commitments, including Article 5?

39. Russia is unlikely to mount a full-scale invasion of a NATO country as long as a large part of its army is tied down in Ukraine. It is, however, quite likely that Putin could opportunistically test the willingness of other allies, and particularly of the US, to aid an ally in the event of a small-scale attack. Donald Trump’s past statements indicating that he might not come to the assistance of some allies, and his criticisms of NATO for not helping him in his war with Iran, might encourage Putin to think that he could expose NATO’s security guarantee as hollow. For example, by using special forces in unmarked uniforms, as it did in Crimea in 2014, Russia could establish a presence on NATO territory while giving some allies the chance to claim that an attack could not be attributed with certainty. Without unanimity in NATO, Article 5 could not be activated, and Moscow would have destroyed the credibility of the alliance’s mutual defence commitment; in future, any country facing demands from Russia would have to consider whether it would get help from its allies if it rejected a Kremlin ultimatum.

Post-conflict Ukraine and Europe

What is the current state of the conflict in Ukraine? Has Russia achieved its objectives? Is it likely too?

40. Russia – or perhaps more accurately Putin – has not achieved its objectives. These objectives are not about territory, but about Ukraine’s existence as an

independent and fully sovereign state. As Putin's July 2021 essay shows, he sees Ukraine as an artificial construct and its government as puppets of the West; his aims are genocidal, in the sense of seeking to destroy Ukrainian identity and culture and to force Ukrainians to become Russians. Given the number of casualties Russia has already suffered, it is highly unlikely that Russian can achieve these objectives. Even if Ukraine's Western partners gave up the struggle, a significant number of Ukrainians would resist Russia – as they continued to fight against the reimposition of Soviet rule after the Second World War until the mid-1950s.

What conditions would be required for a ceasefire or negotiated settlement, and how realistic are they?

41. A ceasefire would require Russia to accept that it could achieve nothing more by fighting, and Ukraine to decide that the cost of trying to recapture territory by military means was too high. At present, while Ukraine seems willing to accept a ceasefire along the current front lines, Russia continues to insist that it can achieve victory by force of arms. It is highly unlikely that the war will end soon, therefore.

What are the implications of the conflict for international law, accountability and norms?

42. The implications will depend on how the war ends and what happens afterwards. If the result of the end of hostilities is that Russia remains in control of territory that is still recognised under international law as part of Ukraine, that would be bad, but much less bad than a settlement involving international recognition of Russian annexation of Ukrainian regions. If the West continued to demand accountability for war crimes and damage, and (finally) seized immobilised Russian central bank assets to pay for reparations, that would be a better outcome (even if Putin and others indicted by the International Criminal Court ultimately escaped justice) than if the West lifted sanctions and returned to business as usual and economic co-operation with Russia, as the Trump administration seems to hope it will. The more that the West shows itself willing to compromise with Russia over fundamental principles of international law in relation to sovereignty, territorial integrity and genocide, the more dangerous the world will be for democratic states and states with aggressive neighbours.