



## Russia-Ukraine: The West needs a sanctions strategy

by Ian Bond and Zach Meyers, 10 March 2022

In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the EU, US and UK have instituted an unprecedented set of economic sanctions – treating Russia in a comparable way to pariah states like North Korea.

In this Centre for European Reform policy brief, '[Russia-Ukraine: The West needs a sanctions strategy](#)', director of foreign policy Ian Bond and senior research fellow Zach Meyers explain that sanctions serve different purposes: some are signals meant to dissuade; others aim to coerce countries to change course; and others serve to constrain a country's capabilities to engage in deplorable behaviour in future.

While the West surprised many by acting quickly and decisively, it needs to take a more strategic approach. The West failed to adopt signalling sanctions early on, which might have persuaded Putin to settle for less than a full-scale invasion; some Western countries remain notably slow at imposing such signalling sanctions, nearly two weeks after the invasion began. Coercive sanctions – even those as severe as the West is imposing – are unlikely to provoke Putin to withdraw from Ukraine and will become less effective over time. The authors conclude that the West therefore needs to be clear that constraining sanctions will most likely be needed over the long term.

The policy brief notes that Russia will try to blur the difference between coercive and constraining sanctions, and get politicians to see the latter as failing (and therefore not worth keeping in place) because they have not produced changes in behaviour. Western governments therefore need to be clear that these sanctions serve an important long-term purpose: to degrade Russia's ability to threaten others in future. The West must also explain the circumstances in which certain sanctions could be lifted; what further steps the West may take if Russia's behaviour deteriorates further, for example with increasingly widespread and indiscriminate targeting of civilian infrastructure including nuclear power plants; and how the West will respond to countermeasures. Certain policy changes, such as measures to crack down on illicit finance and disinformation, must also become the new 'business as usual', rather than forgotten once the immediate crisis passes.

*"As it became clearer that Putin was likely to attack Ukraine, the West should have been readier with signalling sanctions, to warn him to back off"; said Ian Bond. "But once the war had started, it felt as though countries were competing to show how many oligarchs' yachts they could seize or how many banks they could force to stop operations. In the next phase, they need to be more strategic."*

*"Russia will inevitably start to lobby against long-term sanctions, enlisting Western businesses on its side, once the initial flood of headlines about atrocities in Ukraine passes"; said Zach Meyers. "The West needs to be clear-eyed about the purposes sanctions serve: constraining sanctions must not be lifted simply because they have not produced changes in behaviour."*

### Note for editors:

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