

## Aide Memoire – the ongoing Russia/Ukraine crisis

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### Summary

Tensions on the Russia – Ukraine border remain high. A Russian military build-up on the border has been ongoing for several weeks, with estimates that over 100,000 troops are now in place. Russian troops are also presently engaged in exercises in Belarus, which could also offer another option for launching a military incursion into Ukraine.

Moscow continues to deny an intention to launch military action against Ukraine, and it is not clear whether President Putin has made a final decision on an incursion or invasion. However, with the military build-up ongoing, Russia is widely seen as having the capability to launch a military incursion into Ukraine at any time, potentially at short or little notice. With the heavy concentration of troops on the border, the risk of a miscalculation leading to further tensions or conflict also remains high.

### Latest Developments

- Intense diplomatic efforts are under way between Russia, the EU, US, NATO and European partners in an effort to find a diplomatic pathway to de-escalation<sup>s9(2)(g)(i)</sup>  
Aotearoa New Zealand has signalled our strong support for these efforts.
- A number of countries have signalled their intention to introduce strong sanctions against Russia in the event of Russian aggression. Such response would likely include sweeping economic sanctions featuring greater restrictions on Russian financial institutions and the energy sector, export controls and travel bans.
- EU countries, the US, UK, Canada and others have also provided assistance and military aid to help Ukraine prepare to counter a possible military attack.<sup>s6(b)(i)</sup>
- The US has sent an additional 3000 troops to Central and Eastern Europe,<sup>s6(b)(i)</sup>

### Aotearoa New Zealand's current diplomatic response

- Actions taken so far by Aotearoa New Zealand include public statements by you and the Prime Minister, expressing our support for efforts under way to find a diplomatic pathway to de-escalate tensions, and engagement with senior Ukrainian and Russian officials.
- These include a visit to Kyiv by New Zealand's Ambassador to Ukraine (accredited from Poland) in late January; discussions between Russian officials and New Zealand's Ambassador in Moscow, and senior MFAT officials meeting with the Russian Ambassador in Wellington earlier this month.
- In discussions with Russian officials Aotearoa New Zealand officials have expressed our concerns with the current tensions, including the build-up of Russian military; expressed our support for diplomatic efforts towards escalation; and called on Russia to take urgent steps to de-escalate tensions.
- Aotearoa New Zealand will also continue to make statements in bilateral and multilateral settings such as the UN, and in support of the Crimean Platform.

### Steps in case of further escalation

- As a Russian military incursion could occur with very short notice, it will be important that we are in a position to respond quickly, and where appropriate, in concert with likeminded partners.
- The deliberate use of military force in violation of Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity would be an act of aggression and constitute a grave breach of one of the most fundamental rules of international law.
- Despite our geographical distance, an armed conflict in Ukraine would have significant implications for Aotearoa New Zealand's interests in Europe, our strong support for the international rules-based system and our values more broadly.
- Armed conflict in Ukraine could have significant implications for our broader interests globally, considering potential effects on global markets. <sup>s6(a), s9(2)(d)</sup>
- As a small country with an independent foreign policy we strongly support the sovereign right of any state to determine its own future, including as regards its security relationships. In this context, Aotearoa New Zealand has been consistent in our support for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.
- An MFAT led inter-agency process has been established to consider measures Aotearoa New Zealand might employ should there be a further escalation in Russian aggression against Ukraine, drawing on a "diplomatic response kete".

s6(a)

s9(2)(e)

- Contingency planning for the possibility of armed conflict, including consular planning and potential impacts on the operation of our Embassy in Moscow is ongoing.

Europe Division  
Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade  
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