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What is the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on New Zealand and what are the future implications?

Introduction

In 2022, New Zealand, like the rest of the world, was astonished by the actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin launching the so-called ‘special military operation’ to ‘demilitarise’ Ukraine.¹ Ukrainian territory was hit by hundreds of Russian missiles and airstrikes supported by the ground forces advancing on multiple fronts and causing the largest humanitarian and refugee crisis in Europe since WWII. This invasion attracted immediate support for Ukraine among predominantly Western communities, and New Zealand also began preparing to assist affected Ukrainian citizens. Russia had broken international law in 2014 when it annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine and now reneged on the Minsk II agreements made in the aftermath of that conflict. Despite multiple historical factors for Russia’s offensive action, the key issue is that a dominant state power explicitly rejected the laws and institutions of the international rules-based order by not respecting Ukrainian sovereignty and its right to exist as an independent nation.² Russia’s violation of

¹ A. Troianovski, N. MacFarquhar, *Putin Announces Start to ‘Military Operation’ Against Ukraine*, “The New York Times”, 23 February 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/23/world/europe/ukraine-russia-invasion.html> [accessed: 25 March 2023].

² T. Snyder, *The War in Ukraine is a Colonial War*, “The New Yorker”, 28 April 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/essay/the-war-in-ukraine-is-a-colonial-war> [accessed: 24 March 2023].

international law and institutions raises concerns for small states who rely on the rules-based order to uphold their political and territorial independence as well as mitigate the coercive power of large states.

For the purposes of this article the definition of a small state is based upon the power they exercise rather than the power they necessarily possess. This definition uses relational power as its basis, in that, 'small' is defined through the relationship between the state and its strategic environment. States are considered small if they are the weaker part in an asymmetric relationship within its strategic environment. Small states are therefore unable to alter the 'nature and function' of power relations of this environment on their own.³ In this way, despite significant differences in empirical measures like population, geographic size, and military assets, both Ukraine and New Zealand share the challenges of small states in negotiating their interests within the competitive international community. Largely, the current international rules-based order promotes equal sovereignty among states and seeks to prevent large states from overtly using their power advantages to detrimentally influence small states. Therefore, when a large state deliberately violates these institutions, small states, as beneficiaries of these rules, actively contribute to international security operations which reinforce the current order.

The imbalance of security in Eastern Europe became a defence interest for New Zealand due to the involvement of their primary international partners. The country has benefitted from having longstanding economic relationships with great powers such as Russia, China, the European Union, the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States. However, in the competitive world of great powers, as a small state, New Zealand needs to choose their actions carefully when the interests of their larger partners cause instability. The outcome of the war in Ukraine will impact the rules-based order of the international system, either by reaffirming the current Western-led democratic model or strengthening the position for authoritarian models to supplant the status quo. Therefore, New Zealand needs to assess the intentions of the great powers to identify opportunities and challenges that best serve the country's national interests.

The aim of this article is to explore the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on New Zealand in a world of competing great powers. An assessment of possible future developments for New Zealand's choices within global challenges is offered to demonstrate the challenge for small states. Due to its reliance on international law and the rules-based order, New Zealand must participate in actions that uphold the international order as well as navigate their relationship with great powers on

2023]; M. Mälksoo, *The postcolonial moment in Russia's War against Ukraine*, "Journal of Genocide Research" 2022, p. 1, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2022.2074947>.

³ M. Maass, *Small States in World Politics: The Story of Small State Survival 1648–2016*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2017, pp. 24–25.

opposing sides of a conflict. Additionally, building relationships with like-minded small states by means of common features, values, and principles can be an alternative to the undue influence of large states.

This article presents a view through the lens of a Ukrainian immigrant living in New Zealand for the past 15 years and discusses the changing levels of interest in New Zealand's government and population towards Ukraine and the Ukrainian diaspora in New Zealand. It was noticed that prior to 2014, New Zealand's attention toward the Ukrainian people was quite insignificant. The situation changed to some degree in 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea and invaded Eastern Ukraine; however, this receptiveness to the voices of the Ukrainian communities were short-lived. The situation transformed significantly in 2022, as New Zealand provided support to Ukraine, following its international partners/great powers.

Reaction to the invasion of Ukraine

Ukraine's relationship with Russia has always been problematic. The fall of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union offered opportunities for Ukraine to assert its independence as a sovereign state. However, in the aftermath of these events, Russia took action to ensure its continued influence within Ukraine. The 2014 Revolution of Dignity, which forced Viktor Yanukovich from presidential office after acting against his citizens' wishes to sign political association and free trade agreements with the European Union instead strengthening ties to Russia, is seen as the catalyst for the current conflict.

The relationship between New Zealand and Russia had been gaining momentum prior to the invasion; however, New Zealand changed its position when Russia broke international law. In 1944, New Zealand and Russia established diplomatic relations and in 1973, the New Zealand embassy was opened in Moscow.⁴ The two nations were able to successfully trade with each other during Cold War. With the fall of the Soviet Union, the global ideological confrontation disappeared and a new dynamic to the relationship between Russia and New Zealand was born. Overall, the economic relationship between the two countries was in New Zealand's favour. After years of negotiations, New Zealand, Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan were on their way to forming an FTA, which was supposed to boost New Zealand's economy by generating about 90% of exports free trade by 2030.⁵ However, the talks were suspended by New Zealand as Russia annexed Crimea and violated international law.⁶

⁴ J. Headley, *Russia Resurgent: The Implications for New Zealand*, [in:] *Small States and the Changing Global Order: New Zealand Faces the Future*, ed. A.M. Brady, Springer, Cham 2019 (The World of Small States series, vol. 6), p. 214.

⁵ *Ibidem*, pp. 214–217.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine is recognised by many states and international organisations as contravening international law regarding a state's right to sovereignty, treaties established between the two countries after Ukraine's independence, and the Minsk agreements signed after Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea. It is these violations of international institutions which threaten to undermine the international rules-based order that make the conflict in Ukraine an important issue for small states like New Zealand.

New Zealand respects the rule of law not only because of its principles but also as the need for a small state to maintain a sense of order with great powers. In the 13th century, England introduced *Magna Carta*, a royal charter underpinning people's rights, their protection by the law, and equal justice for everyone. The legacy of this document entrenched a strong symbol of liberty in England as well as in all British colonies including New Zealand.⁷ For New Zealand, *Magna Carta* became a cornerstone of the rule of law and represents the country as a trustworthy international partner. As a post-colonial nation of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, Ukraine did not have the same opportunities for a system based on the rule of law. The desire of the Ukrainian people was to become a modern democratic state by implementing the rule of law for the stability and prosperity of the country. However, New Zealand did not understand Ukrainian aspirations and most New Zealanders had a limited knowledge of Eastern Europe.

Prior to the Russian invasion, the ability of the small Ukrainian diaspora in New Zealand to influence political leadership in the country was limited. With only approximately 1500 ethnic Ukrainians identified, their ability to prompt political action, such as recognition of the Holodomor as genocide, was effectively non-existent. Even in the initial stages of the 2022 invasion, the New Zealand government appeared content to 'wait and see.' When members of the Ukrainian diaspora approached their local political representatives, they were informed that no plans to support Ukraine were being considered.⁸ This position appeared to change because of the significant interest and reaction of the New Zealand public to the Russian aggression. New organisations were formed, such as Mahi for Ukraine, to petition the government to support Ukraine, as well as generate private funds to provide humanitarian assistance to Ukrainian citizens impacted by the conflict. Whilst the New Zealand government's initial responses were mainly punitive actions against Russia, public influence pushed for a more direct support to the Ukrainian people.

⁷ *Magna Carta 1297*, New Zealand Legislation, Imperial Act 29, 28 March 1297, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/imperial/1297/0029/latest/DLM10929.html> [accessed: 25 March 2023].

⁸ Personal experience of the author with her local Member of Parliament.

New Zealand's response to the invasion

New Zealand's response to the Russian aggression against Ukraine was not only laid in rejecting a potential FTA deal but in changing New Zealand legislation by introducing sanctions against Russia. New Zealand Parliament unanimously passed a bill to sanction the Russian Federation and individuals.⁹ The key aspects of the Act were the banning of Russian individuals, government and military vessels under international sanctions, and freezing assets of individuals.¹⁰ In addition to sanctions, the New Zealand government issued a notice prohibiting the export of all goods for the intention of use by the military and security services of the Russian Federation and the Republic of Belarus.¹¹ Russia's response to New Zealand sanctions was to impose personal sanctions against 32 New Zealand officials, academics, and journalists for the promotion of the 'Russophobic agenda.'¹² Russia also added New Zealand to the list of countries that 'commit unfriendly actions against Russia.'¹³

New Zealand also supported Ukraine with humanitarian and military aid and offered immigration support to Ukrainian citizens. New Zealand has committed nearly NZ\$13 million in humanitarian and economic assistance. In terms of military support, New Zealand provided about NZ\$20 million of military aid either through the UK, NATO Comprehensive Assistance Package Trust Fund or in support of the Ukrainian Defence Intelligence.¹⁴ The New Zealand Defence Force is committed in delivering training to Ukrainian soldiers alongside other nations as well as continuing support in logistics and intelligence.¹⁵

New Zealand also issued the 2022 Special Ukraine Policy allowing residents and citizens of New Zealand who were born in Ukraine to sponsor their closest families

⁹ *Russia Sanctions Act 2022*, New Zealand Legislation, 17 May 2022, <https://www.legislation.govt.nz/act/public/2022/0006/latest/whole.html> [accessed: 25 March 2023].

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹¹ *Export Controls (Export Prohibition to Specified Places) Notice 2022 (No 2)*, "New Zealand Gazette" 2022, notice no. 2022-go899, <https://gazette.govt.nz/notice/id/2022-go899> [accessed: 26 March 2023].

¹² *Foreign Ministry statement concerning personal sanctions against heads of municipal agencies, members of the command of the armed forces and journalists of New Zealand*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 30 July 2022, https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1824556/?lang=en&cysclid=l67x7j6hqz568094172 [accessed: 26 March 2023].

¹³ *Russian government approves list of unfriendly countries and territories*, TASS Russian News Agency, 08 March 2022, <https://tass.com/politics/1418197> [accessed: 26 March 2023].

¹⁴ *Russian invasion of Ukraine*, New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/countries-and-regions/europe/ukraine/russian-invasion-of-ukraine/> [accessed: 26 March 2023].

¹⁵ *Support to Ukraine: Timeline*, New Zealand Defence Force, 13 April 2022 – 12 May 2023, <https://www.nzdf.mil.nz/media-centre/story-collections/support-to-ukraine/> [accessed: 06 July 2023].

and bring them to New Zealand under simplified procedures.¹⁶ A year later, a new type of 2022 Special Ukraine Policy was issued on similar terms but with an extension to wider families of Ukrainians.¹⁷ The support that New Zealand provided to Ukraine signalled New Zealand's intent of backing international communities and, at the same time, building its diplomatic relationship with Ukraine.

Perspectives for the future

The outcome of the Russian invasion of Ukraine will determine the stability of Eastern Europe, and also have an impact on the global environment. As a small state, New Zealand needs to carefully contemplate the consequences of the potential outcomes of the Ukraine conflict and determine what actions to take that will best serve their national interests. The four important areas that New Zealand should consider regarding the Ukraine conflict are:

1. What benefits does New Zealand's current relationship with Ukraine bring?
2. What is the impact on New Zealand if Russia succeeds in Ukraine?
3. How does China perceive the Ukraine conflict, and how might the outcome impact its actions in the Asia-Pacific region?
4. What would be the impact of Ukraine's victory on New Zealand?

The relationship between Ukraine and New Zealand is somewhat recent, but if New Zealand was looking for a deeper affiliation what would be the possible advantages? Ukraine is an agricultural country that has rich mineral resources and advanced Information Technology (IT) industry. According to the World Bank report, Ukraine scores 67.4 out of 100 in enabling the business of agriculture in the country.¹⁸ Another study indicates that despite fragility in some sectors, the economy of Ukraine is still showing remarkable growth, allowing the country to become one of the leading exporters of grain in the world as well as to become Europe's largest IT sector.¹⁹ Moreover, having to defend democratic rights through various revolutions and being in conflict for nearly a decade, Ukraine was still able to increase its Gross

¹⁶ *Important information for Ukrainian nationals*, New Zealand Immigration, 02 March 2022, <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/media-centre/news-notifications/important-information-for-ukrainian-nationals> [accessed: 26 March 2023].

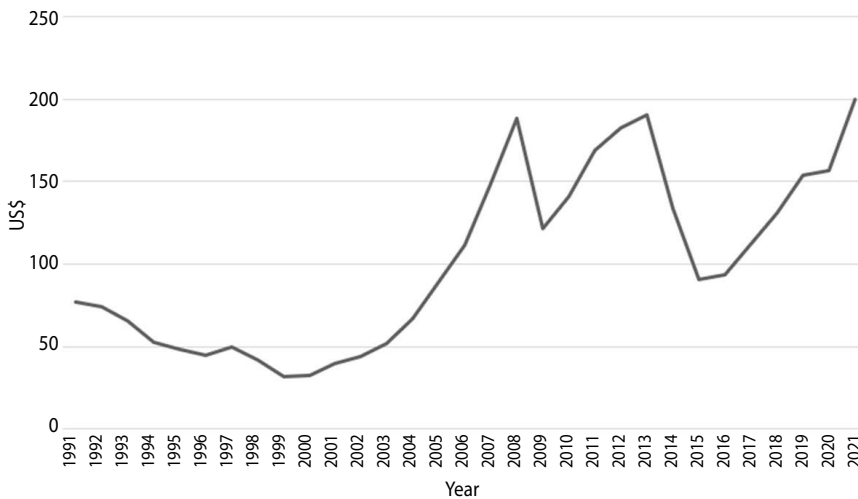
¹⁷ *Temporary visa for family of Ukrainians in New Zealand*, New Zealand Immigration, <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/new-zealand-visas/preparing-a-visa-application/support-family/new-temporary-visa-for-family-of-ukrainians-in-new-zealand> [accessed: 26 March 2023].

¹⁸ *Enabling the Business of Agriculture 2019: Country Profile Ukraine*, The World Bank, Washington 2019, <https://eba.worldbank.org/content/dam/documents/eba/UKR.pdf> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

¹⁹ *Ukraine Growth Study Final Document*, The World Bank, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/543041554211825812/pdf/Ukraine-Growth-Study-Final-Documents-Fast-Lasting-and-Kind.pdf> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

Domestic Product (GDP) (Figure 1). It was in 2009 that Ukraine faced an economic crisis due to its currency's exchange rate being pegged to the US dollar, resulting in high inflation. The country sought global support through the International Monetary Fund and was granted funding that helped Ukraine recover from the financial crisis.²⁰ Moreover, the Ukrainian GDP crashed in 2015, following the Russian annexation of Crimea and invasion of Eastern Ukraine, but the country was able to increase its GDP year-by-year, reaching the peak in 2021 despite having high spending on military demands necessary for securing its territories. These are all aspects favourable for New Zealand investments. Even though Ukraine's economy may still be unstable in some areas, it has proven its growth despite substantial circumstances and, therefore, New Zealand should be looking for building deeper relationships with Ukraine as there is notable potential in this country.

Figure 1. Ukrainian Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 1991–2021 (US\$ Billion)



Source: *GDP (current US\$) – Ukraine*, The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2021&locations=UA&start=1991> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

The next outcome to discuss is the possibility of a Russian victory in Ukraine and what would be the implications for New Zealand. Historical factors suggest that Russia will not support democracy in the country as neither the people nor the government are used to following an egalitarian approach. Russia was an absolute monarchy, then it shifted to a Communist regime and at present, the country is upholding its authoritarian status. Besides its history, Russia has been developing a new movement of geopolitics by relying on theories of Russian political analysts

²⁰ A. Åslund, *Ukraine's financial crisis, 2009*, "Eurasian Geography and Economics" 2009, vol. 50, no. 4, p. 371, <https://doi.org/10.2747/1539-7216.50.4.371>.

such as Alexander Dugin. It was determined that Dugin's vocabulary and ideas were directly influential in political and military discourses. It is not surprising that the description of Dugin as being 'Putin's brain' gained popularity.²¹ In his *Fourth Political Theory*, Dugin rejects all ideologies, but at the same time, promotes a new one by combining all other ideologies that have ever existed.²² He speaks unfavourably about the West and sees America as an adversary to humanity: 'The American Empire should be destroyed. And at one point, it will be.'²³ Therefore, the increasing concern about Russia becoming victorious in their military campaign against Ukraine is that Russia will more likely pursue an authoritarian government to act more aggressively. It will attempt to promote its state policies to other nations. Considering its aggressive ambitions, Russia may attempt to expand their territories to achieve its grand imperial ambition.²⁴ It is worth remembering that there is a possibility of creating a new regime in Russia, which is not known yet to the world; and more likely, it will be trying to achieve its goals by force. New Zealand needs to contemplate this important matter before it considers rebuilding its ties with Russia. Similar challenges may need to be negotiated with Russia's neighbour China, with whom New Zealand also has strong connections.

The Chinese position towards the Russian invasion is currently neutral; however, what the future intentions of China are and what benefits it may gain from the Ukrainian war remains unknown. On the first anniversary of the invasion, the Chinese government released an official statement suggesting peace talks as the best solution to end the war.²⁵ Incidentally, Russia and Ukraine tried negotiation talks through the Minsk Agreements and Russia failed to fulfil its promises. It is important to note that China demonstrates similar intentions towards Taiwan. Apart from Taiwan, China's rising power in the Asia-Pacific over the last decade has raised numerous concerns worldwide regarding their aspirations for influence. New Zealand and China recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of their diplomatic

²¹ G.S. Fellows, *The Foundations of Aleksandr Dugin's Geopolitics: Montage Fascism and Eurasianism as Blowback*, Master of Arts Thesis, University of Denver, 2018, pp. 72–87, <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2516&context=etd> [accessed: 30 May 2023].

²² A. Dugin, *The Fourth Political Theory*, Arktos Media, London 2012, Kindle, Loc. 3526–3621.

²³ *Ibidem*, Kindle, Loc. 3535.

²⁴ W. Courtney, *Russia's Appetite May Extend Beyond Ukraine*, RAND Corporation, 17 February 2023, <https://www.rand.org/blog/2023/02/russias-appetite-may-extend-beyond-ukraine.html> [accessed: 29 March 2023].

²⁵ *China's Position on the Political Settlement of the Ukraine Crisis*, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 24 February 2023, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/202302/t20230224_11030713.html [accessed: 30 March 2023].

relationship²⁶ and were able to establish a robust and growing trade relationship.²⁷ New Zealand's relationship with China is necessary for political survival, but a significant point is the divergence of these nations' approaches in important areas, such as human rights and international law.²⁸ A warning sign may be that China is interested in Russia winning the war, as both countries have similar situations regarding claims of their neighbouring territories. Moreover, China and Russia are two authoritarian states and increasingly respect their ideological approaches. Therefore, New Zealand could look at Russia's actions in Ukraine as an indicator of potential Chinese ambitions within the broader Pacific region.

New Zealand also needs to consider the possibility of Ukraine winning the war, which will lead to the relocation of dominance in the eastern flank of NATO. Even though the security segment of Ukraine is currently at risk as the war is still ongoing, Ukraine gained extensive respect from most of the Western world because of the desire to defend its democracy and to move away from the Russian regime and corruption. It is important to note that most of New Zealand's international partners have provided substantial support to Ukraine with military and humanitarian aid.²⁹ Another point to consider are Ukraine's endeavours to strengthen its security system by signing the following agreements before the invasion: (a) the Lublin Triangle (2020) between Poland, Lithuania, and Ukraine to deepen military, economic, political, and cultural cooperation;³⁰ and (b) the British–Polish–Ukrainian trilateral pact (2022) aiming to improve cybersecurity and energy security as well as counter disinformation.³¹ Poland is Ukraine's partner in both agreements as well as one of the major supporters of Ukraine since the early days of the invasion. Warsaw helped Kyiv with military and humanitarian aid as well as hosted millions

²⁶ J. Ardern, *50th Anniversary of New Zealand China Diplomatic Relations*, Beehive.govt.nz – The official website of the New Zealand Government, 09 December 2022, <https://www.beehive.govt.nz/speech/50th-anniversary-new-zealand-china-diplomatic-relations> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

²⁷ *China*, New Zealand Foreign Affairs and Trade, <https://www.mfat.govt.nz/en/countries-and-regions/asia/china/> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

²⁸ A.M. Brady, *New Zealand-China relations: Common points and differences*, "New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies" 2008, vol. 10, no. 2, pp. 19–20.

²⁹ C. Trebesch *et al.*, *The Ukraine Support Tracker: Which countries help Ukraine and how?*, Kiel Institute for the World Economy, February 2023 ("Kiel Working Papers", no. 2218), https://www.ifw-kiel.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/-ifw/Kiel_Working_Paper/2022/KWP_2218_Which_countries_help_Ukraine_and_how_/KWP_2218_Trebesch_et_al_Ukraine_Support_Tracker.pdf [accessed: 29 March 2023].

³⁰ J. Bornio, *Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine Inaugurate 'Lublin Triangle'*, "Eurasia Daily Monitor" 2020, vol. 17, no. 115, pp. 140–145.

³¹ P. Biskup, J. Rogers, H. Shelest, *The trilateral initiative: Rekindling relations between Britain, Poland and Ukraine*, Council on Geostrategy, 01 February 2023, <https://www.geostrategy.org.uk/research/the-trilateral-initiative-rekindling-relations-between-britain-poland-and-ukraine> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

of Ukrainian refugees. It is not only that Poland became a military hub for Ukraine, but it is also a rising power in Europe.³² Therefore, it may be favourable for New Zealand to deepen its relationship with Ukraine to remain in line with its traditional partners, to pursue international security issues, and to seek economic opportunities through Ukraine as a gateway to Europe.

Conclusion

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought fundamental shifts in regional powers. It impacted small states' security, as well as global political and economic structures. New Zealand was also affected by the disruption of security in Eastern Europe and embraced the coalition of nations providing aid to Ukraine, whose desire was to maintain international law and the rules-based international system. New Zealand's response to the invasion was to support Ukrainian rights to sovereignty and to foster relationships with large states as upholders of international institutions. The complex nature of the imbalance of security in Eastern Europe creates a dilemma for New Zealand, as it needs to cooperate with great powers that it both agrees and disagrees with. As an alternative, New Zealand could consider building relationships with like-minded small nations such as Ukraine. This kind of relationship can be even more effective than one with larger powers. Even though New Zealand and Ukraine are two heterogeneous nations vis-à-vis geopolitics, government structure, economic system, social life, geographical positioning, cultural, and traditional aspects, the two nations have common identities, values, and principles on which an effective relationship could be leveraged. Both nations understand the necessity to comply with international law and rules-based order, for New Zealand this order is one of the ways to ensure political survival, while Ukraine sees these institutions as the route to freedom from historical Russian influence.

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³² P. Buras, *East side story: Poland's new role in the European Union*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 16 February 2023, <https://ecfr.eu/article/east-side-story-polands-new-role-in-the-european-union> [accessed: 30 March 2023].

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What is the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on New Zealand and what are the future implications?

Abstract

In 2014, Russia annexed Crimea and conducted insurgency operations in Eastern Ukraine resulting in a stalemate for the next eight years and followed by a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This has triggered an imbalance in international security worldwide as well as impacted small states such as New Zealand. To remain in the same circle of great powers, New Zealand suspended a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with Russia and changed its international policies by introducing a sanctions programme against Russia. New Zealand also provided humanitarian and military aid to Ukraine and offered immigration support. The invasion served as a pivotal point for New Zealand's diplomacy, security, and economy. The aim of this article is to identify what choices New Zealand needs to make in order to secure its position within the great powers' domain. By providing a narrative of the possible future scenarios, the study will recommend strategies for New Zealand as a small state to find a right fit within the great powers' dominion. The article suggests the necessity for New Zealand to follow international law and rules-based order as one of the guarantors of the country's security and economic stability.

Keywords: Ukraine, New Zealand, Russia, post-colonial, small state