

## *What helped Ukraine resist the initial Russian invasion?*

### Key Concepts:

**Internal factors:** Factors that come from inside a country itself. Here, it can be a government's choices, its own resources, leadership, and the actions of its people.

**External factors:** Factors that come from outside a country. These include the decisions, support, or actions of other countries and organizations.

In February 2022, Russia launched a full invasion of Ukraine. Analysts projected the war to be quick with a rapid collapse of the Ukrainian government. After all, the Russian military was expected to greatly overmatch the defensive capabilities of the Ukrainian forces. On February 25th, 2022, CNN reported that US intelligence officials feared Kyiv could fall under Russian control within days.

None of that happened. Ukraine held the capital, Kyiv, and Russian forces withdrew from northern Ukraine by April. There are several explanations that came together to produce this significant result for Ukraine.

### 1. Ukrainian military effectiveness

RUSI, a British defence research institute, published a study built on operational data supplied by the Ukrainian General Staff. It found Ukraine dispersed its arsenals, aircraft and air defences across several sites beforehand. This significantly limited the damage of Russia's opening strikes. RUSI also corrects a widespread claim: Kyiv was defended

principally by massed artillery fire from two brigades, not by the portable anti-tank weapons, like javelins, that dominated media coverage.

### 2. Societal resilience

Chatham House, another British think tank, had identified Ukraine's volunteer movement and civil-society networks as giving Ukraine the potential for resilience against Russian threats. Volunteer networks organised evacuations and supplied troops, at times outpacing the logistics and ability of the Ukrainian state.

### 3. Russian failure

RUSI concludes the Russian plan's central deficiency was the absence of reversionary courses of action. They simply had no alternative once rapid victory failed. Even once the invasion struggled to achieve its primary objectives, Russian forces still continued to operate on original planning.

#### 4. External support

The Kiel Institute, a German organization that conducts economic analysis, tracks government aid to Ukraine from 41 countries. The data shows that from April 2022, the West became Ukraine's strategic depth. Its reliance on funding and military aid from the United States and other western powers became the reserve Ukraine could fall back on. Ukraine's capacity to defend its formal independence rested substantially on decisions taken in other states, over which Zelenskyy had some influence but not control.

#### 5. Soft power.

Writing in May 2022, political scientist Joseph Nye argued that Zelenskyy had effectively used soft power – the ability to achieve his preferred outcomes through persuasion and attraction, and not force or threats. The president declined evacuation, famously saying he needed 'ammunition, not a ride'. Furthermore, he addressed Western parliaments directly, and, in Nye's view, converted sympathy into tangible military aid. Nye also credited his soft power skills with Germany suspending the Nord Stream 2 pipeline and raising defence spending.

There were, however, limits to Zelenskyy's soft power. Over 40 states abstained from or opposed UN resolutions condemning the invasion, and around 50 opposed removing Russia from the UN Human Rights Council. India, the world's largest democracy, declined to criticize Russia. This shows that Russia remained a powerful influence over other states, even while Ukraine was gaining sympathy abroad.

However, roughly 140 states did vote to condemn, including about 60 per cent of African states. So, perhaps, "the world rallied to Ukraine" is more convincing than "the world sat this one out". It is important to remember, however, that not everyone came to Ukraine's aid.

Ukraine's ability to resist Russian invasion shows that for a conflict where the aggressor has more military power than the country invaded – a large combination of factors, both internal and external, is necessary for a successful resistance.



## Comprehension Questions

1. What does RUSI identify as the central deficiency of the Russian plan?
2. How did Ukraine's social organization help the resistance?
3. In your own words, explain soft power and how it contributed to Ukraine's resistance.
4. Summarise the evidence given for and against the claim that the world rallied to Ukraine.
5. What does the reading mean by saying Ukraine had "influence but not control" over decisions in other capitals?

## Thinking Questions

1. Do Ukrainian effectiveness and external support depend on each other?
2. Nye wrote in May 2022, early in the war. To what extent does the timing of an analysis limit its ability to assess the situation?
3. Explain to what extent, in this case, sovereignty depends on interdependence.
4. Compare the evidentiary strength of the Kiel Institute dataset with Nye's argument about attraction. How can these complement each other?
5. To what extent might support for Ukraine be reliant on donor states' own strategic interests?

| What helped Ukraine resist the initial Russian invasion?                                                                  |                  |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| For all of the different factors that supported Ukrainian resistance, categorize them into internal and external factors. |                  |
| Internal Factors                                                                                                          | External Factors |
|                                                                                                                           |                  |

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|                                                                                                                           |                  |

Now, thinking about the central question of the lesson, **do you think internal or external factors were more important to the effectiveness of the Ukrainian resistance to Russian invasion?**

- Clearly state your answer to the question
- Justify your position with at least two pieces of evidence.
- Your response should make reference to both internal and external factors

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## Further Research

1. Research the resistance in more detail. Find two events where Ukraine successfully resisted Russia that occurred between February and April, 2022. Make a list of internal and external factors that contributed to Ukraine's success.

| Event 1:              |                  |
|-----------------------|------------------|
| Description of event: |                  |
| Internal Factors      | External Factors |
|                       |                  |
| Event 2:              |                  |
| Description of event: |                  |
| Internal Factors      | External Factors |
|                       |                  |

2. From the two events you research, add more to your response above. Were internal or external factors more important?

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