

Russia has launched a [full-scale invasion](#) of Ukraine after President Vladimir Putin authorised, what he called, a “special military operation” in the east.

The attacks on Thursday came as weeks of intense diplomacy and the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia failed to deter Putin, who had massed between 150,000 and 200,000 soldiers along the borders of Ukraine.

Here are five things you should know about what led to the invasion, what is happening now and what could come next.

[Editor’s note: This explainer, originally published in January, has been updated to reflect the latest developments].

What is the background to the conflict?

Ukraine, which was part of the Russian empire for centuries before becoming a Soviet republic, won independence as the USSR broke up in 1991. It moved to shed its Russian imperial legacy and forge increasingly close ties with the West.

A decision by Kremlin-leaning Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich to reject an association agreement with the European Union in favour of closer ties with Moscow led to mass protests that saw him removed as the leader in 2014.

Russia responded by annexing Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula and throwing its weight behind a separatist rebellion that broke out in Ukraine’s east.

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Ukraine and the West accused Russia of sending its troops and weapons to back the rebels. Moscow denied that, saying the Russians who joined the separatists were volunteers.

According to Kyiv, more than 14,000 people have died in the fighting that devastated Donbas, Ukraine’s eastern industrial heartland.