

FX Flash

Will AXJs Hold Up Against Russian Invasion?

Invasion Begun

On the morning of 24 Feb 2022, Russia President Putin declared the start of military operation in Ukraine after weeks of guessing and speculation about Russia's intent after it amassed 150,000 troops near Ukraine's borders. Putin said that his goal was to "demilitarise" Ukraine and not occupy it. In a statement, US President Biden said that Putin has chosen a premeditated war that will bring catastrophic loss of life and human suffering and the US and its allies will hold Russia accountable.

Bigger Moves Seen in Oil, Gold and Equities

The full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine has resulted in an initial sell-off across most asset classes. At one point, Russia MOEX index slumped 33%, while RUB fell 7% to record low (vs. USD). Closer to home, most Asian equities also traded lower with FTSE STI down 3.5% and NIFTY down 4.8% at close. Oil prices surged over 8% to trade at almost \$106/bbl (worries of global supply chain disruptions) while gold extended its run-up to 17-month high of above-\$1,970 handle (risk aversion) before pulling back.

Within the region, some Asian FX similarly slumped up to >1%, although losses were pared overnight. Some overshooting and retracement seem to be occurring across asset classes (US equity rebound overnight too) amid the expected volatility, with long USD haven flows also paring a tad. For now, it seems like inflation fears (exacerbated by elevated oil) could keep UST yields supported and constraint the extent of decline in USDJPY. We are mindful that elevated oil prices, despite overnight pullback, could still lead to more discernible drags on KRW, THB and INR in the current episode versus likely resilience for oil-linked MYR. Looking back on historical geopolitical events, while the trough for most Asian FX took varied durations to materialize, most losses had been reversed on average after three months. Yuan remains well-cushioned for now and can serve as an anchor for other AxJ FX.

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Sharp Spikes in Gold and Oil to Multi-Year highs But a Quick Recovery



Source: Bloomberg, Maybank FX Research & Strategy

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geFX Moves on 24th Feb and in Past Geopolitical Episodes (% Change)

	Russia Attack on Ukraine	September 11 attacks, 11 Sep 2001			Iraq War, 20 Mar 2003			Mar 2014 Russia's annexation of Crimea, 20 Feb 2014			Brexit Referendum Results, 24 Jun 2016			US-China trade war, 6 July 2018			Turkish Offensive into North-Eastern Syria, 6 Oct 2019		
	Intraday % Chg, 24 Feb, 3pm	1-Day	1-Week	3-Mths	1-Day	1-Week	3-Mths	1-Day	1-Week	3-Mths	1-Day	1-Week	3-Mths	1-Day	1-Week	3-Mths	1-Day	1-Week	3-Mths
RUB	-6.0	2.4	0.0	-2.0	0.2	0.2	3.3	0.1	-0.7	3.7	-2.4	-0.6	-0.5	0.3	1.5	-4.2	-0.5	0.6	4.8
BGN	-0.6	0.0	1.9	-1.7	0.3	1.0	10.9	-0.1	-0.3	-0.2	-2.4	-2.5	-2.1	0.4	-0.2	-1.8	-0.1	0.5	1.8
RON	-0.5	0.0	0.0	-4.9	0.0	-0.8	2.7	-0.2	-0.4	1.5	-2.7	-2.8	-0.4	0.6	-0.1	-1.9	-0.1	0.3	1.0
ZAR	-1.0	-0.8	-1.2	-22.0	0.4	3.3	3.2	0.3	2.0	5.7	-4.4	-2.1	6.2	0.5	1.8	-7.6	-0.9	1.7	6.8
HUF	-1.6	0.0	-0.3	-0.3	0.2	0.9	1.6	0.2	0.5	2.3	-3.6	-3.0	0.0	0.6	-0.6	-1.7	-0.3	0.6	3.0
PLN	-1.8	-0.5	-0.4	3.5	0.2	0.1	7.3	0.0	-0.5	-0.6	-4.5	-2.8	0.0	0.4	0.5	-0.6	-0.4	0.7	3.5
CZK	-1.8	0.5	2.0	2.5	0.3	0.4	11.5	0.0	-0.1	-0.6	-2.6	-2.5	-1.6	0.5	-0.1	-1.0	-0.2	0.2	3.3
TRY	-2.6	-5.3	-6.7	-1.0	-0.2	0.1	21.2	0.7	-0.6	4.8	-2.5	-0.8	-3.4	0.3	-5.3	-24.1	-2.3	-3.2	-4.4
KRW	-0.8	0.2	-1.0	0.8	0.9	1.0	6.1	-0.4	-0.2	4.2	-2.6	-1.0	3.4	0.3	-0.5	-0.5	-0.4	0.7	3.0
TWD	-0.5	-0.1	0.2	0.7	0.0	-0.2	0.0	-0.1	0.1	0.5	-1.6	-0.9	2.5	0.2	0.0	-0.7	0.0	0.8	3.0
CNH	-0.1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-0.4	-1.1	-3.0	-0.8	-1.2	-1.3	-0.1	-0.5	-3.4	-0.3	0.4	2.2
MYR	-0.4	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.7	2.7	-3.3	-0.9	-3.5	0.2	0.4	-2.2	0.0	0.0	2.4
IDR	-0.3	-4.2	-2.4	-11.2	0.7	2.0	10.8	-0.2	1.3	2.5	-2.3	-0.5	0.3	0.3	0.4	-5.3	0.0	0.1	1.8
SGD	-0.5	0.0	1.0	-4.5	0.3	0.1	2.3	0.0	-0.3	0.9	-1.3	-0.7	-1.2	0.6	0.1	-1.1	-0.2	0.4	2.3
THB	-0.7	0.4	1.4	1.7	-0.4	0.0	3.0	0.1	0.0	0.2	-0.4	0.0	1.3	0.2	0.0	2.1	-0.2	0.1	0.9
PHP	-0.2	-0.8	-0.2	-1.2	1.1	2.2	2.7	-0.5	-0.1	1.9	-1.2	-1.5	-2.5	0.1	-0.1	-1.7	-0.3	0.1	1.9
INR	-1.3	-0.8	-0.4	-1.0	0.0	-0.4	2.4	0.5	-0.4	6.4	-0.9	-0.4	0.8	0.0	0.6	-7.0	0.2	-0.3	-0.7
VND	0.0	0.0	0.0	-0.4	0.0	0.0	-0.2	0.1	-0.1	-0.2	-0.1	0.0	-0.1	0.0	0.0	-1.3	0.0	0.0	0.1
EUR	-0.6	1.7	3.0	-0.8	0.4	1.2	10.6	-0.1	-0.3	-0.2	-2.4	-2.5	-1.7	0.5	-0.2	-1.8	-0.1	0.6	1.8
GBP	-0.4	1.3	0.6	-1.5	0.1	0.6	7.3	-0.2	-0.1	0.9	-8.1	-10.5	-12.4	0.5	-0.1	-2.1	-0.3	2.7	6.6
JPY	0.5	1.4	2.7	-3.9	0.1	0.4	2.2	0.0	-0.1	1.0	3.9	2.9	5.8	0.2	-1.7	-3.4	-0.3	-1.4	-1.5
CHF	0.0	2.9	5.1	1.5	0.4	0.9	5.4	-0.1	-0.2	-0.4	-1.6	-1.8	-1.6	0.4	-0.9	0.1	0.1	-0.1	2.5
AUD	-0.7	1.6	-2.1	0.2	0.5	1.4	14.0	0.1	-0.4	2.7	-1.9	-2.1	0.1	0.6	0.3	-3.8	-0.6	0.3	3.3
NZD	-0.8	0.4	-4.6	-3.8	0.9	-0.1	6.7	0.4	0.5	3.6	-1.7	-1.6	1.4	0.6	0.0	-4.0	-0.5	0.3	6.0
CAD	-0.4	-0.1	-0.5	-1.0	0.2	1.1	11.1	-0.2	-0.4	1.6	-1.8	-1.2	-2.5	0.3	-0.2	2.1	0.0	0.8	2.5
DXY	0.4	-0.4	-2.2	1.4	-0.4	-1.0	-8.3	0.2	0.4	-0.1	2.1	2.8	2.3	-0.5	0.5	1.4	0.2	-0.5	-2.0
Gold	1.8	5.3	6.5	0.5	-1.2	-1.8	6.2	0.9	1.5	-1.3	4.7	5.2	6.2	-0.2	-0.8	-4.8	-0.7	-1.0	1.6
Brent	5.7	5.9	3.4	-33.8	-4.7	-5.5	-1.8	-0.2	-0.9	-0.7	-4.9	-2.4	-8.0	-0.4	-3.8	11.5	0.0	3.7	13.5

Source: Bloomberg, Maybank FX Research & Strategy

As of late afternoon yesterday post Russian attack, amongst DM majors, high-beta AUD, NZD (sentiment channels) and EUR (given trade, energy linkages and sentiment channel) were more impacted but initial declines had been rather well-behaved (0.4% - 0.8% depreciation). Not surprisingly JPY held up (+0.5%) at first given its safe haven attributes.

We find EMEA FX most affected by the Ukraine tensions down (0.5%-6%). And this is likely due to their economic linkages via trade, investment flows and energy. Among AxJ FX, INR, THB and KRW led declines of between 0.7% and slightly >1% as of 24th late afternoon. Looking out, geopolitical situation remains fluid and tougher sanctions are expected to be imposed especially when Russia's move represents an invasion of Ukraine while planned US-Russia dialogues this week have been called off.

We looked at FX performance in past geopolitical episodes in a world post-2000.

At one glance, most geopolitical events in the past saw gold bid on most occasions, and Brent seeing mixed performances depending on whether there were risks to supply.

Notably, whether FX reacted in a knee-jerk fashion or sentiment drags took longer to materialize also depend on the specific event-flow accompanying each bout of geopolitical events.

Having said that though, we summarize some findings.

Currencies that are directly linked to the geopolitical events are typically hurt the most such as GBP in the event of the Brexit referendum. The Brexit referendum actually elicited the biggest reaction from all the currencies which suggests that **events that cause significant economic uncertainties have a greater impact on FX than military conflict**. This is also observed in the performance of Asian FX during the US-China trade war, where trade was viewed as a key channel for activity spillovers and drags on Asian FX turned out to be significant and protracted.

On the other hand, with the exception of the September 11 attacks—which coincided with a short economic recession in US and subsequently also led to the war in Afghanistan—most short-lived military conflicts in the past did not lead to lasting drags on currencies. This could be because of the more contained channels (mostly financial in nature) in which sentiment drags can proliferate. **While the trough for most FX took varied durations to materialize, most losses had been reversed on average after three months**.

For the Russian attack on Ukraine, sentiment drags are similarly likely to emerge through financial channels for most AxJ FX. **Notably, Russia's trade shares with most Asian economies are not significant**, with the exception of China (20% of Russian trade in 2020) and South Korea (3% of Russian trade in 2020). For CNH though, we note that it continues to display resilience to risk-off headlines centred on the geopolitical tensions. To be sure, yuan always had smaller sensitivity to exogenous events (geopolitical or Fed actions) compared to regional peers. With fundamental underpinnings of yuan (such as exports performance) steadfast and added boost from the recent USDCNY fixes (lower than median estimates), yuan remains well-cushioned and can serve as an anchor for other AxJ currencies.

Still, we are cognizant of one key channel of transmission—i.e., upward pressures on oil prices if conflict worsens. To some extent, this could lead to some differentiation in near-term FX performance. Among AxJ FX, energy importers such as INR, THB could see more discernible drags if oil prices stay elevated, while oil-linked MYR could be a tad more resilient.

Interestingly, upward pressures on oil prices as tensions escalate could also lead to raised bets for central bank tightening on inflation concerns. This could induce UST yields to see some support on dips, concomitantly constraining the extent of decline in interim USDJPY as well.

Amongst G7 we expect EUR to remain somewhat vulnerable to further US-Russia tensions over the invasion of Ukraine. EUR has shown that it can be affected due to trade, energy and sentiment channels. In 2020, Russia was 5th largest partner for EU exports and imports. A military conflict could see Russia potentially turning off gas supplies to Europe, in turn exacerbating Europe's energy shortage situation as the EU relies heavily on Russia for energy consumption (40% gas comes from Russia). We also keep a look out for harsher sanctions such as barring Russia's access to Belgium-based SWIFT for Russian money flows. Risk-sensitive AUD had a comparable pullback yesterday but further declines could be limited by

potential export gains - Australia had stepped up to export more LNG to the energy-starved continent.

Conclusion

Geopolitical situation is fluid and risks are 2-way for markets. We cannot predict how long the conflict will last but we draw on experience from past military conflicts (such as 9-11 attack, Crimea annexation in 2014 and Turkish offensive into Syria in 2009). Initial weaknesses in AXJs tend to reverse after a few weeks. Assuming this is not a long-drawn conflict, we expect the negativity surrounding AXJs to slowly fade. Moreover most of AXJ linkages to Russia is via sentiment channel, unlike EMEA FX and EUR where linkages extend beyond sentiments to trade, energy and investment flows.

We see interim weakness for EUR, given trade, energy and investment ties with Russia. Potentially ECB's policy normalisation plans may be delayed as ECB officials expressed caution. We look for better levels on dips to buy into. Near term support at 1.1110, 1.1040 levels. Resistance at 1.1290, 1.14 levels.

Potential supply chain disruptions may continue to keep oil and energy prices supported in the interim. inflation fears (exacerbated by elevated oil) could keep UST yields supported and constraint the extent of decline in USDJPY. We are mindful that elevated oil prices, despite overnight pullback, could still lead to more discernible drags on KRW, THB and INR in the current episode versus likely resilience for oil-linked MYR.

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