

## Russia Ukraine War - the Current Scenario

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### **Abstract**

*Ukrainian negotiators at talks with Russian officials demanded a ceasefire and humanitarian corridors to evacuate besieged citizens as Moscow's invasion forces surrounded and bombarded Ukrainian cities. Earlier, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov had said that Moscow is ready for talks to end the fighting in Ukraine but will continue to press its effort to destroy Ukraine's military infrastructure.*

*Ukraine's state emergencies agency said that at least 22 civilians have been killed in a Russian strike on a residential area in the city of Chernihiv, a city of 280,000 in Ukraine's north. It said the casualties could be higher as rescuers are continuing to look through debris for more bodies. The development comes even as talks between Russia and Ukraine were underway in Belarus. In other news, Major General Andrei Sukhovetsky, the commanding general of the Russian 7th Airborne Division, was killed in fighting in Ukraine earlier this week, news agency AP reported. His death was confirmed by a local officers' organization in the Krasnodar region in southern Russia. The circumstances of his death were not immediately clear.*

*Meanwhile, the International Criminal Court prosecutor has launched an investigation that could target senior officials believed responsible for war crimes, crimes against humanity or genocide amid a rising civilian death toll and widespread destruction of property during Russia's invasion of Ukraine. ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan announced the probe after dozens of the court's member states asked him to take action. After informing the court's judges of his decision to open an investigation that covers all sides in the conflict, Khan said, "Our work in the collection of evidence has now commenced."*

**Keywords:** *Russia, Ukraine, War, Belarus, invasion, civilians, criminal, military, genocide.*

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President Vladimir Putin denied he would invade his neighbor, but then he tore up a peace deal and unleashed what Germany calls "Putin's war", pouring forces into Ukraine's north, east and south.

As the number of dead climbs, Russia's leader stands accused of shattering peace in Europe. What happens next could jeopardise the continent's entire security structure.

In a pre-dawn TV address on 24 February, President Putin declared Russia could not feel "safe, develop and exist" because of what he claimed was a constant threat from modern Ukraine.

Immediately, airports and military headquarters were attacked, then tanks and troops rolled in from Russia, Russian-annexed Crimea and its ally Belarus. Now, warplanes have bombed major cities, and Russian forces have seized control of the key southern port city Kherson.

Russia refuses to use the terms war or even invasion; many of its leader's justifications for it were false or irrational.[1,2]

He claimed his goal was to protect people subjected to bullying and genocide and aim for the "demilitarisation and de-Nazification" of Ukraine. There has been no genocide in Ukraine: it is a vibrant democracy, led by a president who is Jewish.

"How could I be a Nazi?" said Volodymyr Zelensky, who likened Russia's onslaught to Nazi Germany's invasion in World War Two. Ukraine's chief rabbi and the Auschwitz Memorial have also rejected Russia's slur.

### How much of Ukraine does Russia control?



Source: Institute for the Study of War (as of 23:00 GMT, 1 March)



President Putin has frequently accused Ukraine of being taken over by extremists, ever since its pro-Russian president, Viktor Yanukovich, was ousted in 2014 after months of protests against his rule.

Russia then retaliated by seizing the southern region of Crimea and triggering a rebellion in the east, backing separatists who have fought Ukrainian forces in a war that has claimed 14,000 lives.[3,4]

Late in 2021, Russia began deploying big numbers of troops close to Ukraine's borders, while repeatedly denying it was going to attack. Then Mr Putin scrapped a 2015 peace deal for the east and recognised areas under rebel control as independent.

Russia has long resisted Ukraine's move towards the European Union and the West's defensive military alliance, Nato. Announcing Russia's invasion, he accused Nato of threatening "our historic future as a nation".

It is now clear Russia is seeking to seize the big cities and overthrow Ukraine's democratically elected government. President Zelensky said he had been warned "the enemy has designated me as target number one; my family is target number two".

Russia's stated aim is that Ukraine be freed from oppression and "cleansed of the Nazis". Under this false narrative of a Ukraine run by fascists since 2014, Mr Putin has spoken of bringing to court "those who committed numerous bloody crimes against civilians".

His long-term ambitions for Ukraine are unknown. He denies seeking to occupy Ukraine and rejected a UK accusation in January that he was plotting to install a pro-Kremlin puppet. One unconfirmed intelligence report says he aims to split the country in two.

He faces stiff resistance from a deeply hostile population, but he has shown he is prepared to bomb civilian areas to fulfill his goals.

There is no immediate threat to Russia's Baltic neighbors, but Nato has bolstered their defenses just in case.[5,6]

Ahead of the invasion, Russia's public focus was always on the areas held by Russian-backed rebels in the east. But that changed when President Putin recognised their independence.

Not only did he make clear he saw them as no longer part of Ukraine, he revealed he backed their claims to far more Ukrainian territory. The self-styled people's republics cover little more than a third of the regions of Donetsk of Luhansk and the rebels covet the rest, too.

These are terrifying times for Ukrainians as bombs rain down on cities and civilians rush to Cold War-era bomb shelters.

Thousands have died already in what German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has dubbed "Putin's war" - civilians as well as soldiers. Russia's onslaught has prompted hundreds of thousands of people to flee across Ukraine's borders. Poland, Hungary, Romania, Moldova and Slovakia are seeing a big influx, while the EU suggests more than seven million people could be displaced.

Russia's military forces have kept up their punishing campaign to capture Ukraine's capital with fighting and artillery fire in Kyiv's suburbs, even as Russian and Ukrainian negotiators held a new round of talks. The attacks around Kyiv came a day after Russia escalated its offensive by shelling areas close to the Polish border. In the eastern city of Kharkiv, firefighters doused the remains of a four-storey residential building on a street of apartments and shops. Ukrainian

emergency services said a strike hit the building, leaving smouldering piles of wood and metal. It was unclear whether there were casualties. The surrounded southern city of Mariupol, where the war has produced some of the greatest human suffering, remained cut off despite earlier talks on creating aid or evacuation convoys. Mariupol, a city of about 400,000, has been subjected to days of heavy bombardment. Its people are running dangerously short of food and water, the city's deputy mayor Sergei Orlov, says, and there is "no electricity, no water supply, no heating, no sanitary system". People are being forced to melt snow to drink, and chop wood to cook and keep warm in sub-zero temperatures, he says.

### **Discussion**

Russia's leader has even put his nuclear forces on high alert, days after threatening the West with "consequences the like of which you have never seen" if it stands in his way. Such scenes are horrifying for the entire continent, witnessing a major power invading a European neighbour for the first time in decades. Recalling the Cold War, Volodymyr Zelensky spoke of Ukraine battling to avoid a new iron curtain closing Russia off from the civilised world.

For Europe's leaders, this invasion has brought some of the darkest hours since World War Two. France's Emmanuel Macron has spoken of a turning point in Europe's history, while Germany's Olaf Scholz has warned that "Putin wants a Russian empire".

For the families of both armed forces, these are anxious days. Ukrainians have already suffered a gruelling eight-year war with Russian proxies. The military has called up all reservists aged 18 to 60 years old.[7,8]

This is not a war Russia's population was prepared for, either, as the invasion was rubber-stamped by a largely unrepresentative upper house of parliament. Thousands of anti-war protesters have been detained in a state whose main opposition leader was already behind bars. Independent Russian broadcasters Dozhd and Ekho Moskvy have also been taken off the air.

Nato's defensive alliance has made clear there are no plans to send combat troops to Ukraine itself. But member countries have provided weapons and field hospitals and the EU, for the first time in its history, is to buy and send arms and other equipment.



**The paediatrics ward of this Kyiv hospital was forced to shelter in the basement as Russian forces attacked**

Nato has deployed several thousand troops in the Baltic states and Poland and for the first time is activating part of its much larger rapid reaction force. Nato will not say where but some could go



to Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia.

At the same time, the West is targeting Russia's economy, financial institutions and individuals:

- The EU, US, UK, Japan and Canada are cutting off key Russian banks from the international Swift payment network, which allows the smooth and rapid transfer of money across borders
- The EU, UK and Canada have shut off their airspace to Russian airlines
- Personal sanctions are being imposed on President Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov by the US, EU and UK, while 351 Russian MPs are being targeted by the EU
- Germany has halted approval on Russia's Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, a major investment by both Russia and European companies
- Russia's state-run media Sputnik and Russia Today, seen as a Kremlin mouthpiece, are being banned across the EU
- The Russian city of St Petersburg will no longer be able to host this year's Champions League final and the Russian Grand Prix will not take place in Sochi.
- The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) has banned Russian and Belarusian athletes from competing, and has expelled them from the Games in Beijing.[9,10]

Ukrainian forces said they retook a strategically important suburb of Kyiv early, as Russian forces squeezed other areas near the capital and their attack on the embattled southern port of Mariupol raged unabated. Explosions and bursts of gunfire shook Kyiv, and black smoke rose from a spot in the north. Intensified artillery fire could be heard from the northwest, where Russia has sought to encircle and capture several suburban areas of the capital, a crucial target. Residents sheltered at home or underground under a 35-hour curfew imposed by city authorities that runs .Russian forces also carried on with their siege of Mariupol after the southern port city's defenders refused demands to surrender, with fleeing civilians describing relentless bombardments and corpses lying in the streets. But the Kremlin's ground offensive in other parts of the country advanced slowly or not at all due to lethal hit-and-run attacks by the Ukrainians. Ukrainian troops forced Russian forces out of the Kyiv suburb of Makariv after a fierce battle, Ukraine's Defense Ministry said. The regained territory allowed Ukrainian forces to retake control of a key highway and block Russian troops from surrounding Kyiv from the northwest. Still, the Defense Ministry said Russian forces battling toward Kyiv were able to partially take other northwest suburbs, Bucha, Hostomel and Irpin, some of which had been under attack almost since Russia's military invaded .Officials in the city of Boryspil, which is close to Boryspil International Airport, are trying to calm the population amid alarm about a possible impending attack by Russian forces pursuing their offensive on the Ukrainian capital.

Ukraine never join Nato but that the alliance turns the clock back to 1997 and reverses its eastward expansion. He has complained Russia has "nowhere further to retreat to - do they think we'll just sit idly by?".

He wants Nato to remove its forces and military infrastructure from member states that joined the alliance from 1997 and not to deploy "strike weapons near Russia's borders". That means Central Europe, Eastern Europe and the Baltics.

But this goes beyond Nato. In the words of Germany's chancellor, Russia's leader "wants to take over Europe according to his world view".

Last year, President Putin wrote a long piece describing Russians and Ukrainians as "one nation", and he has described the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 as the "disintegration of historical Russia".

He has claimed modern Ukraine was entirely created by communist Russia and is now a puppet state, controlled by the West. It was his pressure on Ukraine not to sign an association treaty with the EU in 2013 that sparked the protests that ousted its pro-Kremlin president.

In President Putin's eyes, the West promised back in 1990 that Nato would expand "not an inch to the east", but did so anyway.

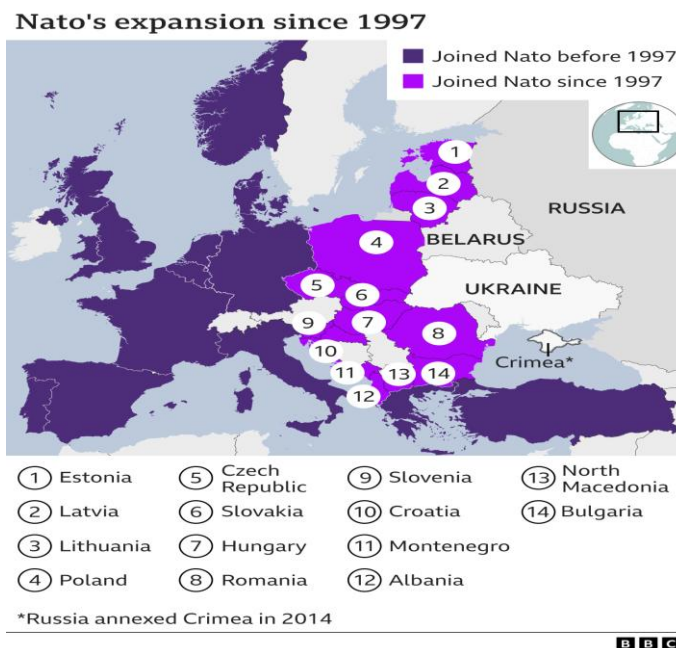
That was before the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, so the promise made to the Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev only referred to East Germany in the context of a reunified Germany. Mr Gorbachev said later "the topic of Nato expansion was never discussed" at the time.[11]

**Results**

Nato is a defensive alliance with an open-door policy to new members, and its 30 member states are adamant that will not change.

Ukraine's president wants a clear timeline, but there is no prospect of Ukraine joining for a long time, as Germany's chancellor has made clear.

The idea that any current Nato country would give up its membership is a non-starter.



There seems very little chance for the moment, even if the two sides have held talks on the border with Belarus.

Russia insists Kyiv lays down its arms and demilitarises, and that will not happen.

Beyond the war, any eventual deal would have to cover the status of eastern Ukraine as well as arms control with the West.



The Russian and US presidents have spoken several times via video link and over the phone

The US had offered to start talks on limiting short- and medium-range missiles, as well as on a new treaty on intercontinental missiles. Russia wanted all US nuclear arms barred from beyond their national territories.

Russia had been positive towards a proposed "transparency mechanism" of mutual checks on missile bases - two in Russia, and two in Romania and Poland.[12]

### **Implications**

The Russo-Ukrainian War is an ongoing war primarily involving Russia, pro-Russian forces, and Belarus on one side, and Ukraine and its international supporters on the other. Conflict began in February 2014 following the Revolution of Dignity, and focused on the status of Crimea and parts of the Donbas, internationally recognised as part of Ukraine. The conflict includes the Russian annexation of Crimea (2014), the War in Donbas (2014–present), naval incidents, cyber warfare, and political tensions. While trying to hide its involvement, Russia gave military backing to separatists in the Donbas from 2014 onwards. Having built up a large military presence on the border from late 2021, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, which is ongoing.

Following the Ukrainian Euromaidan protests and subsequent removal of pro-Russian Ukrainian President Viktor Yanukovich on 22 February 2014, pro-Russian unrest erupted in parts of Ukraine. Russian soldiers without insignia took control of strategic positions and infrastructure in the Ukrainian territory of Crimea. Unmarked Russian troops seized the Crimean Parliament and Russia organized a widely-criticised referendum, whose outcome was for Crimea to join Russia. It then annexed Crimea. In April 2014, demonstrations by pro-Russian groups in the Donbas region of Ukraine escalated into a war between the Ukrainian military and Russian-backed separatists of the self-declared Donetsk and Luhansk republics. In August, unmarked Russian military vehicles crossed the border into the Donetsk republic. An undeclared war began between Ukrainian forces and separatists intermingled with Russian troops, although Russia



denied the presence of its troops in the Donbas. The war settled into a stalemate, with repeated failed attempts at ceasefire. In 2015, a package of agreements called Minsk II were signed by Russia and Ukraine, but a number of disputes prevented them from being fully implemented. By 2019, 7% of Ukraine's territory was classified by the Ukrainian government as temporarily occupied territories, while the Russian government had indirectly acknowledged the presence of its troops in Ukraine. [13]

In 2021 and early 2022, there was a major Russian military build-up around Ukraine's borders. NATO accused Russia of planning an invasion, which it denied. Russian president Putin criticized the enlargement of NATO as a threat to his country and demanded Ukraine be barred from ever joining the military alliance. [14] He also expressed irredentist views, questioning Ukraine's right to exist and claiming Ukraine was wrongfully created by Soviet Russia. On 21 February 2022, Russia officially recognised the two self-proclaimed separatist states in the Donbas, and sent troops to the territories. Three days later, Russia invaded Ukraine after Russian president Vladimir Putin announced a "special military operation". Much of the international community and organizations such as Amnesty International have condemned Russia for its actions in post-revolutionary Ukraine, accusing it of breaking international law and violating Ukrainian sovereignty. Many countries implemented economic sanctions against Russia, Russian individuals or companies, especially after the 2022 invasion. [15]

### **Conclusion**

Explosions struck the capital, Kyiv, and an apparent rocket strike destroyed an administration building in Kharkiv, the second largest city, killing civilians. [16]



**The remains of Russian military vehicles in the town of Bucha, close to Kyiv, Ukraine.**



**Members of the General Assembly approved the resolution during a special session of the**



**General Assembly at the United Nations headquarters.**

Russia claims its forces have captured Kherson, in Ukraine's south. Local authorities deny Kherson has fallen, but say Russian troops have encircled the city. Deaths mount as Russian attacks pound several cities, including northeastern Kharkiv and Mariupol, in the southeast. Russia's negotiator says a second round of talks will take place on Thursday, while Ukraine is casting doubt on the plan. The UN says more than 870,000 people have fled Ukraine in search of safety in other countries. [17]

In Mariupol, with communications crippled, movement restricted and many residents in hiding, the fate of those inside an art school flattened on Sunday and a theater that was blown apart four days earlier was unclear. More than 1,300 people were believed to be sheltering in the theater, and 400 were estimated to have been in the art school. Perched on the Sea of Azov, Mariupol is a crucial port for Ukraine and lies along a stretch of territory between Russia and Crimea. As such, it is a key target that has been besieged for more than three weeks and has seen some of the worst suffering of the war. It is not clear how close its capture might be. Ukraine's Defense Ministry said that their forces were still defending the city and had destroyed a Russian patrol boat and electronic warfare complex. Over the weekend, Moscow had offered safe passage out of Mariupol – one corridor leading east to Russia, another going west to other parts of Ukraine – in return for the city's surrender before daybreak Monday. Ukraine flatly rejected the offer well before the deadline. Mariupol had a prewar population of about 430,000. Around a quarter were believed to have left in the opening days of the war, and tens of thousands escaped over the past week by way of the humanitarian corridors. Other attempts have been thwarted by the fighting. Mariupol officials said on March 15 that at least 2,300 people had died in the siege, with some buried in mass graves. There has been no official estimate since then, but the number is feared to be far higher after six more days of bombardment. For those who remain, conditions have become brutal. The assault has cut off Mariupol's electricity, water and food supplies and severed communication with the outside world, plunging residents into a fight for survival. Fresh commercial satellite images showed smoke rising from buildings newly hit by Russian artillery. [9,10]

Those who have made it out of Mariupol told of a devastated city. "There are no buildings there anymore," said 77-year-old Maria Fiodorova, who crossed the border to Poland on Monday after five days of travel. Olga Nikitina, who fled Mariupol for the western Ukrainian city of Lviv, where she arrived Sunday, said gunfire blew out her windows, and her apartment dropped below freezing. "Battles took place over every street. Every house became a target," she said. A long line of vehicles stood on a road in Bezimenne, east of Mariupol, as residents of the besieged city sought shelter at a temporary camp set up by Russian-backed separatists in the Donetsk region. An estimated 5,000 people from Mariupol have taken refuge in the camp. Many arrived in cars with signs that said "children" in Russian. [11] A woman who gave her name as Yulia said she and her family sought shelter in Bezimenne after a bombing destroyed six houses behind her home. "That's why we got in the car, at our own risk, and left in 15 minutes because everything is destroyed there, dead bodies are lying around," she said. "They don't let us pass through everywhere - there are shootings." In all, more than 8,000 people escaped to safer areas Monday through humanitarian corridors, including about 3,000 from Mariupol, Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said. Russian shelling of a corridor wounded four children on a route leading out of Mariupol, Zelenskyy said. Matthew Saltmarsh, a spokesperson for the U.N. refugee agency called the speed and scale of people fleeing danger in Ukraine "unprecedented in recent

memory."

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