



# Russia's Invasion of Ukraine: Military and Intelligence Issues and Aspects

Updated March 7, 2022

On February 21, 2022, Russian President Vladimir Putin [announced](#) that Russia would recognize the [independence](#) of two Russia-controlled areas in eastern Ukraine (the so-called [Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics](#), or DNR/LNR). Russian recognition appeared to include the entire regions of Donetsk and Luhansk, most of which had remained under Ukrainian control since Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014. Shortly after February 21, Putin announced Russia would send "[peacekeepers](#)" into the DNR/LNR to defend against [fabricated Russian charges](#) of [Ukrainian plans](#) for [invasion and sabotage attempts](#). Despite denials from Russian officials, Russia had spent months [amassing a significant portion](#) of its [military capabilities](#) around Ukraine. The attack began after Russia [had mobilized](#) between [150,000 and 190,000](#) personnel on the Ukrainian border, in Belarus, and in Ukraine's occupied Crimea region, according to U.S. government [estimates](#). Russia's invasion follows months of [warning and concern](#) from the [Biden Administration](#), European allies, NATO, and some Members of Congress.

## Russia's Invasion of Ukraine

On February 24, [Putin](#) announced in a [televised address](#) a "[special military operation](#)" to protect the civilian population and to "[demilitarize](#)" and "[de-Nazify](#)" Ukraine (the latter term understood by many observers as a false pretext for overthrowing the democratically elected Ukrainian government).

Hours after Putin's speech, the invasion [began](#) with a [massed air and missile attack](#) against key targets, including logistics centers, naval installations, command and control centers, air defenses, and critical infrastructure. [Russia](#) initiated [large-scale precision guided missile \(PGM\)](#) and rocket artillery attacks across Ukraine. In the initial attack, the [Pentagon](#) stated that Russia launched over 100 short-range ballistic missiles (SRBM), including Iskander-M SRBMs, and air- and sea-launched cruise missiles. [Some observers](#) believe Russia's initial strategy was to achieve air superiority, degrade Ukrainian air defenses, and undermine the Ukrainian military's ability to coordinate defenses and counterattacks. This [initial bombardment](#), however, was more limited in duration and scale than some analysts expected and did not establish full air superiority.

After the air and missile assault, Russian ground forces [attacked](#) from [multiple directions](#): north from occupied Crimea in the direction of Kherson; limited incursions west from DNR/LNR; from Russia's Belgorod and Kursk toward Ukraine's cities of Kharkiv and Sumy; and a strong thrust toward Kyiv.

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IN11872

**Initially**, Russia made the most progress in the south, driving north from Crimea toward Kherson and eventually turning toward Mariupol (see **Figure 1**).

**Figure 1. Ukraine**



**Source:** Congressional Research Service.

Russia's key target was seemingly Kyiv. Led by elite, but more lightly equipped, airborne and special forces, Russia reportedly made advances along the western side of Kyiv and quickly reached the **outskirts of Kyiv**. U.S. officials and some analysts believe Russia's initial operation was to "**decapitate**" the **Ukrainian government** and rely on fast-moving, elite units to quickly **seize key junctures**, similar to Russia's seizure of Crimea in 2014.

The **Ukrainian military hindered, deflected, and imposed costs**, in personnel and equipment, on Russian forces. The Ukrainian military was seemingly able to draw in, and in many cases overextend, Russian forces, allowing the Ukrainian military to conduct ambushes and counterattacks. Russia also **failed to completely achieve air dominance**, leaving at least some of Ukraine's air defenses and aircraft **operational**; Ukrainian air defenses shot down multiple **Russian fighters and helicopters**.

**Reports** indicate that Russia's **military and political leadership** appeared surprised by the lack of progress and **level of resistance** from Ukrainian forces. After failing to meet initial objectives, suffering casualties, and appearing to **outrun logistics support** (leaving many units stranded), Russian forces were forced to regroup and resupply. Analysts also noted that Russian units were often **not operating as combined arms formations** (joint armor, infantry, and artillery), which left infantry (such as airborne, special operations, reconnaissance, and *spetsnaz* forces) exposed and **armor vulnerable** to ambushes. Some observers were **surprised** at the poor tactical and operational discipline of Russian units.

## Latest Developments

Reports indicate Russian forces continue to make advances along all sectors and by March 6, the [Pentagon](#) estimated that 95% of available Russian units had been committed into Ukraine. Russia has seen its [biggest advances](#) in the south, capturing [Kherson on March 2](#) and [continuing to advance](#) toward Mykolaiv and Zaporizhzhia (including shelling and capturing the [Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant](#)) and to encircle Mariupol. In the east, Russian forces have [encircled Kharkiv](#) and appear to be making slow but steady progress—although, reportedly, they are suffering heavy casualties. Some [observers](#) believe these forces are preparing for a possible advance toward the Dnieper River. Additionally, Russian forces continue to advance from Sumy toward Kyiv to encircle it from the east.

Most analysts believe Kyiv continues to be the primary Russian objective. Russia has been [resupplying and reinforcing](#) units outside of Kyiv, and reports indicate Russia is trying to surround the western approaches to the city. Heavy fighting has been reported in Kyiv's northwest suburbs of Bucha, Hostomel, and Irpin.

In recent days, Russian forces have increased the use of artillery and air support, including targeting civilian and residential areas as well as infrastructure targets ([such as airfields](#)) in western Ukraine after initially refraining from using large-scale artillery attacks. Many of these strikes appear to be SRBMs launched from Belarus or Russia, as well as some cruise missiles from Russian Black Sea Fleet vessels in recent days. Russian [air forces](#) also have increased activity but [continue to suffer losses](#) due to active Ukrainian air defenses.

In addition to defending key urban areas, Ukrainian forces [continue to attack](#) exposed Russian units and supply convoys, further [straining](#) the Russian military's ability to resupply and sustain offensive momentum. Over March 5-6, Russian forces appeared to pause most operations, leading [some observers](#) to speculate that they are resupplying in preparation for [renewed offensives](#).

Despite significant [Ukrainian resistance](#), Russia retains significant quantitative and qualitative advantages over the Ukrainian military, including significant air and helicopter forces, electronic warfare, and artillery.

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