

# Ukraine

## CONFLICT UPDATE

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

with the Critical Threats Project, AEI

March 3, 2022

ISW published its most recent [Russian campaign assessment](#) at 4:00 pm EST on March 3.

This daily synthetic product covers key events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine.

### Key Takeaways March 3

- Russian forces opened a new line of advance from Belarus south toward Zhytomyr Oblast, west of Kyiv, as Russian forces attempting to encircle Kyiv from the northwest were driven further west by determined Ukrainian resistance and counterattacks. Russian forces will struggle to complete an encirclement of Kyiv at all if they have to advance along ring roads as far from the city center as those they are now using.
- Russian forces on the east bank of the Dnipro River remain unable to secure the important town of Chernihiv or to break through Ukrainian defenses in the northeastern outskirts of Kyiv.
- Russian ground forces have remained relatively static near Kharkiv as Russian artillery, air, and missile bombardments wreak devastation in the city, though the Ukrainian military indicates that a regiment-sized Russian formation will try to envelop or bypass Kharkiv in the coming days.
- Russian forces are attempting once again to open a line of advance through northern Luhansk Oblast, possibly to assist efforts at Kharkiv or, as the Ukrainian General Staff assesses, to drive on Dnipro and Zaporozhya. The Russian forces currently reported as engaging in that drive are far too small to attack either city successfully and are probably insufficient to sustain a long drive on their own.
- Russian troops have surrounded Mariupol and are attacking it brutally to compel its capitulation or destroy it.
- The mayor of Kherson conditionally surrendered to the Russians, allowing Russian forces to renew their advance on Mykolayiv. The Ukrainian military nevertheless

**reportedly defeated an attempted Russian air assault to take an airfield near Mykolayiv.**

- **The Kremlin escalated domestic censorship of Ukraine coverage and accused Western platforms of launching disinformation campaigns.**
- **Sweden and Finland are increasing cooperation with each other and NATO and may consider NATO membership due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.**
- **Georgia and Moldova officially applied to join the European Union.**
- **Western intelligence sources reported that Chinese President Xi Jinping had prior knowledge of the Russian invasion and asked Russia to delay operations until after the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.**

**Key Events March 2, 4:00 pm EST – March 3, 4:00 pm EST**

### **Military Events:**

**The Russian military has continued its unsuccessful attempts to encircle Kyiv and capture Kharkiv. The Russians continued to attack piecemeal, committing a few battalion tactical groups at a time rather than concentrating overwhelming force to achieve decisive effects.** Russian commanders appear to prefer opening up new lines of advance for regiment-sized operations but have been unable to achieve meaningful synergies between efforts along different axes toward the same objectives. They have also continued conducting operations in southern Ukraine along three diverging axes rather than concentrating on one or attempting mutually supporting efforts. These failures of basic operational art—long a strong suit of the Soviet military and heavily studied at Russian military academies—remain inexplicable as does the Russian military's failure to gain air superiority or at least to ground the Ukrainian Air Force. The Russian conventional military continues to underperform badly, although it may still wear down and defeat the conventional Ukrainian military by sheer force of numbers and brutality. Initial indications that Russia is mobilizing reinforcements from as far away as the Pacific Ocean are concerning in this respect. Those indications also suggest, however, that the Russian General Staff has concluded that the forces it initially concentrated for the invasion of Ukraine will be insufficient to achieve Moscow's military objectives.

Operations to envelop Kyiv remain Russia's main effort. Russian troops are also continuing three supporting efforts, one to seize Kharkiv, one to take Mariupol and secure the "land bridge" connecting Rostov-on-Don to Crimea, and one to secure Kherson and set conditions for a drive west toward Mykolayiv and Odesa.

The Russian attack on Kyiv likely consists of a main effort aimed at enveloping and ultimately encircling the city from the west and a supporting effort along the axes from Chernihiv and Sumy to encircle it from the east.

Russian forces in the south resumed offensive operations toward Mykolayiv on March 3 after securing Kherson on March 2, but do not appear to pose an imminent danger to Odesa. Russian forces likely seek to force Mariupol to capitulate by destroying critical civilian infrastructure and killing civilians to create a humanitarian catastrophe—an approach Russian forces have repeatedly taken in Syria.

**Russian forces are engaged in four primary efforts at this time:**

- 1) **Main effort—Kyiv:** Russian operations on the Kyiv axis consist of a main effort aimed at enveloping and ultimately encircling the city from the west and supporting efforts along the Chernihiv and Sumy axes to encircle it from the northeast and east. Russia has not achieved air superiority over Ukraine as of March 3. Russia is likely mobilizing reinforcements to support its existing axis against Kyiv from the northwest. Russian forces did not attempt assaults on the cities of Chernihiv or Sumy on March 3, instead bypassing the city to advance on the outskirts of Kyiv.
- 2) **Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv:** Russian forces will likely attempt to encircle Kharkiv in the next 24-48 hours but may not succeed with the forces they are committing to the operation. Russian forces likely seek to encircle and bypass Kharkiv before bombarding it to force a capitulation.
- 3) **Supporting effort 2—Mariupol:** Russian forces fully encircled Mariupol as of March 2 and are conducting a deliberate campaign to destroy critical civilian infrastructure and residential areas in a likely attempt to force the city to surrender.
- 4) **Supporting effort 3—Kherson and advances westward:** Russian forces secured a negotiated surrender of Kherson on March 2 and continued advances toward Mykolayiv on March 3, including a failed airborne landing. Russian forces will likely struggle to fully resource three simultaneous lines of effort from Crimea—Mikoayiv, Zaporizhya, and Mariupol. Russian forces have not made territorial advances towards Zaporizhya since March 1.

## Russian Activity

**The Kremlin increased legal penalties for spreading what the Kremlin claims is false information about Russia’s war in Ukraine, forced key liberal Russian media outlets offline, and limited domestic access to non-Russian-controlled social media on March 3.** A Russian State Duma (Parliament) Committee approved an amendment to Russia’s existing law against spreading false information about the Armed Forces on March 3 to imprison any person “spreading fakes” about the Russian military and its operations for 10 to 15 years.<sup>1</sup> State Duma Speaker Vyacheslav Volodin called for Russia to adopt a law criminalizing false information about the Russian Armed Forces and to combat disinformation campaigns allegedly targeting Russia on Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube on March 3.<sup>2</sup> Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova baselessly alleged that the *BBC* has undermined Russia’s domestic security; Russia may attempt to ban *BBC* coverage in Russia to retaliate for the EU’s ban of the Russian state-run *RT* and *Sputnik*.<sup>3</sup> The Russian Prosecutor General’s Office stated that outlets promoting “supposedly peaceful anti-war actions” are banned in Russia due to their “connections with extremist activities” on March 3.<sup>4</sup> The Prosecutor General’s Office also announced it will begin investigations on allegedly extremist platforms and their calls for Russian citizens to protest Russian actions in Ukraine on March 3.<sup>5</sup>

The Kremlin is increasingly limiting Russia’s domestic information space to include only Kremlin propaganda. The board of Russia’s last liberal, publicly broadcast radio station, Echo Moskvy, closed the radio station on March 3 to avoid prosecution.<sup>6</sup> Russian censoring body Roskomnadzor previously forced Echo Moskvy off the air on March 1, falsely claiming the station promoted extremist activities and published false information about the Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>7</sup> Roskomnadzor also demanded that Google block “false information” YouTube ads targeting Russia and remove the “foreign” media outlet *Dozhd*’s online TV channel for promoting disinformation on March 3.<sup>8</sup> *Dozhd* General Director Natalia Sindeeva announced on March 3 that *Dozhd* will “temporarily stop” its operations but assured that the channel plans to return to the air.<sup>9</sup>

The Kremlin is also attempting to limit Russian domestic usage of Western social media platforms. Russian state officials and social media experts accused Facebook of launching a disinformation campaign against Russia and suggested that Russian-owned Telegram and VKontakte are among the suitable alternatives for Russian citizens.<sup>10</sup> Russian social media network MirTesen claimed it tripled its userbase as Russian censoring body

Roskomnadzor restricted and slowed access to Western platforms.<sup>11</sup> The United States condemned Russia's censorship on March 3 for blocking Russian citizens from witnessing the human costs of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.<sup>12</sup>

**Kremlin officials continued to frame the invasion of Ukraine as a necessary and successful “limited operation” to protect Donetsk and Luhansk and obfuscated the true extent of Russian losses on March 3.** Russian President Vladimir Putin told Russia's national security council that his “special military operation” is on schedule and going according to plan.<sup>13</sup> Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov expressed their full confidence that Russia will complete its objectives in Ukraine and claimed that “a solution to the situation around Ukraine will definitely be found, and the Western hysteria will pass.”<sup>14</sup> The Kremlin reiterated that the objective of its “limited operation” is to restore the borders of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics (DNR and LNR) to the full extent of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, premised on the “self-determination” of DNR and LNR residents.<sup>15</sup> The Kremlin cited a UN “arms expert” who stated that the Ukrainian military has no chance against Russian forces.<sup>16</sup> Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov warned against “hoaxes” that misrepresent Russian casualty numbers.<sup>17</sup>

**Russia rejected US attempts to ease nuclear tensions with Russia and Belarus on March 3 and continued to paint the United States as the aggressor in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.** The United States canceled a test launch of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) on March 2.<sup>18</sup> Department of Defense spokesperson John Kirby stated the United States has “no intention of engaging in any actions that can be misunderstood or misconstrued.”<sup>19</sup> The United States warned Russia and Belarus against deploying nuclear arms in Belarus during a UN arms control meeting on March 3.<sup>20</sup> US envoy Aud-Frances McKernan told the Conference on Disarmament that “any movement of Russian nuclear weapons into Belarus would be dangerously provocative and further destabilize the region.”<sup>21</sup>

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov stated that it is NATO, not Russia, that presents a risk of nuclear war on March 3.<sup>22</sup> Lavrov would not rule out the possibility of the United States launching an attack against Russia and claimed that the United States is acting like Napoleon and Hitler towards “European countries.”<sup>23</sup> Lavrov stated Russia is not considering a nuclear deployment but that the West is continuing to escalate concerns and “go crazy” over Russian nuclear capabilities.<sup>24</sup> Russian State Duma Chairman Vyacheslav Volodin claimed that if Russia had not launched its operation in Ukraine, “literally the next day the operation would have started from NATO, but only by the hands of neo-Nazis of Ukraine.”<sup>25</sup> Volodin also claimed that the Russian operation has saved hundreds of thousands of lives. Multiple Russian media outlets reported that Russia is finally retaliating after years of the United States humiliating Russia.<sup>26</sup> Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said that Russia's relations with the West will improve after having reached rock bottom, but that such an improvement would require US initiative.<sup>27</sup>

**Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov denied Ukrainian claims that Russia is preparing for martial law on March 3.**<sup>28</sup> Ukrainian Presidential Advisor Mikhail Podolyak claimed earlier on March 3 that the Russian Duma will meet to discuss implementing martial law on March 4.<sup>29</sup> Peskov also rejected reports that Russia plans to restrict all men from leaving the country.<sup>30</sup> Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergei Ryabkov stated on March 3 that the Foreign Ministry is working in crisis mode after the West imposed harsh sanctions against Russia.<sup>31</sup> Some Russian men received conscription letters or orders to appear at Russian military enlistment centers on March 3; lawyers stated that these letters and orders do not have legal authority and warned that those who appear to the enlistment centers may be forced to sign a legal summons or short-term contract for military service under false pretenses.<sup>32</sup>

## **Belarusian Activity**

N/A

## **Ukrainian Activity**

**Ukrainian and Russian negotiators agreed on the potential future establishment of humanitarian corridors but did not reach a ceasefire agreement during their second round of negotiations in Belarus on March 3.** Head Russian negotiator Vladimir Medinsky stated the two parties agreed on the possibility of creating humanitarian corridors to facilitate civilian evacuation and food and medical supply delivery.<sup>33</sup> The establishment of corridors includes the potential for a ceasefire in the agreed-upon areas during civilian evacuations.<sup>34</sup> Ukrainian presidential advisor Mykhailo Podolyak stated that the objectives of the Ukrainian delegation were to achieve an immediate ceasefire, an armistice, and humanitarian corridors, but that the Ukrainian delegation did not get the results they wanted.<sup>35</sup> Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky maintained that he is ready to discuss all issues with Putin directly, including the status of the Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics.<sup>36</sup> Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov outlined additional demands for the negotiations and stated that the agreement “must include a clause on the elimination of weapons that threaten Belarus,” likely setting conditions to demand the “demilitarization” of Ukraine.<sup>37</sup>

**Ukraine and the international community called on Russia to implement nuclear fallout prevention measures on March 3.** The Ukrainian Energy Ministry called on NATO to enforce a no-fly zone over nuclear power plants and ask Russia to agree to a ceasefire that would prevent Russian ground forces from moving within 30 kilometers of a nuclear power plant.<sup>38</sup> The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) called on Russia to let Ukraine control its nuclear facilities on March 3. Russian IAEA Envoy Mikhail Ulyanov called the IAEA resolution full of “politically motivated lies,” indicating that the Kremlin may not agree to proposed nuclear fallout mitigation measures that involve ongoing Ukrainian control of nuclear facilities.<sup>39</sup> Ukraine's nuclear agency said that it still controls the Zaporizhzhia nuclear powerplant as of March 3 despite encroaching Russian forces and shelling in nearby towns.<sup>40</sup>

**Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced that the first of 16,000 expected foreign volunteer fighters began arriving in Ukraine on March 3.**<sup>41</sup> Numerous outlets reported that small numbers of Japanese, US, French, and UK volunteers are among the foreign fighters, as well as many citizens from former Soviet states.<sup>42</sup>

## **Military Support to Ukraine**

**NATO and EU countries provided additional lethal defense equipment and humanitarian aid to Ukraine on March 3.**<sup>43</sup>

- Germany announced on March 3 it will add 2,700 anti-aircraft Strela rockets to its next arms shipment to Ukraine.<sup>44</sup> German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also approved the export of German-origin weapons from the Netherlands and Estonia to Ukraine.
- Spain is sending 1,370 anti-tank grenade launchers, an unspecified number of light machine guns, and 700,000 rounds of ammunition as part of its first arms shipment to Ukraine on March 4.<sup>45</sup>
- Norway delivered 2,000 M72 anti-tank launchers to Ukraine on March 3.<sup>46</sup>
- Canadian Defense Minister Anita Anand said on March 3 that Canada will send up to 4,500 M72 rocket launchers and up to 7,500 hand grenades to Ukraine.<sup>47</sup>
- The White House asked Congress on March 2 to approve \$10 billion in lethal and humanitarian aid for Ukraine as part of a \$32.5 billion emergency funding request.<sup>48</sup>
- A deputy Turkish foreign minister described Turkish drone shipments to Ukraine as “private sales,” not “military aid,” on March 3. Turkey is attempting to balance its relationships with both Russia and Ukraine.<sup>49</sup>

## Sanctions and Economic Activity

### **Japan joined sanctions targeting Russian and Belarusian businessmen and trade as EU and NATO countries prepared to remove Russia and Belarus’ most-favored nation status. Calls to ban Russian and Belarusian banks from SWIFT and for the US to ban oil imports grew.**

- Japan sanctioned Russian businessmen and Belarusian officials on March 3.<sup>50</sup> Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida stated that Japan will freeze the assets of Russian President Vladimir Putin, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, other key government officials, and wealthy businessmen. Kishida said Japan will ban financial transactions with seven Russian banks and implement restrictions on transactions with the Russian Central Bank.
- Canada removed Russia and Belarus’ “most-favored nation” (MFN) status on March 3.<sup>51</sup> Canada announced it revoked Russia and Belarus’ MFN status as trading partners, resulting in a 35 percent tariff on Russian and Belarusian goods imported into Canada.<sup>52</sup> An anonymous European Commission spokesperson told *Reuters* on March 3 that the EU is discussing the possible suspension of Russia’s MFN status at the World Trade Organization (WTO).<sup>53</sup> The MFN principle requires equal treatment of all WTO members. Further suspensions would greatly increase tariffs on Russian exports to member states.
- UK Foreign Secretary Liz Truss pushed on March 3 for Western allies to ban all Russian banks from SWIFT and for the West to further reduce dependency on Russian hydrocarbons. Both moves would likely harm Europe’s energy supply and raise global oil prices.<sup>54</sup>
- An anonymous EU official told *Reuters* on March 3 that the EU is considering excluding Belarusian banks from SWIFT.<sup>55</sup>
- US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi announced her support for a bipartisan effort to ban Russian oil imports into the US during a news conference on March 3.<sup>56</sup> Pelosi said she “is all for [banning] the oil coming from Russia.”<sup>57</sup>
- The Beijing-based Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank suspended all operations with Russia and Belarus on March 3.<sup>58</sup> The Chinese government founded the bank and is the largest shareholder at 30 percent.<sup>59</sup>

**The Kremlin continued implementing capital control measures in a likely unsuccessful attempt to mitigate Western sanctions on March 3.** The Russian Central Bank kept the stock market closed for the fourth consecutive day in a likely attempt to defer selloffs.<sup>60</sup> Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree on March 2 prohibiting citizens and foreigners from transporting more than 10 thousand USD of foreign currency outside of Russia, likely to prevent further loss of foreign capital.<sup>61</sup> The State Duma submitted a draft law to protect Russian citizens from the effects of Western sanctions on March 3. The draft law promotes

domestic social assistance programs, protects domestic consumers of foreign companies, and prevents foreign countries from further divesting from the Russian market.<sup>62</sup> Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said that the Kremlin is not considering nationalizing foreign assets on March 3 despite Russian Security Council Deputy Dmitry Medvedev's February 26 call to nationalize the assets of foreigners from "the US, EU, and other unfriendly jurisdictions."<sup>63</sup> The Russian Federal Space Agency announced that it would stop exporting rockets to the United States on March 3; this attempt is likely an ineffective countermeasure due to a US store of Russian engines and existing contracts with US domestic producers.<sup>64</sup> CEOs of Russian diamond company Alrosa and the Federal Space Agency reduced their salaries on March 3 to mitigate the impact of Western sanctions on their workforces and research.<sup>65</sup> Russian billionaire Oleg Deripaska predicted that Western sanctions would drive Russia into a prolonged economic crisis and called for a peace deal to end the Ukraine war in a March 3 speech to other businessmen.<sup>66</sup>

## **Humanitarian Concerns**

**Russian sieges deteriorated living conditions in southern Ukraine and indiscriminate Russian attacks killed more civilians in northern Ukraine, causing more demands for war crimes investigations.**

- The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) will send an expert delegation to Ukraine to investigate war crimes and violations and abuses of international human rights laws after 45 member states called for an investigation.<sup>67</sup>
- The US mission to the OSCE stated on March 3 that Russian forces plan to execute some Ukrainian opponents and send others to camps after a military occupation. The US mission warned of Russian planning to use lethal population control measures to counter-protests and Ukrainian resistance during a Russian occupation of Ukraine.<sup>68</sup>
- International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutor Karim Khan launched an immediate criminal investigation of alleged Russian war crimes on March 3.<sup>69</sup> Khan expedited normal procedures and sent a team to Ukraine after 39 ICC member states called for action.
- Lithuanian prosecutors launched a war crimes investigation into Russia's invasion of Ukraine on March 3.<sup>70</sup>

## **Other International Activity**

**Sweden and Finland are increasing cooperation with each other and NATO in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and may be considering NATO membership.**

- NATO announced on March 2 that the foreign ministers of Finland and Sweden will attend a scheduled meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) Ministers of Foreign Affairs on March 4.<sup>71</sup> Non-NATO members Finland and Sweden typically send delegations to relevant NATO meetings.<sup>72</sup>
- Sweden and Finland conducted a joint air and sea exercise in the Baltic Sea as part of increased joint military cooperation "against the backdrop of Russia's invasion of Ukraine."<sup>73</sup>
- Finland's parliament met on March 2 to discuss a petition calling for a vote on NATO membership.<sup>74</sup> Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin stated that because the petition reached the necessary threshold of 50,000 signatures, "it made sense to hear views on the issue."<sup>75</sup> 53% of Finns now support joining NATO according to a poll conducted by Finnish broadcaster *Yle* on February 28.<sup>76</sup> *Reuters* reported that Finnish

officials are considering a referendum on NATO membership rather than a parliamentary vote.<sup>77</sup> Russia threatened military and political consequences on February 25 if Sweden or Finland join NATO.<sup>78</sup>

- Seven of the eight Arctic Council members—Finland, Sweden, Norway, Iceland, the United States, Canada, and Denmark—announced on March 3 that they would boycott future talks in Russia.<sup>79</sup> Russia holds the Arctic Council’s rotating chairmanship and was scheduled to host talks in May in Arkhangelsk.

**Georgia and Moldova formally applied to join the EU on March 3 following Ukraine’s request to join the bloc on February 28.**<sup>80</sup> Applicants must first have their candidacies unanimously approved by all 27 EU member states.<sup>81</sup> Then Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova must all make their political, judiciary, and economic systems compatible with the EU system of common law and extensive regulations in a process that can take as long as a decade.

**A Western intelligence report leaked on March 3 says that Chinese President Xi Jinping knew ahead of time about the Russian invasion and asked Russia to delay operations until after the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics.**<sup>82</sup> The Chinese Foreign Ministry called the report “pure fake news” designed to shift blame.<sup>83</sup>



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