

Ukraine

CONFLICT UPDATE

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

with the Critical Threats Project, AEI

March 6, 2022

ISW published its most recent [Russian campaign assessment](#) at 2:00 pm EST on March 6.

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

Key Takeaways March 5-6

- Russian forces spent the past 24 hours largely regrouping and preparing to renew offensive operations around Kyiv, Kharkiv, and Mykolayiv.
- The Ukrainian General Staff reports the presence of a large concentration of Russian forces west of Kharkiv that it assesses will launch a wide offensive southwest toward the Dnipro River, although no such offensive has begun as of this publication.
- Russia violated two Russian-Ukrainian ceasefire agreements, collapsing efforts to establish a humanitarian corridor to help evacuate civilians from Mariupol and Volnovakha on March 5 and 6.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin has not demonstrated any willingness to de-escalate with Ukraine or the international community, nor has he provided reasonable demands that would lay the groundwork for de-escalation or negotiations.
- The Kremlin is likely laying the domestic information groundwork for a declaration of martial law in Russia should Russian President Vladimir Putin decide that mass mobilization and conscription are necessary to achieve his objectives.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin allowed for the confiscation of assets belonging to “corrupt” Russian officials on March 6, likely to acquire new revenue streams at the expense of alienating some supporters.
- The Kremlin is attempting to deter US or European bans on Russian oil exports by claiming that a ban would devastate world oil markets.
- Russian President Vladimir Putin compared Western sanctions to a “declaration of war” on March 5 as the Kremlin began to retaliate against foreign businesses.

Key Events March 4, 4:00 pm EST – March 6, 4:00 pm EST

Military Events:

The military situation on the ground has not changed significantly in the past 24 hours. Russian forces continue to mass for renewed offensive operations east and west of Kyiv, west of Kharkiv, and toward Mykolayiv-Odesa but have not yet initiated new large-scale ground attacks. Russia has increased aerial and artillery/rocket attacks on civilian positions and infrastructure, including known evacuation corridors. Ukrainian forces reportedly conducted their second counterattack in two days, this time near Mariupol. The Ukrainian air force and air defense forces continue to operate, inflicting damage on Russian ground forces and disrupting Russian air and missile operations.

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. Russian forces near Kyiv have continued to concentrate in preparation for resuming offensive operations both east and west of the city. They have conducted limited movements to advance the western envelopment but have not gained much ground.
- 2) Supporting effort 1—Kharkiv;** The Ukrainian General Staff assessed on March 5 that as many as 23 BTGs are concentrated likely west and northwest of Kharkiv and are preparing to resume offensive operations toward Lubny, Poltava, and Kharkiv itself.
- 3) Supporting effort 2—Mariupol:** The Russian encirclement of Mariupol continues and Russian forces continued to shell the city on March 5.
- 4) Supporting effort 3—Kherson and advances westward:** The Ukrainian General Staff reports that three Russian BTGs of the 7th Airborne Division attacked toward Mykolayiv on March 5 but were repulsed. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky claimed on March 6 that Russia was preparing to bomb Odesa, although he offered no evidence for that claim and ISW has found no independent confirmation of it. Zelensky is almost certainly right that Russia will begin bombing Odesa in advance of ground or amphibious operations against the city, but the timing of such operations remains unclear.

Russia violated two Russian-Ukrainian ceasefire agreements, collapsing efforts to establish a humanitarian corridor to help evacuate civilians from Mariupol and Volnovakha on March 5 and 6.¹ Russia and Ukraine agreed to a March 5 ceasefire to create a humanitarian corridor for evacuating civilians and the wounded from Mariupol and nearby Volnovakha. Russia likely continued to target Ukrainian forces on March 5 in violation of the ceasefire. Russia and Ukraine agreed upon a subsequent ceasefire on March 6 starting at 10:00 am local time.² The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) reported that evacuation attempts in Mariupol and Volnovakha again failed and Ukrainian officials claimed Russia again violated the ceasefire.³ Russia denied that its forces violated the ceasefire and blamed the Ukrainian government for the failure of the humanitarian corridor.

- **Ukraine’s Framing:** Multiple Ukrainian officials claimed Russian attacks in Mariupol on March 5 and 6 closed the humanitarian corridor.⁴ Mariupol Mayor Vadym Boichenko and Mariupol Deputy Mayor Serhiy Orlov said Russian forces were “still bombing Mariupol” on March 5 and called off evacuation efforts.⁵ The head of Ukraine’s Donetsk Region administration, Pavlo Kirilenko, said in a Facebook post on March 6 that the second attempt to evacuate Mariupol residents failed.⁶ Kirilenko claimed “the Russians began to regroup their forces and resumed heavy shelling of the city.”⁷ Ukrainian Interior Ministry advisor Anton Gerashchenko and Ukrainian Minister for Reintegration Iryna Vereshchuk

blamed Russian shooting along parts of the corridor between Mariupol and Zaporizhzhia for the failure to safely establish humanitarian corridors.⁸

- **Russia's Framing:** Russian officials and Kremlin-supported media outlets claimed the Ukrainian government is disinterested in helping its citizens and said Ukraine blocked its citizens from evacuating Mariupol on March 5 and 6. Russia's Ministry of Defense claimed Russian forces followed the ceasefire order and accused "Ukrainian forces and national battalions of taking advantage of the declared [ceasefire] to regroup on defensive positions."⁹ Head of the National Center for Defense Control of the Russian Federation Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev stated on March 5 that "a catastrophic humanitarian situation had developed" in most of Ukraine and falsely claimed "the Nazis blocked thousands of Ukrainians and foreigners" from evacuating. Russian Defense Ministry Representative Major General Igor Konashenkov said on March 5 the Russian military went ahead with its offensive operations at 6:00 am Moscow time "due to Ukraine's unwillingness to influence nationalists or extend [the ceasefire]."¹⁰

Other Russian Activity:

The Russian Federal Customs Service detained a US citizen on drug charges on March 5, likely to improve Russian leverage over the United States.¹¹ The Russian Federal Customs Service detained NBA Basketball player Brittney Griner for possession of hash oil at Sheremetyevo airport on March 5.¹²

An alleged FSB whistleblower leaked their analysis on the Russian-Ukrainian war, highlighting major logistical and planning issues.¹³ The leaked letter accused Russian leaders of poor planning and concealing the nature of the war from the Russian people, including planners for the invasion. The letter-writer claimed that Russian intelligence analysts did not provide accurate assessments of the impact of Ukrainian resistance or Western sanctions because Russian leadership told analysts that their assessments were hypothetical thought exercises for which the assessment of a positive outcome for Russia would be politically beneficial. The letter-writer also claimed that the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) is searching intensely for evidence that Ukraine is building nuclear weapons. The letter-writer also alleged that Russia has an internal deadline of June for the end of the war due to economic pressures.

The Kremlin continued restricting news and social media outlets that refused to comply with its new disinformation law as other media outlets restricted or closed their Russian operations on March 5-6. The Kremlin is leveraging its accusations of Western disinformation against Russia to justify its acceleration of social control measures that eliminate Russian freedom of speech, right to protest, and access to trusted information. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov justified increasing crackdowns on freedom of speech as a national security measure.¹⁴ Peskov said that Russian citizens must express their positions on the Russian military operation in Ukraine "within the framework of the law" but did not specify the parameters of the law.¹⁵ The Kremlin likely seeks to promote self-censorship among Russian citizens. Russian Internal Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Irina Volk admitted on March 6 that Russian authorities arrested 3,500 protesters in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and other unspecified regions, likely to deter additional protests.¹⁶

Chinese-owned social media platform TikTok temporarily suspended live broadcasting and new content in Russia on March 6 to comply with the new censorship law.¹⁷ Russian-owned media application Telegram briefly experienced service interruptions on March 5, possibly to ensure compliance with the new disinformation law.¹⁸ Russian users frequently use TikTok, Telegram, and other social media applications to share Russian force movements in Russia and spread footage of kinetic action in Ukraine. Russian state media regulator

Rozkomnadzor also blocked access to communications application Zello on March 6 over its refusal to comply with the censorship law.¹⁹

Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty closed their Russian operations on March 6 due to mounting fines over their refusal to accept their designations as “foreign agents.”²⁰ Independent Russian news outlet *COLTA* temporarily suspended publications on March 5 and said that it must “make changes” to and remove recently published materials on Russia’s war in Ukraine to comply with the law.²¹

Belarusian Activity:

N/A

Ukrainian Activity:

N/A

Military Support to Ukraine:

N/A

Sanctions and Economic Activity:

Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree allowing for the confiscation of assets belonging to “corrupt” Russian officials on March 6, likely to raise state revenue at the expense of alienating some supporters.²² The decree allows the Kremlin to withdraw money from an official’s account if its assets exceed three years’ worth of income. The Kremlin will confiscate the assets if the official does not provide legal documentation of the origin of his or her land ownership, real estate, vehicles, and other assets. The Kremlin is unlikely to conduct fair audits and may rely on seizing the assets of disobedient officials to fund Russia’s declining economy. Such seizures would likely damage Putin’s relations with regional governments. The Kremlin’s invasion of Ukraine has already soured relations with formerly pro-Russian Ukrainian businessmen like Rinat Akhmetov, who denounced Russia as an aggressive country and Putin as a “war criminal” on March 5.²³ Russia’s invasion of Ukraine likely destroyed Akhmetov’s Ukraine-based industries. Akhmetov was previously a strong supporter of the pro- Putin Yanukovich regime.

The Kremlin is attempting to deter US or European bans on Russian oil exports by claiming that a ban would devastate world oil markets. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov warned on March 5 that US limitations on Russian oil imports “could have rather serious consequences” on Russian oil that would disrupt the world energy market.²⁴ US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on March 6 that the United States and the

European Union are looking into banning Russian oil imports “while making sure that there is still an appropriate supply of oil in world markets.”²⁵

Russian President Vladimir Putin compared Western sanctions to a “declaration of war” on March 5 as the Kremlin began to retaliate against foreign businesses.²⁶ Putin’s “declaration of war” rhetoric is likely intended to prepare the Russian population for additional hardship.

The Kremlin is likely attempting to prevent further Western sanctions against Russian officials by masking available information on their assets and incomes. The State Duma introduced a bill under the guise of anti-corruption efforts to remove public information about income and assets of sanctioned public officials on March 5 to prevent “unfriendly states from exerting pressure and influencing Russian officials” and their families.²⁷

The Kremlin is beginning to retaliate against and replace Western companies for their governments’ sanctions. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov claimed that Western governments acted like bandits, coerced private companies to leave Russian markets, and infringed on the property rights of sanctioned Russian businessmen by confiscating their properties abroad.²⁸ Peskov claimed that Russian companies might resort to using “non-standard and bold” measures such as using unlicensed software, encouraging pirating of Western programs.²⁹ Putin ordered the Kremlin to create a list of “unfriendly” states, legal entities, and actors on March 6.³⁰ Putin also signed a decree allowing Russian companies to repay debts to “unfriendly” foreign creditors in Russian rubles instead of dollars or euros.³¹ Russian State Duma Committee on Economic Policy member Sergey Altukhov warned that Western companies will have a challenging time returning to the Russian market as Russian and Asian businesses will replace them.³² Visa, Mastercard, American Express, and PayPal suspended their operations in Russia on March 5-6, limiting Russians’ abilities to conduct domestic transactions.³³ Russian banks reportedly plan to issue “Mir” co-badged cards and introduce the Chinese “UnionPay” system in retaliation.³⁴ Russia’s Central Bank also unofficially ordered Russian banks to limit the amount of funds Russians can transfer to families abroad to \$5,000 a month to prevent currency from leaving the country on March 5.³⁵

The Kremlin is also leveraging its own and Western sanctions to advance its foreign policy and national interests. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov threatened to derail the Iran nuclear deal talks if the United States does not guarantee that Western sanctions against Russia will not be imposed on Russian trade and investment with Iran on March 6.³⁶ Russian agriculture and veterinary regulators likely lifted restrictions from 15 Georgian dairy producers on March 6 to reward the Georgian government for its reluctance to officially support Ukraine.³⁷

Humanitarian Concerns:

N/A

Other International Activity:

N/A



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¹ <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-kyiv-europe-1f3dc134dc6f8c5214cfc723d37fd56a>

² <https://www.newsweek.com/russia-ukraine-kyiv-ceasefire-corridor-1685186>

³ https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-06-22/h_7f6d07a0a89916517edaf62751b834de
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⁴ <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-vladimir-putin-kyiv-europe-1f3dc134dc6f8c5214cfc723d37fd56a>

⁵ washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/05/mariupol-ukraine-russia-evacuation-invasion/

⁶ https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-06-22/h_7f6d07a0a89916517edaf62751b834de

⁷ https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-06-22/h_7f6d07a0a89916517edaf62751b834de

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¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/05/sports/basketball/russia-brittney-griner.html>

¹³ <https://www.facebook.com/vladimir.osechkin/posts/4811633942268327;>

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¹⁵ <https://www dot kommersant.ru/doc/5249113>

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¹⁷ <https://tass dot ru/obschestvo/13989055;> <https://www.pravda dot com.ua/news/2022/03/6/7328904/>

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²¹ <https://meduza dot io/news/2022/03/05/redaktsiya-colta-ru-reshila-na-vremya-zamolchat-iz-za-zakona-pro-feyki-o-deystviyah-rossiyskoy-armii>

²² <https://tass dot ru/obschestvo/13987551>

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- ²⁹ <https://tvzvezda.ru/news/2022351314-dtuYE.html>
- ³⁰ <https://nv.ua/world/geopolitics/vladimir-putin-sostavlyayet-spisok-stran-vragov-novosti-ukrainy-50222631.html>
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- ³³ https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-06-22/h_e0512c49d922f17cfd6d543eb52a3e3f
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