

Ukraine

INVASION UPDATE

Institute for the Study of War, Russia Team

with the Critical Threats Project, AEI

April 2

The Ukraine Invasion Update is a semi-weekly synthetic product covering key political and rhetorical events related to renewed Russian aggression against Ukraine. This update covers events from March 30-April 1. All of the ISW Russia's team's coverage of the war in Ukraine—including daily military assessments and maps, past Conflict Updates, and several supplemental assessments—are available on our [Ukraine Crisis Coverage](#) landing page.

Key Takeaways March 30-April 1

- **Ongoing peace talks will likely protract, and the Kremlin is unlikely to withdraw its main demands in the near future.**
- **Russia and Ukraine may have reached initial agreements on Ukrainian “neutrality” in ongoing negotiations, but remain stalled on the Kremlin’s refusal to discuss Crimea and the Donbas.**
- **The Kremlin set additional conditions on March 30-April 1 for a chemical or biochemical false-flag attack in eastern Ukraine or Russia.**
- **Ongoing European efforts to find alternatives to Russian energy likely successfully undercut a Kremlin attempt to buttress the Russian economy by coercing Europe into buying Russian gas in rubles.**
- **Sustained Western military aid to Ukraine will help enable further Ukrainian counterattacks in the coming weeks.**

Key Events March 30-April 1

Negotiations:

Ongoing peace talks will likely protract, though Russia and Ukraine may have reached initial agreements on Ukrainian “neutrality.” However, the Kremlin is unlikely to drop its maximalist demands—which are inadmissible to Kyiv—in the near term. Kremlin Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stated on March 30 that the March 29 negotiations in Istanbul on March 30 did not result in “anything too promising or any breakthroughs.”¹ Lead Russian negotiator Vladimir Medinsky claimed on March 30 that Ukraine has stated its willingness to meet core Russian demands to end what the Kremlin claims is “the threat of creating a NATO bridgehead on Ukrainian territory” but clarified that only the “essence” of agreements was agreed on.² Smaller Russian and Ukrainian delegations arrived in Jerusalem, Israel, on March 30 for further negotiations.³ Ukrainian and Russian negotiators resumed peace talks virtually on April 1 and Ukrainian Foreign

Minister Dmytro Kuleba said that Russia has not yet provided responses to Ukraine's March 30 proposals.⁴ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said that the Kremlin is preparing a response to Ukraine's March 30 proposals but did not provide a timeline for delivery.⁵

The Ukrainian government flatly denied Kremlin claims that Kyiv has agreed to Russian control over Crimea and Donbas. Lavrov falsely claimed on March 30 that "the issues of Crimea and Donbas have been finally resolved," likely to maintain domestic support for the continued Russian military operation in Ukraine and to frame the operation as achieving its objectives.⁶ Ukrainian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Oleg Nikolenko refuted Lavrov's claims on March 30, asserting that Lavrov has an "erroneous understanding of the negotiation process" and that "the issues of Crimea and Donbas will finally be resolved after the restoration of Ukraine's sovereignty over them."⁷ The Kremlin is unlikely to drop its territorial demands and Kyiv is unlikely to meet them.

Kyiv received initial positive rhetoric from several states on its demanded security guarantees in exchange for dropping its NATO aspiration, but the Kremlin is unlikely to accept any Western involvement in a possible peace deal. The United Kingdom, Germany, and Turkey separately stated their willingness to act as security guarantors for Ukraine in principle on March 30 and 31, though all three states declined to comment on specifics.⁸ Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova claimed on March 31 that the United States directly refused to give Ukraine security guarantees, citing US President Joe Biden's assertion that the United States will not provide aid to Ukraine that would lead to direct US-Russia military conflict.⁹

Russian Domestic Opposition and Censorship:

N/A

Kremlin Narratives:

The Kremlin set additional conditions on March 30-April 1 for a chemical or biochemical false-flag attack in eastern Ukraine or Russia.

- Russian Defense Ministry Spokesperson Igor Konashenkov claimed on March 30 that Ukrainian forces "considered the possibility of using biological weapons against the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LNR)" with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).¹⁰
- Russian Radiation, Chemical and Biological Protection Forces Head Igor Kirillov claimed on March 31 that Ukraine asked Bayraktar (the Turkish manufacturer of many of Ukraine's UAVs) to equip Ukraine's drones with an aerosol spraying mechanism for biological weapons in December 2021.¹¹
- Russian State Duma officials convened a committee on March 31 to "investigate" Russia's repeated and false allegations that US biolabs are participating in "the development of biological weapons components in the immediate vicinity of the territory of Russia."¹²
- Russian First Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Dmitry Polyansky told Russian state media on April 1 that Ukrainian forces "plan to blow up railway containers containing up to 800 tons of chlorine" in Ukraine's Kharkiv region and claimed that Russia is providing additional evidence of alleged Ukrainian biological weapons programs to the United Nations.¹³

ISW warned on March 9 that the Kremlin may conduct a chemical or radiological false-flag attack and blame Ukraine, the United States, or NATO.¹⁴ Russian media would leverage a potential false flag attack to stoke domestic outrage and establish a pretext for further escalation in Ukraine or against NATO.

Russian Reactions to Sanctions:

Ongoing European efforts to find alternatives to Russian energy likely successfully undercut a Kremlin attempt to buttress the Russian economy by coercing Europe into only buying Russian gas in rubles. Deputy Chairman of the Russian Security Council Dmitri Medvedev stated on March 30 that sanctions against Russia may leave EU countries without gas, an implicit threat to cut off Russian energy exports to Europe.¹⁵ Russian President Vladimir Putin decreed on March 31 that "unfriendly countries" purchasing

Russian gas must have Russian bank accounts and pay in rubles.¹⁶ The United Kingdom, France, Germany, and Japan separately announced on March 31 and April 1 that they would not meet the Kremlin's demand to pay for gas in rubles, in effect calling the Kremlin's bluff.¹⁷ Kremlin spokesperson Dmitri Peskov backtracked on April 1 that Russia will indefinitely delay implementing Putin's decree, claiming the procedure would be "a long and time-consuming process."¹⁸ Ongoing efforts by European and other states to reduce their reliance on Russian energy and preparations to ration existing energy reserves likely enabled them to refuse the Kremlin's demand.¹⁹

Belarus:

N/A

Russian Occupation:

N/A

Drivers of Russian Threat Perceptions:

Sustained Western military aid to Ukraine will help enable further Ukrainian counterattacks in the coming weeks. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reiterated claims on March 31 that the United States and NATO are responsible for the Ukraine crisis for "pumping Ukraine full of weapons" that threatened Russia and violated Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) decisions.²⁰ The United States and its allies continued to provide monetary and military supply assistance to Ukraine since ISW's previous Invasion Update on March 29.²¹

- US Pentagon Spokesperson John Kirby stated on March 29 that the United States is deploying six US Navy Growler electronic warfare aircraft, along with 240 US military personnel, to Germany to bolster electronic warfare capabilities on NATO's eastern flank. Kirby noted that the aircraft will not be used in Ukraine.²²
- US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin approved a deployment extension for the USS Harry Truman aircraft carrier on March 31. The carrier's aircraft have been flying in support of NATO security operations in Eastern Europe.²³
- US President Joe Biden pledged \$500 million in direct budgetary aid to Ukraine in a phone call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on March 30.²⁴
- British Defense Secretary Ben Wallace reported on March 31 that the United Kingdom and its partners will send more lethal aid to Ukraine in the form of anti-aircraft assets, armored vehicles, and long-range artillery.²⁵
- Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison said on April 1 that Australia will send additional armored vehicles to Ukraine.²⁶

Foreign Involvement:

N/A



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¹ <https://tass dot com/politics/1429697>; <https://nv dot ua/ukraine/politics/dmitriy-peskov-proryva-na-mirnyh-peregovorah-s-ukrainoy-poka-net-novosti-ukrainy-50229623.html>; https://riafan dot ru/22594223-peskov_zayavil_chno_rossiya_ne_sobiraetsya_obsuzhdat_status_krima_na_peregovorah_s_ukrainoi

² <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-says-ukraine-willing-meet-core-demands-work-continues-2022-03-30/>.

³ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/30/russia-ukraine-war-news-putin-live-updates/#link-IJFVU7DLUBFSRDS7NVL5NSVQUM>

⁴ <https://nv dot ua/ukraine/politics/vtorzhenie-rossii-v-ukrainu-est-li-otvet-rf-na-predlozheniya-ukrainy-novosti-ukrainy-50230235.html>; <https://www.pravda dot com.ua/news/2022/04/1/7336313/>; <https://www.rferl dot org/a/ukraine-talks-russia-ruble-payments/31780852.html>; <https://www.radiosvoboda dot org/a/news-perehovory-ukraina-rosia-vidozvyazok/31781282.html>

⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/01/russia-ukraine-war-news-putin-live-updates/#link-2QDALYFARJAH3N3CR7TJ4VSTXI>

⁶ <https://ru dot krymr.com/a/news-rossiya-lavrov-vopros-kryma-i-donbassa-reshen-okonchatelno-mid-ukrainy-otvet/31778293.html>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/14231727>.

⁷ <https://nv dot ua/ukraine/politics/peregovory-s-rossiye-ukraina-namerena-vosstanovit-suverenitet-zayavili-v-mid-50229746.html>; <https://www.radiosvoboda dot org/a/news-mzs-slova-lavrova-pro-krym-i-donbas/31778250.html>.

⁸ <https://t.me/stranaua/33824>; <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/scholz-zelenskiy-germany-ready-act-security-guarantor-ukraine-2022-03-30/>; <https://media.un.org/en/asset/k14/k14ax6oa6l>; https://lenta dot ru/news/2022/03/31/turkey_garantee/; <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/ukraine-invasion-update-20>.

⁹ <https://iz dot ru/1313319/2022-03-31/zakharova-otcenila-otkaz-ssha-dat-garantii-bezopasnosti-ukraine>.

¹⁰ <https://lenta dot ru/news/2022/03/30/plann/>

¹¹ <https://tass dot com/politics/1430505>

¹² <https://tass dot ru/info/14237063>; <https://lenta dot ru/news/2022/03/31/prestup/>

¹³ <https://tass dot ru/politika/14258659>; <https://tass dot ru/politika/14258007>

¹⁴ <https://understandingwar.org/backgrounder/warning-update-russia-may-conduct-chemical-or-radiological-false-flag-attack-pretext>

¹⁵ <https://tass dot ru/ekonomika/14233283>.

¹⁶ https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-31-22/h_79823f5a468256da0a0596bea7cb4818.

¹⁷ https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-31-22/h_a04bba26e30aacce486b7b87803d4ee3;

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¹⁸ https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-04-1-22/h_7f33c1cd2998ed058cc0fc7571b1cfaa;

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¹⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/30/russia-ukraine-war-news-putin-live-updates/#link-WB54COPMHFEKTKI4QZ3XDCQVV4>; <https://apnews.com/article/russia-ukraine-business-europe-germany-0205525f2107f57e31b41d02e5a91e6c>; https://t.me/kozytskyy_maksym_official/1845;

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²⁰ <https://tass dot ru/politika/14235885>; <https://iz dot ru/1313342/2022-03-31/lavrov-nazval-politiku-ssha-i-nato-prichinnoi-krizisa-na-ukraine>

²¹ <https://iz dot ru/1312032/2022-03-29/v-pentagone-obiasnili-postavki-amerikanskikh-samoletov-reb-v-frg> ;
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²² <https://iz dot ru/1312032/2022-03-29/v-pentagone-obiasnili-postavki-amerikanskikh-samoletov-reb-v-frg> ;
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²³ https://www.cnn.com/europe/live-news/ukraine-russia-putin-news-03-31-22/h_da136225e27254b09e13694a75bab50c

²⁴ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/03/30/readout-of-president-bidens-call-with-president-zelenskyy-of-ukraine-8/> ; <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/03/30/russia-ukraine-war-news-putin-live-updates/#link-VWR6JY5JMRBTRBIAALKDVF6YQ>

²⁵ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/01/russia-ukraine-war-news-putin-live-updates/#link-FJ7WCQ3TFRHNJEZYPP4B77JBIM>

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