

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

February 28, 2022

Prior to February 24, 2022, Russian President Putin gave signals of impending aggression against Ukraine. For example, on February 21, 2022, Putin [announced](#) that Russia would recognize the [independence](#) of two Russia-controlled regions in eastern Ukraine (the so-called [Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics](#), or DNR/LNR), most of which had remained under Ukrainian control since Russia's first invasion of parts of Ukraine in 2014. Shortly thereafter, Putin announced Russia would send "peacekeepers" into the DNR/LNR to defend against [fabricated 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 Members of Congress.

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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 some observers as a false pretext for overthrowing the democratically elected Ukrainian government).

Hours after Putin's speech, the invasion [began](#) with a [massed aerospace 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 aerospace 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. [Initially](#), Russia

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made the most progress in the south, driving north from Crimea toward Kherson and eventually turning toward Melitopol, a town on the road to Mariupol (see Figure 1). Russia also conducted a risky air assault by airborne (VDV) units to seize the [Antonov International Airport outside of Kyiv](#); Ukrainian forces successfully repulsed the assault.

Figure 1. Ukraine



Source: Congressional Research Service

Russia's key target was seemingly Kyiv. Led by elite, but more lightly equipped, VDV and special forces, Russia reportedly made advances along the western side of Kyiv and quickly reached the [outskirts of Kyiv](#). On February 25, the Pentagon assessed that Russia had committed [one-third of its available troops into Ukraine](#). 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](#), however, [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](#), and the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense released footage of what appeared to be a [TB2 unmanned combat aerial vehicle](#) attacking Russian ground units.

Latest Developments

[Reports](#) indicate that Russia's [military and political leadership](#) appeared surprised by the lack of progress and [level of resistance](#) from Ukrainian forces. Some captured Russian prisoners of war also appeared [surprised by the invasion](#), having believed they [were deployed for exercises](#). Some [analysts](#) believe the Russian military did not rely on its traditional methods of heavy concentrated artillery fire to prepare advances for fear of collateral damage, which would undermine its rationale for the invasion.

Additionally, Russia initially [surrounded and bypassed](#) most heavily populated centers, [such as Kharkiv](#), instead [prioritizing rapid progress](#).

In many areas, Russian units have appeared to [outrun their logistics support](#), leaving many units stranded and forcing offensives to halt until resupplied. Analysts noted that Russian units were often [not operating as combined arms formations](#) (joint armor, infantry, and artillery), which left infantry exposed (such as VDV, special operations, reconnaissance, and spetsnaz forces) and [armor vulnerable](#) to ambushes.

Additionally, communication has appeared to be an issue, with Russian units experiencing difficulty coordinating among various units and service branches. [Russian National Guard troops](#), including units from Russia's [Chechnya region](#), are crucial to Russia for rear-security and occupation missions but [suffered heavy casualties](#) when they appeared to advance ahead of the army. [Some analysts](#) also noted the lack of combat air patrols and close air support from Russia's aerospace forces; instead, Russia [appeared](#) to rely on [Iskander-M SRBMs](#) for precision targeting as opposed to PGMs from fighters or bombers.

On [Sunday, February 27](#), the [Pentagon assessed](#) that Russia had deployed two-thirds of its total forces to the invasion.

Russia continues to face [stiff resistance](#) from Ukrainian forces, stalling [many of its offensives](#), including outside of Kyiv. In response to the [lack of progress](#), some analysts believe Russia is reinforcing its units and changing tactics to overcome Ukrainian resistance. Russia continues to make advances in the south, [capturing Berdyansk and moving to encircle Mariupol](#). As of February 28, satellite imagery had [documented](#) the presence of large Russian armor convoys moving toward Kyiv. [Some analysts](#) suspect Russia is possibly reinforcing and resupplying its units for a large-scale assault on Kyiv.

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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