



Ukraine Essential

Brief Extraordinary
24 February 2022



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Russia has invaded Ukraine (as US intelligence, since November, had warned would happen). This as an extraordinary moment for Europe.

The war began with Russian President Putin's 4 AM address and subsequent Russian air strikes directed at critically important infrastructure in major Ukrainian cities including Kyiv. The strikes targeted air defense, command and control, logistics, air bases and airfields. Ground forces, meanwhile, crossed the Russian, Crimean and Belarusian borders into Ukraine. Numerous analysts and European countries had still expected only limited incursions early this week. But the full-scale invasion transpiring rather corresponds to US intelligence warnings.

Tens of thousands of people have been on the road, since early morning, in a bid to escape Russian efforts to encircle Kyiv. The Ukrainian army, for its part, is engaged in combat as it seeks to repel Russian troops including those seeking to surround Ukrainian army units in the East. The southern front may have already collapsed, with Russian forces from Crimea rapidly reaching the Kahkovka dam – the entry point of the Crimean Canal – and facing minimal resistance. There are significant skirmishes in Donbas (Eastern Ukraine) and [Chernobyl](#) (in the North). Sumy and Kharkiv in Eastern Ukraine and Kherson in the South, however, appear to be already encircled by Russian troops.

Motorized Russian troops, crossing the Belarusian border, were on the move from the morning (rumors suggest that these incursions were potentially launched from Brest though confirmation is currently lacking). Moscow may be aiming to take the entire country: the objective is no longer about dividing Ukraine (as previously expected) but rather to assume complete control of the country. Moscow further ostensibly is seeking to thwart the formation of possible partisan movements in the future and/or a hostile Western Ukraine that potentially could host NATO bases.

It appears, at this point, that both sides are seeking to avoid civilian casualties. If the Ukrainian army were to maneuver itself into major cities, it could increase its hopes of success but also put civilian lives in jeopardy. But more radical scenarios may be needed if the Ukrainian resistance is to be ultimately successful. While the Ukrainian government expected Russian missile strikes to be targeted at Kyiv's government quarter, the Russian military command, for now, has claimed that it has ruled out these steps (unless it deems it necessary to combat the resistance).

How have we reached this point in Europe? The obvious answer is Putin. But the West will need to conduct a painful introspection concerning the failings of its policies towards Russia and Ukraine. Europe, unlike the US, was generally skeptical that Putin was serious about his war intentions. But regardless of these differences in deciphering Putin's plans, Washington and NATO had little to offer Moscow. The Kremlin's core concerns indeed directly contradicted the central principles of the European security order as interpreted for the past several decades.

The Kremlin, notably, meticulously planned the timing of its attack: it knew it could still exploit Europe's energy dependency. Ukraine, meanwhile, was at a weak point domestically, with its economy, finances, and energy sector all already operating in crisis mode. Russian military planning, that said, may have also been premised on the conclusion that the Ukrainian resistance would prove rather futile and the defending forces were likely to disintegrate. The longer the war grinds on, the more casualties it will bring. And so too will the conflict spur larger (already on-going) Russian protests. Putin, in fact, seemingly lacks broad societal and political support for his decision. Both Russian elites and the public

have displayed little apparent backing, sentiment underscored by the behavior of Putin's supposed inner circle at the recent ominous Security Council meeting held before he announced the decision to recognize Donetsk and Luhansk as independent countries.

For Putin, Ukraine represents [unfinished business](#) and a topic that seems to have morphed into a personal obsession. This fixation was made vividly clear from the language deployed in Putin's speeches from earlier this week that laid out the ideological foundation for the destruction of Ukrainian statehood in its current form and promises to exact complete revenge for the Maidan (an event that Moscow considers a coup). Putin's plan may further include bringing back former President Yanukovich and the pre-Maidan parliament to manufacture an aura of continuity and legitimacy.

While a certain segment of the population is disillusioned from post-Maidan policies and disappointed in President Zelensky (who promised peace and the rollback of prior policies), Ukrainians will strenuously reject the pre-Maidan framework under Russian occupation and view it as illegitimate. The armed and political resistance are clear enough signs.