



# Ukraine Essential

**Brief Three**

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The fourth day of war in Ukraine [may have been](#) the worst day for the Russian military so far since their invasion. Dozens of videos of destroyed equipment and Ukrainian effort to document dead or captured Russian soldiers circulated across social media. According to official [Ukrainian sources](#) the losses incurred so far are significant - 150 tanks, 706 armored vehicles, 27 aircraft, 26 helicopters and around 4300 troops - but unlikely large enough to serve as deterrence from further military advance.

Against the backdrop of these figures, Western military experts note some [basic mistakes](#) on the side of the Russian military from the [strategic to tactical levels](#) that lead to poor [unit performance](#). The poor Russian military performance is most likely connected to the order of [restraint to spare](#) the civilian population. According to Ukrainian officials, the civilian casualties are 352 dead and 1684 wounded as of 27 February. In Russia, it appears that [neither many soldiers](#) nor the Russian society are aware of what is the actual military objective is. The [suggestion that Putin wants](#) to roll back Russia's Cold War defeat seems a plausible explanation. In this regard, Moscow demand on [NATO pullback to 1997](#) was key and likely indications how far Putin aimed to go.

The restrained military tactic as well as extensive diplomatic efforts of French President Macron, as well as Belarus' Lukashenka, have allowed the Ukrainian military to build momentum, achieve success, and buy time. The Russian military poor performance also emboldens Kyiv position at the negotiations at the Belarus border.

Make no mistake: Russia still retains massive advantages as so far there were limited air strikes have been limited and hundreds of combat helicopters remain grounded. However, according to the latest (anonymous) US intelligence, [2/3 of its troops](#) are already in action. Moreover, the Russian advance is making progress especially in the south toward Zaporizhzhya and Mariupol, as well as, notably, around Kharkiv in the East, threatening to encircle the Ukrainian army units stationed in Donbas. Kyiv is also [being encircled](#), and the clashes in Kharkiv and Kyiv have been only with reconnaissance and troops and mercenaries.

Meanwhile, the EU is mobilizing to accept [millions of Ukrainian](#) refugees trying to cross the borders to Hungary, Slovakia, Poland, Romania, as well as Moldova, and are enacting "nuclear" sanctions such as freezing the Russian Central Bank reserves or closing European airspace for Russian planes. The Russian rouble is in free fall and inflation is expected to [reach 70%](#). Ordinary Russians are in shock regarding what is going on, protests are increasing in Russia as well as in Belarus.

Unless there are direct sanctions on the energy section, Russia will still be able to earn money though. SWIFT will hurt mostly SMEs but not the large corporations as the Iran experience of being cut off from the system demonstrates. With China's backing, the Central Bank can keep the currency stabilized. Beijing abstained in the UN Security Council, rather than joining Russia in vetoing the resolution of condemnation. Beijing will unlikely break US or European sanctions, but [it could allow Russian banks and companies more access](#) to its own financial markets.

The Central Bank reserves related sanctions prompted Russian President to order the Russian strategic (nuclear) troops into high alert signalling the spectre of their use. The implication of further escalation is that a scenario where Putin accepts a "defeat" stands a far lower chance than a scenario where the escalates dramatically. The [shelling oh Kharkiv](#) is already on the way.

The nascent conflict has resulted in some unprecedented shifts in policy and a reaction. Berlin has made a u-turn on its Russia policy; the EU aims to provides large scale [military assistance](#) including

combat aircraft. The notion that Ukraine is “[one of us](#)” is a bitter moment when one recognizes that this transformational change came only after Russia invaded. It raises the question what is and should Brussels role be during the remainder of the conflict. For example, the EU offers weapons, but no debt relief, when Kyiv’s financial situation is as precarious as its military situation.

Emotions are running high, with many pondering if regime change in Moscow is now not only possible but should be desired. In these dramatic times critical [\(self\)reflections](#) and sober thinking are a must, therefore. Despite the heroic efforts of Ukraine, the facts confirm that this war can be ended only through diplomatic negotiations. Unless there would be a coup in Moscow, Ukraine can’t force Russia to withdraw unconditionally, no matter the amount of the unprecedented support from the West. Without negotiations, Europe could be dragged into a much larger conflict that involve nuclear weapons.

With this nightmare scenario, the emphasize should be on the Belarus border talks. The Ukrainian delegation looks serious as the members are close to President Zelensky. The hope is that their objectives is finding a compromise not merely winning time, as from the very beginning of the Donbas conflict the question was whether and what kind of compromise Ukraine can accept. The minimum Russian requirements seem to be neutrality and capitulation, while the Ukrainian delegation went to the Belarus border with a neutrality proposal that is modelled on Austria. As the Ukrainian spirit is high, capitulation is not an option.