

## Facing strong resistance from Ukraine military, Russia shifts focus to “liberation of Donbas.” Meanwhile peace talks resume in Turkey.



### UK Defence Intelligence update on Russian attacks & troop locations as of March 28, 2022

On Feb. 21, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed executive orders formally recognizing the independence of the “People’s Republics” created by pro-Russian separatists in portions of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine in 2014. He also signed treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance with both “republics” and, after doing so, deployed additional troops to those areas. Three days later, he announced a “special military operation” in eastern Ukraine to protect the people who, he said, “have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime.” But it was in fact a full-scale, multi-pronged invasion of Ukraine from Belarus in the north, Crimea in the south, and Russian territory adjacent to eastern and northeastern Ukraine.

Over the past month, Russia has attacked Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Dnipro, Mariupol, Odesa and other cities with artillery and missiles in an unrelenting war against Ukraine’s citizens, in the process destroying apartment buildings, schools, hospitals and shelters, killing and injuring many thousands of men, women and children, displacing more than 6.5 million and causing another 3.7 million to flee to neighboring countries. But despite those attacks, the Russian forces have been unable to overcome the fierce defense of those and other large cities by the Ukrainian military. And with the offensive stalled on the ground, on Friday the Russian military announced a fundamental shift in the focus of its “operation” in Ukraine.

On Friday, Col. Gen. Sergey Rudskoy, the first deputy chief of Russia's General Staff of the Armed Forces and head of its Main Operational Directorate, gave a briefing on the four weeks of the "operation" in Ukraine. He said, "In general, the main objectives of the first stage of the operation have been accomplished. The combat potential of the armed forces of Ukraine has been considerably reduced, which...makes it possible to focus our core efforts on achieving the main goal, the liberation of Donbass." Continuing, he said, "The public and individual experts are wondering what we are doing in the area of the blockaded Ukrainian cities. These actions are carried out with the aim of causing such damage to military infrastructure, equipment, personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the results of which allow us not only to tie down their forces and prevent them from strengthening their grouping in the Donbas, but also will not allow them to do this until the Russian army completely liberates the territories of the Donetsk People Republic and Luhansk Peoples Republic."

According to the last Ukraine census, conducted in 2001, the Donetsk oblast (region) had a population of 4.4 million, of which 38 percent claimed to be of ethnic Russian heritage and 75 percent claimed Russian as their native language. The adjacent Luhansk oblast had a population of 2.5 million, of which 39 percent claimed to be of ethnic Russian heritage and 69 percent claimed Russian as their native language. The so-called "republics" created by pro-Russian separatists in the two regions in the spring of 2014 control roughly 35-40 of the territory of each region, including the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk and the territory of each that is immediately adjacent to Russia. Russia has made it clear that the price of any peace will be Ukraine's recognition of the independence of the two "republics," either as currently constituted or enlarged through military action to include all of both oblasts (unless, of course, the "republics" are, as Crimea was in 2014, annexed by, and become part of, the Russian Federation).

Meanwhile, despite the Russian military's announcement that it would be focusing its "core efforts" on "achieving the main goal, the liberation of Donbass," its war against the cities and citizens of Ukraine continued. On Sunday, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan spoke by phone with Putin and urged him to agree to a ceasefire and resume the peace talks that took place initially in Belarus and subsequently by videoconference. Putin didn't agree to a ceasefire but he did agree to resume the talks, starting tomorrow in Istanbul.

David R. Cameron  
March 28, 2022