

Day 300 in Putin's "Special Military Operation" in Ukraine.



Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy meeting with troops in Bakhmut today.

On Feb. 24, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that, “in execution of the treaties of friendship and mutual assistance with the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Lugansk People’s Republic, ratified by the Federal Assembly on February 22, I made a decision to carry out a special military operation. The purpose of this operation is to protect people who, for eight years now, have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime.” Noting that today marks the 300th day of Putin’s “special military operation,” British Defence Secretary Ben Wallace made a statement to Parliament updating the members on the war in Ukraine. Here are some excerpts from his statement:

“Since it began its offensive on 24 February, Russia has failed to achieve its strategic objectives. Not one single operational commander then in place on 24 February is in charge now. Russia has lost significant numbers of generals and commanding officers. Rumours of General Gerasimov’s [Chief of the General Staff of the Russian armed forces] dismissal persist as Putin deflects responsibility for continued military failure in Ukraine, high fatality rates and increasing public dissatisfaction with mobilisation is growing. More than 100,000 Russians are dead, injured or have deserted. And Russian capability has been severely hampered by the destruction of more than 4,500 armoured and protected vehicles, as well as more than 140 helicopters and fixed wing aircraft, and hundreds of other artillery pieces.”

“The Russian Battalion Tactical Group concept, for a decade the pride of their military doctrine, has not stood up to Ukrainian resistance. Russia’s deployed land forces’ combat effectiveness has dropped by more than 50%. The Russian Air Force is conducting tens of missions per day as opposed to 300 per day back in March. And Russia’s much vaunted Black Sea Fleet is little more

than a coastal defence flotilla. Kremlin-paid mercenaries are faring no better. Hundreds were killed by a recent strike on a headquarters used by the paramilitary Wagner group in the Luhansk region.”

“Behind the scenes international sanctions, including independently applied UK sanctions, have handicapped the Kremlin’s defence industry. Russia is running out of stockpiles and has expended a large proportion of its SS-26 Iskander short range ballistic missiles. It is now resorting to stripping jetliners for spare parts. Its inability to operate independently is underscored by its reliance on Iran’s Shahed drones.”

“President Putin’s failure to marshal recruits and machinery is translating to battlefield defeat. At the maximum point of its advances in March, Russia occupied around 27 percent of Ukrainian land. Ukraine has since liberated around 54 per cent of the territory taken since February. Russia now controls around 18 per cent of internationally recognised areas of Ukraine. Last Monday the Kremlin cancelled its annual press conference for the first time in a decade.”

“Almost a year on and the conflict now resembles the attritional battles of World War I. The Russian army is largely fixed in place not just by Ukrainian fire power but by its own creaking logistics system and barely trained troops. Soldiers occupy networks of waterlogged trenches and a vast frontline stretches for 1200 km – the distance from London to Vienna. Despite intense fighting in Donetsk, Luhansk and Zaporizhzhia regions, Russia can barely generate a fighting force capable of retaking lost areas let alone make significant operational advances. Russian public opinion is starting to turn. Data reportedly collected by Russia’s Federal Protective Service indicated that 55 percent of Russians now favour peace talks with Ukraine, with only 25 percent claiming to support continuing the war. In April that latter figure was around 80 percent.”

“Alongside Russia’s litany of failure is an expanding rap sheet of reported war crimes. According to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, since 24 February, some 6,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed and nearly 10,000 injured. Every day more allegations emerge of rape, arbitrary detentions, torture, ill treatment, deaths in custody and summary executions. Unrecorded group burial sites have been discovered in former occupied area such as Mariupol, Bucha and Izyum. Industrial facilities such as the Azovstal steelworks and the Azot chemical plant have been targeted – risking the release of toxic industrial chemicals. And the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant – the largest in Europe – has been indiscriminately shelled.”

“Today Russia is weaponizing winter with ongoing and widespread missile strikes targeted at Ukraine’s energy and water infrastructure. More than 40 per cent of Ukraine’s energy infrastructure has been struck. However, Ukraine’s resilience has meant that a significant proportion is back up and running. Such behaviour is a flagrant breach of international humanitarian law and the laws of armed conflict. We are doing everything we can to support the Ukrainian authorities and the International Criminal Court as they investigate.”

“At the beginning of this year my aim was to help Ukraine resist and give their citizens hope that the Europe they aspire to be part of would support them in their hour of need. And the

International Community has not disappointed. As Russia has changed its tactics throughout this conflict, so we have changed the type and level of our support in the UK. For example, it is Britain's expertise and advice that is helping Ukraine better coordinate and synchronize its air defence. Our advice helps Ukraine target incoming Russian/Iranian kamikaze drones. We always make sure our support is calibrated to avoid escalation."

"I wish I could say to the House after 300 days of almost daily defeats Russia would have recognised its folly. Sadly, it has not and there is no let up for the Ukrainians. As we have seen by the weaponization of energy there is no let up for us here in the UK and across Europe from Putin's war. Therefore, this will require our continued support to Ukraine in 2023 building on our lethal aid, training, humanitarian support and international coordination. That's why, as the mercury drops further in Ukraine the UK is doing what we can to help Ukrainians endure the harsh midwinter."

"Although our populations continue to struggle with the cost-of-living crisis, the global community must hold its course on Ukraine. The price of Putin's success is one none of us can afford. We must ensure they maintain their commitment to the Black Sea Initiative which has so far transported 14.3 million tonnes of grain from more than 500 outgoing voyages. We must stop their reckless shelling of nuclear facilities. And we must hold their enablers to account. Iran has become one of Russia's top military backers. In return for having supplied more than 300 kamikaze drones, Russia intends to provide it with advanced military components, undermining both Middle East and international security. We must expose this deal."

"Make no mistake Mr Speaker, the UK's assistance to Ukraine will remain unwavering and I am grateful to the Prime Minister for his continuing support. We have already committed to match or exceed the £2.3 billion in military aid we will spend this year. We have secured a major deal to keep up the ongoing supply of artillery rounds and will continue refreshing their stocks of air defence and other missiles. Where we have equipment to gift we will replace from our own stocks and where we have no more to gift then we shall purchase alongside our Allies. The UK has been joined by the US in its huge level of support, as well as that of EU members - in particular, Poland, Slovakia and the Baltic States."

"We are also determined to maintain and sustain the Ukraine equipment pipeline for the longer term. This year the Ukrainians have been fighting not only for their freedoms but also for ours. We must be clear that three days, or even 300 days, is not the maximum attention span of the West. The UK and the international community's dedication to help Ukraine is solid and enduring, and will not let up through 2023 and beyond. We cannot stand by while Russia sends these waves of drones to escalate its attack on innocent civilians. And, just as the UK has evolved our support as the conflict has unfolded; we are doing so again now for this latest phase of Russian brutality, developing options to respond in a calibrated and determined manner should their escalation continue. Because if the Kremlin persists in its disregard for human rights and the Geneva Conventions, we must insist on Ukraine's right to self-defence and the protection of civilians. Mr Speaker, the next year will be critical for all of us who believe in standing-up for freedom, international law, and human rights."

As Wallace was addressing the House of Commons, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy was making a surprise visit to the besieged small city of Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine that, because of its location between the Russian forces and the larger cities of Kramatorsk and Slovyansk that Russia has been trying to take for some time, has been for several weeks a focal point of the conflict in eastern Ukraine. Zelenskyy gave medals to a number of soldiers and spoke to them commending their courage and bravery. After the visit, which of course wasn't announced until he had left, Zelenskyy wrote on Telegram, "Bakhmut Fortress. Our people. Unconquered by the enemy. Who with their bravery prove that we will endure and will not give up what's ours. Since May, the occupiers have been trying to break our Bakhmut, but time goes by and Bakhmut is already breaking not only the Russian army, but also the Russian mercenaries who came to replace the wasted army of the occupiers."

Meanwhile, as Russia continues to attack Ukraine's energy infrastructure with waves of cruise missiles, knocking out electricity, heat and water, the U.S. has reportedly (and belatedly) agreed to provide Ukraine one or more batteries of its Patriot (Phased Array Tracking Radar for Intercept On Target) missile defense system. (Each battery is a truck-mounted launching system that has eight launchers, each of which can launch, depending on the type of missile, 4 to 16 missiles, as well as a ground radar, a control station and a generator.) Unfortunately, given the time needed in order to deliver the system and train the crew for each battery, it's unlikely that Ukraine will have a functioning Patriot missile defense system until sometime in the mid-to-late winter – which means a very long, and often very dark and very cold, winter for those living in Kyiv and the other cities of Ukraine.

David R. Cameron
December 20, 2022