

## Russia's war against Ukraine enters year two – with no end in sight



UK Defense Intelligence update on Russian attacks and troop locations as of Feb. 23, 2023.

On Feb. 21 last year, frustrated by the continuing refusal of the U.S. and NATO to provide Russia the security guarantees it had requested in late 2021 – specifically, guarantees that Ukraine would never become a member of NATO – and by the refusal of Ukraine to fully implement the measures agreed by the Russian, Ukrainian, French and German leaders at Minsk in February 2015 to end the conflict between Ukrainian troops and pro-Russian separatists in eastern Ukraine that had begun in the spring of 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin convened the 30-member Security Council, which he chairs, to discuss the situation. Referring to the 2015 Minsk agreement, which he and the other three leaders negotiated after an earlier ceasefire had collapsed and which sought to end the conflict by not only establishing a ceasefire and mutual withdrawal of weapons but also by providing for constitutional reform in Ukraine that would give the predominantly Russian-speaking regions of Luhansk and Donetsk a special status and would devolve power from Kyiv to those regions and give them a substantial degree of autonomy, Putin told the members, “A peace plan was drafted during the negotiating process called the Minsk Package of Measures because, as you recall, we [he and the leaders of France, Germany and Ukraine] met in the city of Minsk. But subsequent developments show that the Kiev authorities are not planning to implement it, and they have publicly said so many times at the top state level and at the level of Foreign Minister and Security Council Secretary. Overall, everyone understands that they are not planning to do anything with regard to this Minsk Package of Measures....Our goal, the goal of today’s meeting, is to listen to our colleagues and to outline future steps in this direction, considering the appeals by the leaders of the Donetsk People’s Republic and the Lugansk People’s Republic on recognizing their sovereignty, as well as a resolution by the State Duma of the Russian Federation on the same subject. The latter

document urges the President to recognize the independence and sovereignty of the Donetsk People's Republic and the Lugansk People's Republic." He then called on each member of the Security Council to give his or her view of the situation.

The Security Council agreed that Russia should recognize the DPR and LPR and, later that evening, Putin signed executive orders recognizing the independence of the two "republics" created by pro-Russian separatists in portions of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in 2014 after the annexation of Crimea. He also signed treaties of friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance with the heads of the two "republics." (The territory of the two "republics" is shaded in darker red in the map above.) The next day the Duma and the Federation Council, the two chambers of Russia's Federal Assembly, approved laws ratifying the treaties. Putin signed the laws and then submitted a proposal to the Federation Council that, in accordance with the Russian Constitution and the two treaties, it approve a resolution authorizing the use of the Russian armed forces abroad on the basis of the "generally accepted principles and norms of international law." Later that day, the Federation Council unanimously approved the proposal and the stage was set for what happened on Feb. 24, 2022.

At 6 a.m. on Feb. 24 a year ago, Putin went on television and 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 the "special military operation," he said, was "to protect people who, for eight years now, have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime. To this end, we will seek to demilitarize and denazify Ukraine, as well as bring to trial those who perpetrated numerous bloody crimes against civilians, including against citizens of the Russian Federation. It is not our plan to occupy the Ukrainian territory. We do not intend to impose anything on anyone by force.... The current events have nothing to do with a desire to infringe on the interests of Ukraine and the Ukrainian people. They are connected with defending Russia from those who have taken Ukraine hostage and are trying to use it against our country and our people. I reiterate: We are acting to defend ourselves from the threats created for us and from a worse peril than what is happening now."

The "special military operation" that began on Feb. 24 last year was in fact a large-scale multi-pronged invasion of Ukraine from neighboring Belarus, its partner in their two-country "Union State," in the north; Crimea, annexed in 2014, in the south; and Russian territory adjacent to eastern and northeastern Ukraine, accompanied by intensive strikes on many cities throughout the country. Over the next two months, Russia attacked Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, Dnipro, Mariupol, Odesa, Lviv, and other cities with artillery and missiles, in the process destroying apartment buildings, schools and hospitals, and killing or injuring many thousands of men, women and children, and displacing millions, many of whom fled the country. Yet despite all the attacks on the cities and all the atrocities committed on the ground, the Russian forces were unable to overcome the fierce defense mobilized by the Ukrainian military and its citizens in the Kyiv region and were forced to pull back, and in late March, having failed to capture Kyiv, Russia announced a shift in the focus of the "special military operation" to "achieving the main goal, the liberation of Donbass."

Over the past year, Russia has held, at various times, much of Kharkiv, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia regions as well as roughly half of Donetsk region, and last fall, after having been driven out of Kharkiv region, Russia formally annexed the other four regions. But despite having

shifted the focus of the “special military operation” to the “liberation of Donbass” nearly a year ago, Russia still does not control all of Donetsk region. Indeed, it has even been unable, after several months, to take the small city of Bakhmut that, if taken, would open a pathway toward the larger cities of Kramatorsk and Slovyansk in the western portion of Donetsk region that’s still held by Ukraine. (See map above.) And as the stalemate along the contact line between the Russian and Ukrainian forces in eastern Ukraine continues, so too the huge numbers of military casualties (i.e., killed and wounded) on both sides continue to increase. Russia doesn’t announce its military casualties, of course, and there is considerable uncertainty about the numbers. But the U.S. military estimates there have been 200,000 Russian military casualties, the Norwegian military estimates there have been more than 180,000 Russian military casualties, and the UK military estimates there have been 175,000-200,000 Russian military casualties, of which 40,000-60,000 were killed. Norway also estimates there have been more than 100,000 Ukrainian military casualties and 30,000 civilian deaths. Putin’s war has clearly been a disaster, not only for Ukrainian troops and civilians but for Russian soldiers as well.

The war has now entered year two – and there is no end in sight. How it will end is anyone’s guess. One possibility, of course, is that Russia will attempt, in its much-anticipated offensive that has just begun in eastern Ukraine, to take the portion of Donetsk region it doesn’t yet hold and, after doing so, will propose a ceasefire and truce, to be followed by peace talks. But there’s no reason to believe that, based on its performance to date, Russia will be able to take the rest of Donetsk region anytime soon or indeed ever. Nor is there any reason to believe that if, in the unlikely event that Russia **does** take the rest of Donetsk region, Ukraine would agree to a ceasefire and truce, and then talks that would give Russia the territory in eastern Ukraine it holds at the time of the ceasefire and truce. And so there is, indeed, no end in sight. The only thing that **is** in sight is the likelihood that many more Ukrainian soldiers and civilians, and many more Russians soldiers, will be wounded or killed before this war somehow comes to an end.

David R. Cameron  
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