

War in Ukraine

Russian forces enter outskirts of Kyiv as Putin calls on Ukraine to surrender

Explosions and air raid sirens in capital as Putin's troops move at speed towards Ukraine's two biggest cities



John Reed and **Polina Ivanova** in Kyiv and **Henry Foy** in Brussels AN HOUR AGO

Russian forces breached the suburbs of Kyiv and mobilised for a battle to control the capital as Vladimir Putin called on Ukraine's army to surrender and spare the country bloodshed.

Kyiv residents woke to loud explosions shortly after 4am on Friday and reports of Russian armoured vehicles advancing into the northern Kyiv district of Obolon, bringing street fighting to the 3mn-strong capital.

Western officials said stronger than expected Ukrainian resistance had slowed Russia's attempt to encircle Kyiv and capture Kharkiv in the north-east, Ukraine's second-biggest city.

But by the early afternoon, Moscow said its troops had made a crucial breakthrough, taking a key airport and taking positions so Kyiv was "blocked . . . from the west". The claim could not be independently verified.

As his troops moved to encircle Kyiv, Putin urged Ukraine's armed forces to "take power into their own hands" and overthrow their government so they could strike a peace deal with Russia.

Chairing a meeting of Russia's security council on Friday, the Russian president told Ukraine's army it would be "easier for us to make a deal with you" than the politicians who had taken "the whole Ukrainian people hostage".

Earlier in the day, Ukraine's president Volodymyr Zelensky delivered an early morning address warning that "enemy saboteur groups" were already in Kyiv and that Russia was planning to assassinate him. "The enemy has identified me as the number-one target," Zelensky said, wearing a military-style green T-shirt.

Air raid sirens sounded in the capital and the city government warned people to seek cover in shelters or subway stations as the military said it had intercepted two Russian projectiles fired at the city.



'According to our information, the enemy has identified me as the number-one target,' Volodymyr Zelensky said on Friday morning in a video address © Ukrainian President's Office/dpa

The civilian exodus from Kyiv also continued. Traffic was heavy on roads leading out of the capital, with some residents fleeing on foot from the centre with suitcases, hoping to hail rides from passing cars.

Ukraine's military called on residents of Obolon to inform them about the movement of Russian equipment into the city and called on citizens to resist. "Make Molotov cocktails, neutralise the occupier," the defence ministry said.

Russia on Friday claimed it had captured Kyiv's Hostomel airport, which is near the Obolon district, after it changed hands multiple times on Thursday in fighting involving special forces troops, assault helicopters and precision-guided missiles.

Control of the runway would allow Russia to rapidly transport large numbers of troops directly to the capital.

Oleksiy Arestovych, an adviser in Zelensky’s office, said government troops were battling Russian invaders north of Kyiv near the towns of Dymyer, Ivankiv, Vorzel and Bucha.

“Russian troops are trying to attack, but our mechanised units have set up a solid barrier there,” Arestovych said.

How Russia’s invasion of Ukraine may play out



*Some of the sites located on February 20 are now likely to be empty or are in the process of being emptied
Sources: Rochan Consulting; FT research
Cartography by Steven Bernard
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Ukrainian forces overnight destroyed bridges north of the city in an attempt to impede the Russian advance. Western military officials warned that the arrival of tens of thousands of troops advancing south from Belarus and north from Crimea would bring “overwhelming” military superiority that could lead to the capital falling within days.

On the Ukrainian military, one senior western intelligence official said: “They are

putting up a fight and they are not doing horribly, but they are still overwhelmed. I have no doubt they will continue to fight for as long as they possibly can.”

Ukraine’s defence ministry claimed its forces have taken down more than a dozen Russian aircraft and helicopters, along with scores of tanks and armoured vehicles. Zelensky said 137 of his countrymen had died. Russia provided no figures on damage to its military assets or on casualties.

Ben Wallace, the UK defence secretary, said his intelligence estimates suggested Russia lost more than 450 personnel on the first day of operations, where it did not take “any of its major objectives”.

While social media videos have shown both sides suffering considerable battlefield losses since Thursday, precise Russian, Ukrainian and Nato military claims cannot be independently verified.

Shocked world leaders have [condemned](#) what they cast as the most momentous challenge to the postwar order in Europe for 80 years. “[Putin] has much [larger ambitions](#) than Ukraine,” said US president Joe Biden on Thursday. “He wants to, in fact, re-establish the former Soviet Union. That’s what this is about.”

Biden said the US and its allies would [impose sanctions](#) in response to Russia’s aggression. “Putin chose this war and now he and his country will bear the consequences.”

Zelensky thanked western leaders for their support but questioned their willingness to go further. “Who is ready to fight with us? Honestly, I don’t see anyone . . . I’m asking them, are you with us?”

Nato will hold an emergency summit of its members’ 30 leaders on Friday to discuss the invasion.

On Friday, oil prices steadied after topping \$100 per barrel on Thursday for the first time since 2014. Oil had risen as high as \$106 before dropping back after the Biden administration announced a raft of sanctions that focused on Russia’s [financial sector](#) rather than its energy industry.

European natural gas prices retreated after surging as much as 69 per cent to €142 per megawatt hour in the previous session. Futures contracts linked to TTF, Europe’s wholesale gas price, were down more than a fifth on Friday morning at €106.7.

European equities were up more than 1 per cent, after the regional Stoxx 600 gauge

closed 3.3 per cent lower on Thursday.

Additional reporting by John Paul Rathbone in London and Leo Lewis in Tokyo

Timeline: the key moments that led to Russia invading Ukraine

Spring 2021

Putin's show of force

Russia moves up to 100,000 troops to the border with Ukraine, the most significant military build-up since the annexation of Crimea in 2014.

President Vladimir Putin eventually draws back some troops, but Ukrainian and western think-tanks say the build-up was designed to intimidate Ukraine and its western allies.

July 2021

A justification for invasion

Putin publishes a 5,000-word essay about Ukraine, offering a rare window into his thinking on the country.

He argues that there is “no historical basis for Ukraine as a nation separate to Russia. The essay underlines how much Putin's approach has hardened since he annexed Crimea and instigated a separatist war in the Donbas region.

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