

War in Ukraine

US pours cold water on hopes of diplomatic solution in Ukraine

Top diplomat says no signs Putin is 'prepared to stop' and vows to investigate alleged 'war crimes'



Antony Blinken says Russia 'may be setting the stage to use a chemical weapon' in Ukraine © AP

James Politi in Washington YESTERDAY

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The US secretary of state has poured cold water on hopes of a diplomatic settlement to the war in Ukraine, saying there were no signs Vladimir Putin was “prepared to stop” Russia’s invasion of its neighbour.

Antony Blinken played down expectations the warring countries would be able to come to an agreement that would see Russia withdraw its forces from Ukraine as he vowed Washington would investigate “war crimes” carried out by the Russian military.

“From where I sit, diplomacy obviously requires both sides engaging in good faith to de-escalate,” Blinken said during a press conference at the state department in Washington on Thursday.

“The actions that we’re seeing Russia take every single day, virtually every minute of every day, are in total contrast to any serious diplomatic effort to end the [war](#),” he added.

In a stark assessment of Russia’s intentions a month into the conflict, Blinken laid out what he thought Putin’s next moves might be, including the use of [chemical weapons](#),

the deployment of pro-Russian mercenaries, and the kidnapping of local officials to be replaced with pro-Russian puppet leaders.

“We have a strong sense of what Russia could do next,” Blinken said, pointing out that the US had been correct in its assessment that Putin intended to invade. “We believe that Moscow may be setting the stage to use a chemical weapon and then falsely blame Ukraine to justify escalating its attacks.”

He also attacked Moscow for its increasingly gruesome assaults on civilian targets in the country, including a hospital, schools and a theatre in the port city of Mariupol that served as a shelter for many families.

Blinken’s comments came a day after US president Joe Biden labelled Putin a [“war criminal”](#) for the first time.

“Intentionally targeting civilians is a war crime. After all the destruction of the past few weeks, I find it difficult to conclude that the Russians are doing otherwise,” Blinken said.

He added: “Our experts are in the process of documenting and evaluating potential war crimes being committed in Ukraine. We’ll make sure that our findings help international efforts to investigate war crimes and hold those responsible accountable”.

Blinken spoke a day after Biden announced a new package of military aid to Ukraine, including anti-aircraft systems, anti-tank weapons, and armed drones to help the country fend off the Russian assault.

Biden is planning to travel to Brussels at the end of next week to further co-ordinate the west’s response to the war, after warning that it could end up being a “long and difficult battle”.

On Friday, Biden is due to speak with Xi Jinping, Chinese president, about the war in Ukraine, after escalating concerns in Washington that Beijing is siding with Moscow in the conflict.

“We believe China in particular has a responsibility to use its influence with President Putin and to defend the international rules and principles that it professes to support,” Blinken said.

“Instead, it appears China is moving in the opposite direction by refusing to condemn this aggression, while seeking to portray itself as a neutral arbiter. And we’re

concerned that they're considering directly assisting Russia with [military equipment](#) to use in Ukraine.”

China's foreign ministry said an official met with Andrey Denisov, the Russian ambassador in Beijing, on Thursday to discuss “bilateral counter-terrorism and security co-operation”.

Blinken added that Biden would in his call with Xi “make clear that China will bear responsibility for any actions it takes to support Russia's aggression, and we will not hesitate to impose costs”.

Blinken's words came after Volodymyr Zelensky, Ukraine's president, kept up the pressure on the west to further bolster military support for the country and while imposing fresh sanctions on Russia in response to the invasion.

After addressing members of US Congress on Wednesday, Zelensky spoke to German lawmakers on Thursday, delivering an [excoriating attack](#) on its leaders for placing good economic relations with Putin over the security of Europe.

“We've seen how many ties your companies have with Russia with a country that just uses you and other countries to finance its war,” Zelensky said in a virtual address at the Bundestag.

Additional reporting by William Langley in Hong Kong

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