

Russia Shells Ukraine's Kharkiv as Pressure on Moscow Bites

By [Sergiy Bobok](#), [Dave Clark](#), [Anna Smolchenko](#) for AFP

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People look at a shell crater a day after a shelling on a residential area in Kiev. **TASS / EPA / SERGEY DOLZHENKO**

Russia shelled the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv as it pressed on with its invasion Tuesday, defying mounting global pressure that saw a war crimes probe opened against Moscow, sanctions smash its economy and FIFA ban it from the World Cup.

After their first talks since the war started failed to secure a breakthrough Monday, Russia continued to target residential areas and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky called for a global ban on Russian planes and ships.

"We must close entry for this state in all ports, all canals and all the world's airports," he said on Facebook.

Russian President Vladimir Putin had earlier outlined Moscow's demands for ending the

invasion, including recognition of Russian sovereignty over Crimea and Ukraine's demilitarization.

He issued his demands in a phone call with French leader Emmanuel Macron shortly before the Russian-Ukrainian talks.

Instead, the world has responded with an intensifying diplomatic, economic, cultural and sporting backlash, with Moscow coming under fire at the UN General Assembly and the International Criminal Court (ICC) opening a war crimes investigation.

"I am satisfied that there is a reasonable basis to believe that both alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity have been committed in Ukraine" since 2014, ICC prosecutor Karim Khan said in a statement.

Russia also faced urgent calls at an extraordinary UN General Assembly debate to end its "unprovoked" and "unjustified" assault, which has provoked a massive diplomatic, economic, cultural and sporting backlash.

Inside the General Assembly hall Monday, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres pleaded: "The fighting in Ukraine must stop. Enough is enough."

It followed Putin's phone call with Macron where the Russian leader "stressed that a settlement is possible only if Russia's legitimate security interests are unconditionally taken into account," said the Kremlin.

Fighting continued during the dialogue, with at least 11 people killed by Russian attacks in Kharkiv and Russian missile fire on several residential buildings.

Explosions were also reported in and around Brovary, a city on the outskirts of the capital, Kyiv.

Russian fire killed several civilians, including children, in Kharkiv and Russian armored vehicles and tanks are "everywhere" around the city, said mayor Igor Terekhov, quoted by Ukrainian media.

More than 350 civilians, including 14 children, have been killed during the invasion, Ukraine says, while more than half a million people have fled the country.

In Kyiv, many were preparing for a fresh assault with makeshift barricades dotting the streets.

The Russian army urged Ukrainians to leave Kyiv "freely" on one highway out ahead of what is an expected Russian offensive to capture the capital.

The International Atomic Energy Agency said it was "gravely concerned" as Russian forces advanced toward Ukraine's largest nuclear plant, strongly warning against any military action that could threaten the Zaporizhzhia facility.

Ruble plummets

Western nations have moved to increasingly isolate Russia, with the United States expelling 12 members of Moscow's UN mission from America for being "intelligence operatives."

Canada announced a ban on Russian oil imports Monday.

The European Union and its allies were also preparing more sanctions against Russia in the coming days to "raise the cost" of war in Ukraine, an aide to Macron told reporters.

And Turkey said it would implement an international treaty to limit ships passing through the Dardanelles and Bosphorus straits, a move requested by Ukraine to block the transit of Russian warships.

The Russian ruble crashed to a record low as sanctions imposed by the West over the weekend had an immediate impact in Moscow, forcing the central bank to more than double its key interest rate to 20 percent.

Putin also announced emergency measures intended to prop up the ruble, including banning residents from transferring money abroad.

Long queues

Long queues for groceries snaked through the streets of Kyiv on Monday after a strict 36-hour military curfew was lifted and volunteer militias learned how to make home-made explosives.

"We will greet them with Molotov cocktails and bullets to the head," bank employee Viktor Rudnichenko told AFP. "The only flowers they might get from us will be for their grave."

Many Russians raced to withdraw cash.

Retired soldier Edward Sysoyev, 51, fidgeted impatiently while in line at a bank in Moscow.

"Ninety percent of Russians are going to rush to withdraw their rubles and change them into dollars, property or even gold... it'll be ordinary people who pay for this military bun-fight," he said.

'Unprovoked armed aggression'

In Russia, there were more signs of rare dissent among the usually ultra-loyal oligarchs who surround the Russian leader — in addition to anti-war demonstrations that saw an estimated 2,100 people arrested on Sunday.

Russian tycoon Oleg Deripaska said "we need real crisis managers and not fantasists," while billionaire banker Oleg Tinkov said "innocent people are dying every day, this is unthinkable and unacceptable!"

Western defense officials and the Kyiv government say Ukrainian troops have so far kept the

country's major cities out of Russian hands despite incursions in the capital and Kharkiv over the weekend.

However the small southern city of Berdyansk has been occupied, Ukraine said.

Moscow claimed it had "gained air superiority over the entire territory of Ukraine," while accusing Ukrainian troops of using civilians as human shields.

However Olivier Kempf, a security analyst at the Foundation for Strategic Research think tank, said that Russian forces were "not bogged down."

"This is war, so there are difficulties. They may have logistics issues. But regardless of what we're told, they are making progress," he told AFP. "Only in video games do you conquer a country in two days."

Kicked out of World Cup

The weekend featured a momentous series of announcements from Europe, with Germany unveiling a historic change to its defense policies, and the EU saying it would buy and supply arms to Ukraine, the first such move in its history.

On Monday the European Union said it would add Russian oligarchs and the Kremlin's spokesman to its sanctions blacklist while traditionally neutral Switzerland said it would adopt the bloc's sanctions.

However the EU poured cold water on Zelensky's request for "immediate" membership to the bloc, saying the process to join takes years.

The response from the world of sports also gathered steam, as Russia was expelled from the World Cup and the country's clubs and national teams were suspended from all international football competitions "until further notice," FIFA and UEFA said.

Poland has taken in more than half of the 500,000 people who have fled Ukraine, according to the UN.

Katerina Zaporjets, a laboratory worker from the central city of Cherkassy, said it took her 24 hours to arrive at the western Shegyni border post — and she will likely wait another 48 hours before crossing.

"The trip was really hard," the 31-year-old told AFP. "It's calmer here, but the drive was really scary."

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