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Russia's war with Ukraine

Russian aggression against Ukraine continued into week 12 of the war with further destruction of civilian infrastructure and indiscriminate violence against civilians. The number of people who have fled Ukraine [exceeds six million](#), and a further eight million people have been displaced inside Ukraine. The official UN civilian death toll in Ukraine stands at 3,381 as well as 3,680 injured. However, the number of civilians killed since the beginning of the war is “thousands higher” than official figures, [according](#) to the head of the UN’s human rights monitoring mission in the country, Matilda Bogner. The main difficulty is accessing and corroborating casualty details in Mariupol. Despite unclear information, Ukrainian officials estimate that the death toll of Ukrainian citizens in Mariupol alone is approximately 20,000.

Stalemate?

A protracted, punishing war of attrition is now predicted: “The Russians aren’t winning, and the Ukrainians aren’t winning, and we’re at a bit of a stalemate here”, [said](#) Lt Gen Scott Berrier, director of the Pentagon’s Defense Intelligence Agency during evidence to the US Senate Armed Forces Committee. Berrier suggested that this stalemate could lead to increasingly unpredictable acts of escalation from Russian President Vladimir Putin, including full mobilisation, the imposition of martial law inside Russia, and – if his position in Moscow becomes threatened– even the use of a nuclear weapon.

Ukraine’s Defence Minister, Oleksii Reznikov, [said](#) Kyiv hopes to arm a million people as the country prepares for a “new, long phase of war”. He warned that “extremely tough weeks

are ahead” and that Ukraine needed “unity, cohesion, will and patience” during this difficult period.

However, other assessments gave a more upbeat view from a Ukrainian perspective. Major General Kyrylo Budanov, Ukraine’s head of military intelligence, [predicted](#) that the war would reach a turning point by mid-August and be over by the end of the year, while the US-based Institute for the Study of War said in its latest [assessment](#) that Ukraine has “likely won the battle of Kharkiv”, the country’s second largest city. It was also [reported](#) that Ukraine had repelled multiple attempts by the Russians to cross a strategically significant river in the Donbas, inflicting heavy losses in the process. British defence intelligence said Russia had lost “significant armoured manoeuvre elements” from the failed effort to cross the Siverskyi Donets River, 20km west of Severodonetsk. US defence officials also [claimed](#) that some Russian troops in Ukraine were not obeying orders, suggesting that “mid-grade officers at various levels, even up to the battalion level” were refusing to move forward in the Donbas offensive.

Victory Day

Russia’s annual Victory Day celebrations on 9 May marking the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II passed without any significant new announcements by President Putin, although he defended his invasion of Ukraine, [saying](#) it was needed to preemptively rebuff NATO. However, in his speech Putin did not actually mention Ukraine by name, and he did not declare a broader war in Ukraine as some had predicted. As Putin sought to rally his country through the memory of the second

world war, the Ukrainian president, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, pushed back in his own address from Kyiv. “We will not allow anyone to annex this victory, we will not allow it to be appropriated”, he [said](#) in a recorded address.

Faux democracy?

It was [reported](#) that Moscow is planning to hold a referendum on whether Mariupol wants to become part of Russia. Earlier the Russian-controlled administration in the Ukrainian city of Kherson [said](#) it plans to request annexation by Moscow. In addition, the leader of Georgia’s breakaway region of South Ossetia, Anatoly Bibilov, [announced](#) that the region will hold a referendum on joining Russia on 17 July. South Ossetia was at the centre of the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 after which the Moscow recognised the territory – along with another separatist region, Abkhazia – as an independent state and stationed military bases there.

Proxy war?

With the fighting in Ukraine increasingly being [described](#) as a proxy war between the United States and Russia, the US defence secretary, Lloyd Austin, spoke to his Russian counterpart, Sergei Shoigu, for the first time since before the invasion began, the Pentagon [said](#). Austin “urged an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and emphasised the importance of maintaining lines of communication”, the Pentagon press secretary, John Kirby, said.

President Joe Biden signed the [Ukraine Democracy Defence Lend-Lease Act of 2022](#) to streamline the supply of US weapons and other material to Ukraine or eastern European countries. The US House of Representatives [approved](#) a \$39.8 billion aid package for Ukraine. The legislation allocates \$6 billion for security assistance, \$900 million for refugee support services, \$8.7 billion to the Economic Support Fund for “emergent needs in Ukraine,” \$4.365 billion to the US Agency for International Development for emergency food assistance, \$8.7 billion to restock the US supply of equipment sent to Ukraine and \$11 billion to fund the presidential drawdown authority to quickly send aid to Ukraine. The aid package was passed in a vote of 368-57. All

lawmakers who voted against the legislation were Republicans, and two Democrats and three Republicans did not vote. However, the Republican senator Rand Paul [blocked](#) the passage of the bill in the US Senate. Paul demanded changes including an inspector general to scrutinize the new spending. Final passage of the bill is not in doubt.

During her visit to Japan, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [said](#) Russia “is today the most direct threat to the world order with the barbaric war against Ukraine, and its worrying pact with China”, while UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson reiterated that a normalisation of relations with Vladimir Putin seemed impossible, [accusing](#) the Russian President of having “grossly violated human rights” and international law. Earlier the UK Defence Secretary, Ben Wallace, [said](#) the UK would support and provide assistance to Poland or any other central or eastern European country willing to supply Russian-designed combat aircraft to Ukraine. This is a step that no country has been willing to take so far for fear of Russian reprisals.

Russian cyber attacks

The US, EU and other allies accused Russia of committing cybercrimes against Ukraine, according to a [statement](#) released by the US State Department. In the statement, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken alleged that Russia launched cyberattacks against commercial satellite communications networks to disrupt Ukrainian military operations throughout Russia’s invasion. The cyberattacks also reportedly disabled multiple aperture terminals across Ukraine and throughout Europe, which temporarily disabled wind turbines and internet service to private citizens.

NATO military exercises

Meanwhile, NATO allies and partners are taking part in a series of long-planned military exercises stretching from the High North to the Balkans. Two of the biggest drills, with around 18,000 troops from 20 countries, are ‘[Defender Europe](#)’ and ‘[Swift Response](#)’, currently taking place in Poland and eight other countries. In

Estonia, 15,000 troops from 14 countries are involved in exercise '[Hedgehog](#), one of the largest military drills in the country since 1991, while exercise '[Iron Wolf](#)' in Lithuania involves 3,000 NATO troops and around 1,000 vehicles.

Further reading:

On outcomes and consequences of the war

[What went wrong with Russia's invasion of Ukraine?](#) Russia Matters, 12 May 2022

[Belarus to deploy special forces to southern border near Ukraine](#), Reuters, 10 May 2022

Susan D'Agostino, [On Victory Day, Putin points fingers but doesn't escalate war](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 9 May 2022

[Ukraine War: Putin's Victory Day speech fact-checked](#), BBC News, 9 May 2022

Emily Ferris, [Victory Day Was Just a Day: Trying to Penetrate Russia's Thinking](#), RUSI Commentary, 9 May 2022

Dan Smith, [Putin's 6-sided box in Ukraine](#), Blog, 9 May 2022

On peace negotiations and other proposals for conflict transformation

Ian Anthony, [Can Confidence and Security Building Measures \(CSBMs\) help manage European crises?](#) ELN Policy Brief, 10 May 2022

Nela Porobić, [Holding onto nonviolence and feminism in the midst of war](#), WILPF Analysis, 9 May 2022

Neal Ascherson, [Surrendering land is not the same as defeat – if a stronger Ukraine emerges from the ruins](#), The Guardian, 8 May 2022

On investigations of war crimes in Ukraine and other legal processes

On 12 May, the Human Rights Council began its thirty-fourth special session on the deteriorating human rights situation in Ukraine. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights continues to verify allegations of violations of international human rights law and of international

humanitarian law in Ukraine, many of which may amount to war crimes. Michelle Bachelet, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, [said](#) that the causes of civilian casualties that the Office had been recording in Ukraine had not significantly changed since the last time she addressed the Council. The vast majority continued to be caused by the use of explosive weapons in populated areas (EWIPA), such as shelling from heavy artillery, including multiple launch rocket systems, and missile and air strikes. While such incidents could be attributed to both parties to the conflict, most of these casualties appeared attributable to the Russian armed forces and affiliated armed groups. (On efforts to ban EWIPA see [here](#)).

On 12 May the Human Rights Council passed a [resolution](#) to investigate alleged abuses by Russian troops. The resolution was passed by a strong majority, with 33 members voting in favour and two – China and Eritrea – against. There were 12 abstentions. The UN General Assembly [voted](#) overwhelmingly for the Czech Republic to replace Russia on the Human Rights Council.

A Russian soldier has appeared in court [accused](#) of murdering an unarmed man on a bicycle, at the start of the first war crime trial in Ukraine since the invasion began. Vadim Shysimarin, a commander of the Kantemirovskaya tank division, is charged with the premeditated murder of a 62-year-old man. The case is scheduled to resume on 18 May.

A Human Rights Watch [report](#) revealed that Russian forces have used at least six different types of cluster munitions in attacks carried out during their invasion of Ukraine. According to the report, Russia's use of cluster munitions has caused hundreds of civilian casualties. The use of the weapons also violates international bans on indiscriminate weapons. While the total number of cluster attacks committed by the Russians is currently unknown, Human Rights Watch found that hundreds of cluster munition attacks against Ukrainians have been reported or documented since the beginning of the war.

Philip Zelikow, [A Legal Approach to the Transfer of Russian Assets to Rebuild Ukraine](#), Lawfare, 12 May 2022

Knox Thames, [Calling Genocide by its Name: Atrocity Prevention in Foreign Policy](#), RUSI Commentary, 11 May 2022

On the risk of nuclear war

[Russia's space agency chief claimed his nation could destroy NATO countries in 'half an hour' during a nuclear war](#), Business Insider, 9 May 2022

On Ukraine's EU membership application

Ukraine [submitted](#) the second part of a formal questionnaire to obtain candidacy for EU membership. "Today we have taken another step – a very important and not just a formal step – on our path to the European Union", President Zelenskiy announced in his national address on 9 May. France's president, Emmanuel Macron, [said](#) Ukraine's EU bid would "take several years, indeed, probably several decades". Speaking to the European parliament in Strasbourg, Macron suggested creating a "parallel European community" for countries aspiring to join the bloc or, in an apparent reference to the UK, countries that had left the union. Germany's chancellor, Olaf Scholz, described Macron's suggestion as "very interesting".

On energy security and climate change

Ukraine [said](#) it will suspend the flow of gas through a transit point that it says delivers almost a third of the fuel piped from Russia to Europe through Ukraine. GTSOU, which operates Ukraine's gas system, said it would stop shipments via Sokhranivka from 11 May, declaring "force majeure", a clause invoked when a business is hit by something beyond its control. Russia's Gazprom said this would be "technologically impossible".

Simon Dalby, [Firepower, Climate and the Dilemmas of Security](#), RUSI Commentary, 10 May 2022

On sanctions against Russia

The EU could [agree](#) on a phased embargo on Russian oil next week, despite concerns about supply in eastern Europe, according to diplomats and officials. EU foreign ministers meet in Brussels on 16 May and an agreement might be reached then. The UK [issued](#) sanctions against a dozen members of Vladimir Putin's family and inner circle including his long-rumoured girlfriend. The UK Foreign Office argued that the Russian president officially owns only modest assets, and has sanctioned the people who help support his lavish lifestyle.

Shirin Hakim and Karen E Makuch, [Conflicts of Interest: The Environmental Costs of Modern War and Sanctions](#), RUSI Commentary, 11 May 2022

On international food security

Urgent measures to break the Russian blockade of grain exports from Ukraine's ports, including by trying to open routes through Romania and the Baltic, were [discussed](#) at a three-day meeting of G7 foreign and agriculture ministers in Germany. Before the war, most of the food produced by Ukraine – enough to feed 400 million people – was exported through its seven Black Sea ports. The EU Commission has [proposed](#) establishing trade corridors that would allow Ukraine to bypass Russia's blockade. According to the European commissioner for transport, the EU must establish "solidarity lanes" so that Ukraine can resume exports of approximately 22 million tons of grain that are essential to the global food supply. In addition to challenges caused by Russian blockades, Ukrainian export convoys face long delays when attempting to cross borders into Europe because of different rail gauges used by Ukraine and the EU. To remedy this issue, the EU executive body urged EU "market players" to provide vehicles to move freight and urged customs officials to "apply maximum flexibility".

On developments within Russia

Four Russian regional governors [reportedly](#) resigned on 10 May as the country braced for the impact of economic sanctions. The heads

of the Tomsk, Saratov, Kirov and Mari El regions announced their immediate departure from office, while the head of Ryazan region said he would not run for another term. Seven Russian oligarchs, many involved with oil and gas, have recently died under [mysterious circumstances](#). Although suicide is officially suspected, speculation about the Kremlin's involvement abounds.

Sam Cranny-Evans and Olga Ivshina, [Corruption in the Russian Armed Forces](#), RUSI Commentary, 12 May 2022

[‘Paranoid dictator’: Russian journalists fill pro-Kremlin site with anti-war articles](#), The Guardian, 9 May 2022

On developments within NATO

[Long-planned NATO exercises across Europe get underway](#), NATO News Release, 13 May 2022 -

Gabrielius Landsbergis, Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs, [The end of naivete: How NATO must boost Baltic defenses](#), Politico, 11 May 2022

[Allies stand together to bolster NATO's eastern flank](#), Allied Air Command Public Affairs Office, 10 May 2022

[100 miles from Ukraine, NATO special forces carry out training drills on the Black Sea](#), CNN, 10 May 2022

Pierre Morcos and Luis Simón, [NATO and the South after Ukraine](#), CSIS Briefs, May 2022

[The best books on NATO](#): University of Birmingham political scientist Mark Webber offers five book recommendations on the history, aims and ideals of NATO.

On Finland and Sweden joining NATO

Finland's president, Sauli Niinistö, phoned Vladimir Putin to [tell him](#) that Helsinki plans to join NATO. Putin said abandoning neutrality would be a mistake and that there are no current threats to Finland's security. Russia has described Helsinki's bid to join NATO as a hostile move that "definitely" would represent a threat – to which Moscow will respond.

[Finland and Sweden edge closer to NATO, but Turkey hints at opposition](#), NATO Watch News Brief, 13 May 2022

[Should Finland and Sweden hold a referendum on NATO membership?](#) NATO Watch Briefing no. 93, 6 May 2022

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