

Ukraine Crisis Update (15 March 2022)



Summary (As of 1500 Hrs UTC)

As of 15 March, Ukrainian ports remain closed as the war in Ukraine has severely impacted shipping in the Black Sea and has had broad consequences for international transport and global supply chains.

Advisory

MS Risk continues to advise any vessels currently within Ukrainian Ports to leave immediately, if it is deemed safe to do so. Vessels should ensure that they are broadcasting on AIS and clearly state their intentions across VHF. In the event that any vessel is challenged by Russian military vessels, they are advised to comply fully with instructions. MS Risk further advises all commercial operators at this time to avoid any transit or operation within the EEZ of Ukraine or Russia, notably in the vicinity of the Crimean Peninsula within the Black Sea. As of 15 March, the Black Sea ports of the Russian Federation are functioning normally. All transit inbound Western terminals should be made out with Ukrainian and Russian EEZ south of the Crimean Peninsula. While Commercial operations within the EEZ of Turkey, Bulgaria and Romania remain unaffected at this time, the Romanian Ministry of Defence has announced that Russian military vessels are diverting and stopping commercial ships en-route to Ukrainian ports north of Romania's EEZ. Consequently, such vessels are advised to void transiting within 50 nautical miles of the north-east extremity of the Romanian EEZ. Any vessels transiting through this region are advised to maintain close contact with national and local maritime authorities. Any incidents or suspicious activity should be reported via their respective national channels and to the local maritime authorities.



On the Ground

On day 20 of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, fighting around Kyiv has continued with the capital city being targeted for a second day. Civilians in the city awoke to residential buildings on fire, with a sense on the ground that the conflict is coming closer to the city. Unconfirmed reports indicate that Russian forces are about 10 - 15 km away, with the city's mayor warning that the capital is entering a "dangerous moment." Talks between Russia and Ukraine resumed on Tuesday, with Ukraine warning that Russia is likely to renew its offensive if no agreement is reached.

The General Staff of Ukrainian Armed Forces provided a morning update on Tuesday, stating that Russian forces remain focused on maintaining their gains on Ukrainian territory, though they have failed to make further gains. A senior US defence official made a similar statement, disclosing that nearly all Russian military offensives remain stalled after they made minimal progress over the weekend. According to the General Staff of Ukrainian Armed Forces, Russian troops have however continued to launch missile and bomb attacks on critical infrastructure and are co-opting civilian infrastructure. Russian soldiers have also been using healthcare facilities in occupied territories to treat wounded personnel. Four helicopters, one plane, and a cruise missile belonging to Russia have been struck down by Ukrainian forces in recent days, while Ukrainian units have managed to fend off Russian attempts to capture the heavily-contested southern port city of Mariupol. There have also been no further signs of naval landings by Russian forces in the Black Sea region. In regards to Russian troops, their moral and psychological state "remains low," with Russian servicemen apparently refusing to carry out commands. Meanwhile a Ukrainian adviser has disclosed that he expects the war to be over by early May by the latest. Late on 14 March, Oleksiy Arestovich, an advisor to the Ukrainian president's chief of staff, outlined two possible outcomes in the months ahead: "there will be either a peace deal struck very quickly, within a week or two, with troop withdrawal and everything, or there will



be an attempt to scrape together some, say, Syrians for a round two and, when we grind them too, an agreement by mid-April or late April.” The statement cites claims made by the Pentagon earlier this month that Russia is trying to recruit Syrians to fight in Ukraine, though this has not been verified.

The mayor of **Kyiv** has disclosed that four people have been confirmed killed after air strikes hit the capital city overnight. Russian air strikes hit residential buildings and a metro station. A long curfew will begin on Tuesday evening from 20:00 (18:00 GMT) until 07:00 (05:00 GMT) on Thursday after recent bombardments on the city. Elsewhere in Ukraine, in the north-eastern city of **Sumy**, the Red Cross is hoping to evacuate civilians in seventy buses in two convoys today. The city has experienced heavy shelling. In the southern port city of **Mariupol**, officials have indicated that civilians are “essentially being suffocated in this city with no aid.” On Tuesday, some 2,000 cars were able to leave along a humanitarian evacuation route, with the city council reporting that a further 2,000 are waiting to leave. So far around 2,400 civilians have been killed, with 2 mass graves being set up for bodies. The city has gone 13 days with no electricity, gas or water, with the overnight temperatures being around 5°C (23°F). Some 400,000 people remain in the city. In the eastern city of **Dnipro**, an airport was hit by Russian missiles, according to regional authorities. Valentyn Reznichenko, the head of the Dnipropetrovsk regional state administration, reported that there has been “massive destruction.” The airport was targeted by two missile strikes overnight, resulting in damage to the terminal and destroying the runway. In **Kherson**, a spokesman for the Russian Defence Ministry has disclosed that Russian forces have taken full control of Ukraine’s southern Kherson region. The claims by Igor Konashenkov have not been independently verified. Interfax-AVN news agency quoted him as saying that Russian forces had taken full control of the entire territory. A video earlier this week showed residents in the city staging another demonstration against the Russian occupation, despite forces firing warning shots.

Negotiations between Russia and Ukraine resumed on Tuesday after a pause on Monday. Ukrainian negotiator Mykhailo Podolyak has posted on Twitter, “consultations on the main negotiation platform renewed. General regulation matters, ceasefire, withdrawal of troops from the territory of the country.” Overnight, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky published another video message where he sounded a note of cautious optimism about the talks. Comments have also emerged from the Ukrainian leader around his country and its potential NATO membership. Having said prior to Russia’s invasion that he wanted Ukraine to become part of the alliance, he was quoted as saying last week that he had “cooled” on the idea. One of Putin’s key demands ahead of the invasion was a ban on Ukraine ever entering NATO. In a further shift, President Zelensky disclosed on Tuesday afternoon that his country must recognize that there “is not an open door” to NATO membership, adding that “Ukraine understands it is not in NATO,” while proposing a way for the nation to protect its skies independently.

Regional and International Reporting

The prime ministers of the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia are currently travelling by train to Kyiv for talks with Ukraine’s president and prime minister. According to the head of the Polish prime minister’s office, they are travelling as representatives of the European Union and will present details of a concrete support package for Ukraine. The visit was apparently arranged during the recent EU summit in Versailles, France. The three leaders, who are accompanied by the head of Poland’s governing party, Jarosław Kaczyński, will present a broad package of EU support for Ukraine. Their trains have already crossed the Polish-Ukrainian border en route to Kyiv.

Reports emerged during the afternoon hours of Tuesday that Russia has reportedly called for a UN Security Council vote on what it describes as a “humanitarian” resolution for Ukraine. Answering a reporter’s question, Moscow’s ambassador to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia, also disclosed that Russia would stop its invasion when the goals of what he described as its “special military operation” were achieved in Ukraine, including demilitarisation. No further details pertaining to a “humanitarian” resolution for Ukraine have been released.

During a press conference on Tuesday, NATO’s chief Jens Stoltenberg disclosed that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has created a “new security reality” in Europe, adding that NATO’s military position must be ready for this new reality. He went on to say that tomorrow, NATO leaders will begin to discuss concrete measures to reinforce security in the longer term, noting that on land, these measures could include “substantially more forces” in the eastern part of the alliance at a higher state of readiness. He also added that NATO leaders will consider “major increases” to our naval and air deployments, strengthening missile and air defences and also increasing cyber defences.”

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In Moscow, a news editor interrupted a live news bulletin on Russia's state TV Channel One on Monday night to protest against Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Marina Ovsyannikova, an editor at the channel, held up an anti-war sign behind the presenter, reading "No war, stop the war, don't believe the propaganda, they are lying to you here." A Kremlin spokesman has since stated that the action by the news editor amounts to "hooliganism." Dmitry Peskov went on to say that "the TV channel, and those in charge, are looking into this. This is not on our agenda." Reports indicate that Ovsyannikova was detained on Monday night. On Tuesday afternoon, she appeared on trial at Moscow's Ostankino Court. She has been charged with "organizing an unauthorized public event," - an administrative charge which could result in a fine of up to 30,000 roubles (£200), community service or up to 10 days in jail. It suggests that the journalist is not being charged under Moscow's new law on "spreading false information about Russia's armed forces." Earlier, reports had emerged that Ovsyannikova's lawyers were unable to locate her.

Protests in Russia have continued every day since the invasion began on 24 February, and nearly 15,000 people have been reportedly detained. In Valdivostok, in the Far East of Russia, a court has fined a local resident 80,000 roubles (£512) for using social media to call for an anti-war rally. The court charged the man with discrediting the armed forces. According to a statement from the Ministry of Internal Affairs in Primorye, the man was taken into custody and admitted his guilt.

During a high-profile meeting with US officials on Monday, China's top diplomat again called for both sides to exercise restraint. In a read-out summary of the meeting published by Beijing this morning, Yang Jiechi disclosed that "all parties should exercise maximum restraint, protect civilians and prevent a large-scale humanitarian crisis." Yang went on to say that China was committed to promoting peace talks and "the international community should...push the situation to cool down as soon as possible." However he added that the "legitimate concerns of all parties" would need to be addressed. His comments were made during a seven-hour meeting in Rome with US national security adviser Jake Sullivan. The meeting came just hours after US security officials accused China of signalling its willingness to supply Russia with weapons. Beijing has since fiercely dismissed the reports as disinformation. While China has so far refrained from condemning Moscow, stating that its "security concerns" should be taken seriously, at the same time, Beijing has also expressed "unwavering support" for Ukraine's sovereignty.



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