

# Russia Threatens ‘Nuclear’ World War as Its Paratroopers Descend on Ukraine

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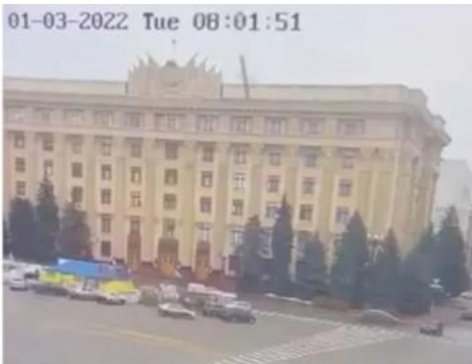
*Ukraine State Emergency Service/Reuters*

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned that a third world war would be “nuclear” and “destructive,” essentially warning NATO not to intervene militarily in Ukraine, a day after peace talks failed to temper the bloodshed and as Russian paratroopers descended on the city of Kharkiv, the second largest city in the nation and the epicenter of fierce fighting.

Ukraine’s defense ministry confirmed the arrival of Russian airborne troops on Telegram, though it is unclear if they are involved in a ground battle just yet. “There is an ongoing fight between the invaders and the Ukrainians,” they said. Authorities confirmed Wednesday midday that “massive shelling and bombing” as well as urban warfare was underway. Images showed municipal buildings in the city center on fire.

Ukraine’s interior minister said that more than 2,000 civilians had already been killed in the six-day-old conflict.

Kharkiv was paralyzed by increased fighting Wednesday morning, with Ukrainian Interior Ministry Adviser Anton Gerashchenko confirming that a Russian airstrike ignited the barracks of a flight school that housed some Ukrainian troops. “Practically there are no areas left in Kharkiv where an artillery shell has not yet hit,” he said in a statement on Telegram Wednesday morning.



*STATE EMERGENCY SERVICES OF UKRAINE/Reuters*

The mayor of Kharkiv said Wednesday that 21 people had been killed in overnight fighting, pushing the death toll higher.

Russia also claimed early Wednesday to have taken control of the port city of Kherson, which the Ukrainian military denies. “According to the information from our brigade the battles are going on now,” a Ukrainian military spokesman told CNN. “The city is not captured totally, some parts are under our control.”





*Serhii Nuzhnenko/Reuters*

Russian troops in a 40-mile long convoy are now around 15 miles from the capital Kyiv as precision attacks slammed a TV tower and devastated a Holocaust memorial site and private maternity clinic on Tuesday continue to “soften” the city for what many believe is an imminent ground invasion. Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky gave CNN and Reuters interviews from a fortified bunker deep below a building in Kyiv on Tuesday, the first face-to-face interactions he has had with Western journalists. He told CNN, “Everyone has to stop

fighting before we’re ready to talk about peace.” When asked if the negotiations were a waste of time if Russia continued shelling, he said, simply, “We’ll see.”

A number of military analysts say that the existence of the convoy backs up Russia’s claim that it does indeed control Ukrainian air space, leaving them unable to attack the somewhat vulnerable convoy. Kyiv mayor, the former heavyweight boxing champion Vitali Klitschko, vowed to hold the city. “We stayed in front of one of the strongest armies in the world. The will to be independent is (the) main priority for us. And we’re defend(ing) our families, our city, our country and our future,” he told CNN Wednesday. “There is a huge patriotic movement right now. Old people—can you imagine—doctors, actors, actors from theater, many professions that never had expectation to fight, to keep weapons, but right now they (are) coming to us. They’re ready to fight. It’s amazing.”

Reaction inside the war theater to President Joe Biden labeling Vladimir Putin a “dictator” in his State of the Union speech was muted, with analysts predicting the Russian president would not react. “I think those personal comments by Joe Biden were probably things that would get under—into the craw of the Russian president,” CNN’s former Moscow bureau chief and expert on Russian affairs Jill Dougherty said. “Things like ‘dictator, Putin alone is to blame, more isolated than ever.’ But I don’t think they’re going to engage in that. You know, you can’t really defend yourself by saying ‘No, I’m not a dictator.’ But what they can do is try to pick apart the argument.”

Meanwhile, inside Russia, clearly fearing an exodus of the country’s wealthy multinationals who have secured European passports through residency, Putin has signed a decree to block anyone from leaving the country with more than \$10,000 in foreign currency to “ensure Russia’s financial stability,” according to the Kremlin.

Oleksiy Arestovich, a top aide to Zelensky, noted Wednesday that Russian soldiers were getting increasingly younger. “The Russian Army is running out of resources,” he told the UNIAN news agency. “They are sending cadets from military academies to war, a troop of second-year cadets of a military school has surrendered to us.” If confirmed, it would help explain why Russia’s much-feared military is not able to move faster.

On Wednesday morning, Russia announced its delegation “would be in place” for new talks with Ukraine negotiators later in the day, though no location was announced. Tass news agency later confirmed that an aide to Zelensky said the Ukrainian delegation would be at the table for a second try to reach a peace accord to stop the deadly conflict.