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Russia Launches Military Attack on Ukraine, Striking Country From Air, Land and Sea

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The Russian military has invaded Ukraine, and western leaders are responding swiftly with punishing sanctions. By. IMAGES FROM WSJ.

The military operation the United States for weeks warned would be launched by Russia is now underway, as Russia early Thursday initiated a full-scale offensive on its smaller neighbor Ukraine, striking the country from the air, land and sea from multiple directions and overwhelming Ukraine's defenses.

The offensive commenced minutes after Russia President Vladimir Putin said he ordered the strike to “demilitarize and denazify Ukraine” and bring its leaders to trial.

President Joe Biden, who pledged further sanctions on Russia after some initial sanctions following Mr. Putin's recognition of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent earlier this week, called the attack unjustified and unprovoked. "President Putin has chosen a premeditated war that will bring a catastrophic loss of life and human suffering," the U.S. president said in a statement.

Donetsk and Luhansk, known collectively as Donbas, are breakaway territories of Ukraine, parts of which were taken by separatists when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014.

The airstrikes hit over a dozen Ukraine cities, including its capital Kyiv. The Russian military targeted government facilities, military installations and airfields across the country, according to international reports from the BBC and the Wall Street Journal.

Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky in a televised speech early Thursday morning urged Ukrainians to remain calm. "We are working, our army is working," he said. "Don't panic, we are strong, we are ready for anything, we will overcome."

In his own speech announcing the offensive, Mr. Putin said he approved the military operation because Ukrainian leaders were guilty of committing "numerous bloody crimes." The Russian president in a televised missive late Monday had expressed grief over the Soviet Union's collapse, while criticizing western governments' support of Ukraine.

Leading up the war, Mr. Putin sought two major concessions from Ukraine and its western allies: that Ukraine never be allowed to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, known as NATO, and that NATO retreat from Eastern Europe, which would see the organization scaling back its military reach to the 1990s before NATO expanded east of Germany. The U.S. and its allies have rejected those demands.

Mr. Putin also warned against attempts to stop his military operation in Ukraine, stating in his televised address announcing the war that Russia was "one of the most powerful nuclear powers in the world."

The Russian president justified the war by stating he was responding to calls for help from leaders of the Donbas region, a strategy western leaders had long warned Mr. Putin would use as a pretext to invade Ukraine.

Leaders around the world have condemned Mr. Putin and have begun exacting new sanctions to further punish Russia.

"President Putin has chosen a path of bloodshed and destruction," [tweeted](#) U.K. Prime Minister Boris Johnson, who said that the U.K. and its allies would "respond decisively." Mr. Johnson said he was appalled by the events in Ukraine and that he had spoken to Mr. Zelensky, the Ukraine president, regarding next steps.

Ukrainian lawmakers on Wednesday approved emergency legislation that sought to prepare the country for a Russian invasion. The extraordinary circumstances have led to Ukrainian political opponents showing a united front in the face of Russian aggression.

"Ukraine above all. As long as the risk of invasion remains, we are taking a moratorium on anything that undermines national unity," former President Petro Poroshenko, Mr. Zelensky's main rival, said in an interview (via WSJ). "The Ukrainian people are showing unity, the Ukrainian society is showing unity, Ukraine's responsible statesmen are demonstrating unity."

Markets Roiled, Oil Surpasses \$100

The developments sent Brent crude oil, which is the global benchmark, over \$100 a barrel, and the rising price is expected to impact the cost of fuel for people around the world, including the U.S. Virgin Islands. Global stock exchanges were also responding negatively to the war, with futures tied to the S&P 500, Nasdaq-100 and Dow Jones Industrial Average all tumbling more than 2 percent by early afternoon Thursday in Hong Kong, [according to the Wall Street Journal](#). WSJ said stock indexes across Asia also fell sharply, with Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index dropping about 3 percent.

Meanwhile, the Russian Central Bank announced it would start interventions after the ruble, the Russian currency, plunged to a record low, falling 6 percent against the U.S. dollar early Thursday — the lowest level on record, according to FactSet. As of Thursday, one U.S. dollar bought 86 rubles.