Kyiv Defence Operation: The Chronology and Military and Historical Features of the Defence Operation for the Capital of Ukraine (February-April 2022)

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Abstract. This study is relevant due to the need to assess the military and political situation at the onset of russia's large-scale aggression against Ukraine, evaluate the Armed Forces of Ukraine's (AFU) ability to repel russia's armed aggression, and explore the methods of command employed by the AFU and other military formations within the security and defence forces. These methods were developed during combat operations aimed at countering the enemy's efforts to capture Kyiv.

The primary approach to investigating these issues involves applying a problem-chronological method of analysis and synthesis, drawing on a wide range of both official and unofficial sources. These sources focus on examining the combat tactics used by military units (subunits) in Kyiv oblast, which formed part of the strategic defensive operation.

The article presents examples of effective leadership by the AFU during the Kyiv Defence Operation, which led to the defeat of the enemy's offensive forces on the approaches to the capital and had a significant impact on the subsequent development of the situation on the front.

This article is theoretical in nature and does not require further research. The materials presented offer practical value for the training of the AFU command staff.

Keywords: Armed Forces of Ukraine, Defence Forces of Ukraine, russian armed aggression, RB and RF, Joint Forces Operation, Mechanised Units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, Territorial Defence, Organisation of the Resistance Movement, National Guard of Ukraine, Security Service of Ukraine.

Introduction

The overall military and political situation that developed on the eve of the russian Armed Forces' large-scale invasion of Ukraine.



The year 2021 was characterised by two major negative factors for Ukraine: the COVID-19 pandemic and russian armed aggression. While the pandemic's impact, despite the spread of a new virus strain, gradually diminished and both the economy and society adapted, russian aggression, by contrast, showed a steady trend of escalation. By the end of the year, this had manifested in russia's readiness for a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. The threat of a significant escalation in the russian-Ukrainian conflict not only defined national security throughout 2021, but also dominated the agendas of both regional and global security [1].

The first information regarding the scale of the kremlin's aggressive plans towards our state was shared by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken with the President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi during the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP-27) on 2 November 2021. According to the American official, the Ukrainian leader appeared "serious, thoughtful, and stoic," but was ultimately sceptical about the intelligence provided by the US, maintaining this scepticism until the final hours before the invasion began.

Despite warnings from Western partners, Ukraine's Ministry of Defence initially denied the

accumulation of russian troops along the border, describing the media reports as "part of a special information and psychological operation." Similarly, both the National Security and Defence Council and the Ukrainian Parliament dismissed data from Western media [2].

Amid reports of russia's concentration of troops and military equipment near the Ukrainian border, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba visited Washington on 10 November 2021. He participated in a meeting of the Strategic Partnership Commission, chaired by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, and signed the updated Ukraine–US Strategic Partnership Charter. The russian escalation and the coordination of joint actions between the US and Ukraine in response became the key focus of the bilateral talks. "The legendary phrase was then heard – 'Dig trenches. Well, start digging, dig trenches,'" Minister Kuleba later recalled. However, the US did not provide more detailed information regarding Putin's plans, despite Ukraine's repeated requests.

On 11 November 2021, President Volodymyr Zelensky publicly acknowledged the presence of approximately 100,000 russian troops near the state border [3]. However, the Ukrainian authorities did not perceive the situation as particularly threatening, drawing on their previous experience with the mass accumulation of russian troops along their borders in the spring of 2021, which had been intended to intimidate Ukraine. President Zelensky later explained that the reason for Ukraine's scepticism towards the information provided by Western partners about the threat of a russian invasion was the lack of specific intelligence data from them [4].

Lacking sufficient evidence regarding the Kremlin's intentions, Ukraine's military and political leadership sought to downplay the threat of a large-scale invasion in its public statements. They feared that premature alarmism could provoke panic among the population, cause capital, investment, and people to flee the country, and ultimately lead to an economic collapse. "We needed to strike a balance between realistically assessing the risks and preparing the country for the worst... while also ensuring its economic and financial stability," explained Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, reflecting on the country's approach later on [5].

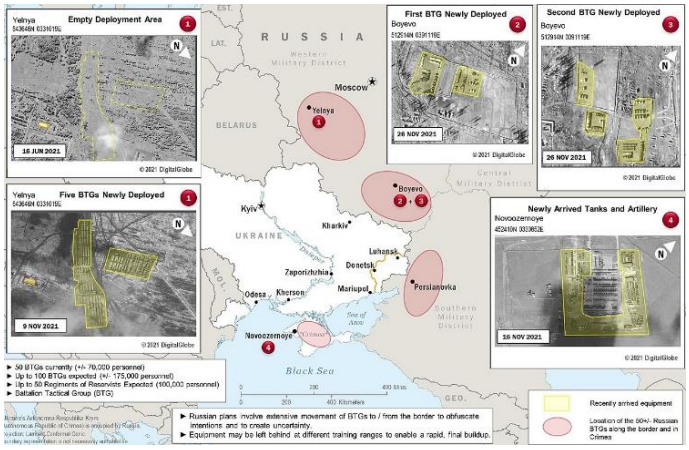


At the same time, neither Ukraine nor its Western allies had confirmation that Putin had made the decision to invade. This created a narrow "window of opportunity" to dissuade russia from pursuing large-scale aggression.

During the NATO ministerial meeting in Riga from 30 November to 1 December 2021, russian aggression emerged as one of the key issues. NATO foreign ministers discussed possible economic sanctions and political measures against russia should it launch another invasion of Ukraine. They confirmed their readiness to bolster the Alliance's defence on its eastern flank and reassured Ukraine of support in the event of an attack by russia. Following the meeting, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg emphasised that the main objective for the Allies was to deter russia from further aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, the Alliance stressed that Russia had no right to interfere with Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic path, and that Ukraine's potential membership in the bloc posed no threat to russia's security. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, after the meeting, confirmed that Ukraine would continue its reforms on the road to NATO membership and rejected russia's ultimatum to the Alliance to halt its eastward expansion [6]. This NATO ministerial meeting in Riga marked a significant shift, with Allies becoming more aware of the seriousness of the russian threat and beginning to formulate a response to it.

Negotiations and consultations among Western nations led to a series of statements

condemning russia's actions and warning it of the consequences. On 12 December 2021, the G7 countries convened in Liverpool, condemning the build-up of russian forces near Ukraine's borders and warning Moscow of severe consequences should it use these forces to attack Ukraine [7]. On 14 February 2022, the G7 finance ministers signalled their readiness to impose collective sanctions capable of delivering immediate and significant impacts on the russian economy in response to further military aggression against Ukraine. On 16 December 2021, the North Atlantic Council issued a strong statement, once again cautioning russia regarding the consequences of aggression against Ukraine, placing the responsibility for the escalating tensions on russia, and stressing that it had no right to interfere in Ukraine's potential NATO membership [8]. On 17 December 2021, following the EU leaders' summit in Brussels, a final communiqué was issued, warning russia that any further military aggression against Ukraine would lead to far-reaching consequences, including coordinated new sanctions with international partners. The EU leaders reaffirmed their commitment to ongoing diplomatic efforts and endorsed the Normandy format as the platform for negotiating the Minsk agreements. On the same day, the European Parliament called for the disconnection of russia from the SWIFT payment system should further military actions be taken against Ukraine, the imposition of sanctions on putin's inner circle and russian oligarchs, and the freezing of their assets within European nations [9].



In an effort to convince its European allies and Ukraine's leadership of the veracity of intelligence reports and the seriousness of the threat posed by russia, Washington made an unprecedented decision in December 2021 – to declassify and release new intelligence data regarding the Kremlin's preparations for an invasion of Ukraine. The American administration deliberately employed alarming rhetoric surrounding the potential russian military incursion into Ukraine, aiming to dissuade the Kremlin from its intentions. In early December, the United States published satellite imagery and a map created by American analysts, showing the positions of russian armed forces and an analysis of russian military planning by the U.S. intelligence community. The analysis stated, in particular, that russia had planned to deploy 100 battalion tactical groups, involving up to 175,000 soldiers, along with armoured vehicles, artillery, and equipment for the invasion of Ukraine. The picture, which administration officials had secretly been crafting for weeks, was now seen by the entire world.



From December 2021 to February 2022, U.S. intelligence made public through Western media and think tanks detailed plans for a russian military offensive and occupation of two-thirds of Ukraine's territory, the imposition of a brutal occupation regime, the suppression of resistance movements, the creation of camps to detain pro-Ukrainian activists, and the preparation of lists of prominent political and public figures for arrest and execution. At the time, these genocidal war plans seemed, if not outright fabrications, then at least significant exaggerations. However, as the war began, they gradually turned

into a harsh reality for Ukrainians. Some of these plans were shared with the United Nations by the U.S. before the invasion commenced.

The aim of the U.S. strategic communications campaign to expose russia's aggressive plans was, on one hand, to warn allies and their publics about the threat of a major war in Europe, and on the other, to pre-empt putin's invasion, preventing the russians from catching anyone by surprise. It also sought to demonstrate that the Kremlin leader, as one British government official put it, "has a leaky vessel, and a leaky vessel sinks." Overall, the U.S. information campaign significantly undermined russia's ability to carry out information and psychological operations (IPSO) during the invasion's preparation phase. Meanwhile, regular media leaks allowed the global public to track the unfolding of russian troop deployments near Ukraine's borders almost in real-time. Never before in history has a war preparation been so closely scrutinised by both the media and the public.

At a press conference on 19 January 2022, U.S. President Joe Biden stated his belief that russia would indeed invade Ukraine, describing it as "the most significant event to occur in the world in terms of war and peace" since World War II. This remark became one of Biden's key warnings. However, the U.S. president also "clouded the issue," suggesting that a "minor incursion" by russian forces, as opposed to a full-scale invasion, might not provoke a strong response from the West. In doing so, he signalled that NATO was not united in its opposition to any form or scale of military action by russia.

After months of uncertainty about the final decision in the Kremlin, on 11 February 2022, President Biden informed NATO and EU leaders that russian President Putin had decided to launch an invasion of Ukraine within the coming days. In response, Washington opted to evacuate its diplomats from Ukraine and suspend consular services, urging U.S. citizens to leave the country immediately. The UK Foreign Office followed suit, advising British citizens in Ukraine to depart "while it is still possible." Later that day, 11 February 2022, the U.S. CIA issued an urgent warning to NATO allies regarding russia's planned attack on Ukraine, which, according to intelligence intercepts, was scheduled for 16 February 2022.

On 18 February 2022, the U.S. Senate unanimously passed a resolution formally declaring the United States' "steadfast support for a secure, democratic, and independent Ukraine" and condemning russia's "military buildup" on Ukraine's border. The resolution called on the U.S. administration to use all available means to impose "significant costs" on russia and "restore peace in Europe." However, senators included a caveat, clarifying that the resolution should not be interpreted as authorising the use of military force against russia or the deployment of U.S. forces to Ukraine.

International Military Assistance to Ukraine. A key component of the strategy by the U.S. and its allies to deter russia and prepare Ukraine to resist aggression was the increased provision of military and military and technical aid. In the second half of 2021, a major breakthrough occurred after many years of restrictions on supplying defensive weapons to Ukraine.

The shift began on 27 August 2021, when President Joe Biden authorised the withdrawal of $60 million worth of defensive weaponry from U.S. stockpiles and its dispatch to Ukraine as a precautionary measure, following Putin's pseudo-historical essay "On the Historical Unity of russians and Ukrainians" on 12 July 2021, which effectively became an ideological manifesto for the impending war against Ukraine.

Between October and November, Ukraine received four shipments of security assistance from the U.S., including radar surveillance systems, FGM-148 Javelin anti-tank missile systems, ammunition, medical supplies, and various other weapons and equipment. Additionally, two Island-class patrol boats, named "Fastiv" and "Sumy," were delivered, each armed with American weaponry.

In December 2021, the U.S. administration approved an additional $200 million in defence

aid to Ukraine. On 15 December 2021, the U.S. Senate also approved the 2022 defence budget, which allocated $300 million in aid to Ukraine – $50 million more than President Biden had initially requested – including $75 million for lethal weapons.

Following the breakdown of negotiations between Western countries and russia over the so-called "security guarantees" and the growing signs of russia's preparations for an invasion of Ukraine, the U.S. and its European allies significantly increased their supply of lethal aid to Ukraine.

In January and February 2022, NATO members established a kind of "airbridge" to deliver weapons and ammunition to Ukraine, aiming to deter a potential russian invasion and bolster the capabilities of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

By the time russia launched its large-scale aggression, Ukraine's international partners – including the U.S., the UK, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Canada, the Czech Republic, and others – had provided nearly $450 million in military-technical assistance in the form of defensive weaponry. This included, among other items, anti-tank missile systems (FGM-148 Javelin, NLAW), SMAW-D rocket launchers, man-portable air defence systems (Stinger, Piorun), ammunition, and drones. Over the course of a month, almost 2,000 tonnes of modern weapons, ammunition, and personal protective equipment were delivered from various countries, with the U.S. providing 1,300 tonnes in 17 shipments.

The weapons supplied by the U.S. and its allies were primarily tactical and defensive to avoid being seen by the Kremlin as Western provocation.

Methodological Framework

The significance of Kyiv's defence in relation to russia's aggressive plans on the north-eastern front and the war as a whole.

The defence of Kyiv from 24 February to 2 April 2022 exhibited significant characteristics typical of a strategic operation, and therefore, there are ample grounds to consider it as the Kyiv Strategic Defence Operation. This highlights the crucial strategic importance of Kyiv – the capital of Ukraine – for both sides, given its status as a political, economic, transport, cultural, historical, and religious centre.

Capturing Kyiv was a priority strategic objective for the enemy. Success in this would have led to the swift defeat of enormous grouping within the Defence Forces of Ukraine and disrupted the entire system of state and military governance. It would have enabled the enemy to advance further south, south-west, and west, taking advantage of the city's logistical capabilities as a key transport hub. The capture of Ukraine's capital would have had significant military and political implications, paving the way for a change of government and the installation of a puppet regime. It would also have influenced the positions of foreign countries on their political and military support for Ukraine. Moreover, taking Kyiv would have delivered a powerful propaganda boost, demonstrating the strength of the "russian military" and the russian armed forces' ability to carry out complex strategic operations in a short timeframe.



For Ukraine and its armed forces, Kyiv, as the capital of an independent state, carries immense significance that extends beyond strategic concerns. The city holds profound military-political and spiritual importance for Ukrainians, being both the birthplace and historical centre of Ukrainian statehood. We recognise that Ukraine without Kyiv is no longer Ukraine. As such, the loss of Kyiv would

represent more than just the loss of the capital; it would deeply affect the moral and psychological state of Ukrainian society as a whole. This would severely weaken its ability to resist aggression and hinder the organisation and leadership of national resistance in occupied territories.

On the other hand, the successful defence of Kyiv became a key catalyst for organised resistance against the aggressor. It showcased the ability of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to withstand what was regarded as the world's second-most powerful army. Moreover, it highlighted to the international community the need and justification for providing Ukraine with political, economic, and military support, along with moral backing and other forms of aid.

Kyiv Strategic Defence Operation (The Enemy's Plan)
(24 February – 8 March 2022)

The Kremlin leadership regarded the capture of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, as one of the main strategic objectives of the so-called "special military operation"—in effect, a large-scale military invasion launched as an air and ground offensive in the early hours of 24 February 2022. This operation was seen as carrying not only decisive strategic but also significant military-political importance.

The russian leadership initially aimed to enter Kyiv, seize key infrastructure, isolate Ukraine's political and military leadership, and, under favourable conditions, force acceptance of russia's ultimatums (essentially, a surrender) and end organised resistance from the Armed Forces of Ukraine within the first three days (72 hours) of the operation. However, due to the failure to meet this plan's timeframe, largely because of the organised resistance from Defence Forces of Ukraine, the objective was revised. The new plan focused on encircling, blocking, and capturing Kyiv as swiftly as possible, within one to two weeks.

To achieve this objective, two powerful russian military groups were formed in Belarus and russia, operating across multiple directions within two operational areas: Polissia (on the right bank of the Dnipro River) and Siverskyi (on the Left Bank). For the task of capturing Kyiv, Russian military command established two operational-tactical groups: the Polissia group, consisting of up to 15 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) formed in Belarus, and the Siverskyi group, made up of up to 20 BTGs from the Bryansk and Kursk regions of russia. These groups included specific units from the russian aerospace forces, airborne forces, special operations forces, and the russian national guard. The primary direction for the russian land forces' advance towards Kyiv was the Polissia axis. On the Siverskyi axis, russian troops were tasked with restraining Defence Forces of Ukraine, preventing their redeployment to the Polissia axis, and blocking or capturing major settlements and key railway hubs. The advance along the Polissia axis was to be carried out in marching columns at maximum speed, with forces only deploying into combat formations if faced with large Armed Forces of Ukraine or National Guard units. It was expected that the lead russian units from "Column No. 1" would reach the outskirts of Kyiv by 14:55 and complete concentration at the "blocking lines" by 16:15 on 24 February 2022.

As analysis of the enemy's subsequent actions shows, following a massive air and missile strike on command posts, air defence systems, airfields, permanent locations of Defence Forces of Ukraine, communication systems, and other strategic targets, russian command planned to deploy a tactical airborne assault at Hostomel and Vasylkiv airfields (involving up to 2,000 personnel). The aim was to capture the airfields and prepare air traffic control facilities for the arrival of Il-76 military transport aircraft, bringing personnel (up to 10,000), standard vehicles, and lightly armoured equipment from the russian Airborne Forces. The assault's objective was to block Kyiv, disrupt communications and military command channels, seize or destroy arsenals, incite panic among the population, and create conditions for a chaotic evacuation from Kyiv by "uncontrolled columns" of refugees. These columns would block highways, severely hindering the movement of Defence Forces of Ukraine in the Kyiv region.

The sabotage groups already operating on Ukrainian territory were tasked with attacking Kyiv's power grids and substations to disconnect a large part of the city from the electricity network and communication systems, thereby creating panic among the population. Certain groups of provocateur saboteurs were also instructed to set fires and engage in looting to intensify the panic and divert law enforcement from defending the capital, forcing them to focus on restoring public safety. To further disrupt the situation, a major cyberattack was planned to disable the electronic information pages of Ukrainian government authorities. In Kyiv, the enemy aimed to seize control of key state institutions – the Office of the President of Ukraine, the General Staff, the Cabinet of Ministers, and the Verkhovna Rada. russian special operations forces were also assigned to capture television centres and announce the overthrow of the "anti-people regime" and the establishment of a "new government." These objectives were to be completed within four hours.

Simultaneously with air and missile strikes on Ukrainian military targets and the deployment of russian tactical airborne forces near Kyiv, the advance of russian land forces on the Polissia and Siverskyi axes was to begin. These forces were tasked with destroying the Ukrainian Armed Forces and National Guard units defending the capital. Once this was accomplished, in coordination with airborne troops and russian special operations forces, they would seize Kyiv and establish full control over the capital within 18 hours.

Enemy offensive operation. Polissia operational area.
(24 – 28 February 2022)

At 4:50 am on 24 February 2022, the enemy launched an offensive, targeting critical civilian and military infrastructure in Ukraine with missile and air strikes. At the same time, russian troops crossed the Ukrainian State Border (USB) in Kyiv, Chernihiv, and Sumy regions, quickly advancing deep into Ukrainian territory towards Kyiv. In the Polissia operational area (OA), russian forces moved towards Chernobyl and Kyiv. The enemy's military columns primarily travelled along highways, passing through the settlements of Pripyat, Chernobyl, Ivankiv, Dymer, Vyshhorod, Borodyanka, Bucha, and Irpin. To overcome water barriers such as the Pripyat, Uzh, Teteriv, and Zdvizh rivers, russian forces used pontoon bridges when existing bridges were destroyed. Ukrainian border guards engaged the enemy, but were unable to halt the advancing columns.



Fighting for Hostomel airfield
(07:00–22:00, 24 February 2022)

At 07:00, the enemy launched a cruise missile at the administrative building of Hostomel Airfield, which was being defended by units from the 4th Operational Brigade of the National Guard of Ukraine (4th OPB NGU). The missile struck a site near the airfield, damaging a civilian building. However, the strike caused minimal damage to the defenders, only partially destroying the airfield's infrastructure. Around 08:00, 34 Ka-52 helicopters took off from Belarus, heading for Hostomel.

National Guard troops, using MANPADS, downed one enemy helicopter and damaged two others over the Kyiv Sea. One helicopter was destroyed by a missile fired from a fighter aircraft of the 40th Tactical Aviation Brigade within the Air Forces of Ukraine. The remaining helicopters

reached Hostomel Airfield, where they launched a missile strike on the positions of the airfield defenders. However, personnel from the mixed battalion and tactical group of the 4th Operational Brigade of the National Guard managed to secure defensive positions in buildings and outside the airfield.





Following the helicopter attack, 18 Mi-8 helicopters carrying 300 soldiers from the 45th Airborne Brigade of the russian Armed Forces appeared over Hostomel. russian paratroopers landed, leading to a battle that lasted for 19 hours and 20 minutes on 24 February.

In defence, 150 National Guard troops from the 4th Operational Brigade participated, supported by MiG-29 fighters from the 40th Tactical Aviation Brigade. After capturing the airfield, russian forces attempted to set the conditions for the landing of 18 Il-76 military transport aircraft carrying paratroopers, already airborne over Belarus. To prevent this, the Defence Forces of Ukraine targeted and disabled the runway. Meanwhile, units from the 4th Operational Brigade, the 80th Airborne Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the SSU "Alpha" special forces, and the 8th Special Operations Forces Regiment arrived to assist the operational group. By 21:00, they had regained control of the airfield's perimeter. By 22:00 on 24 February, the surrounding area of the airfield had been cleared of scattered russian special forces.

In the afternoon of 24 February, enemy units advancing from Belarus entered the exclusion zone and surrounded Chernobyl. To seize the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, the enemy launched a tactical airborne assault, consisting of up to one company, using eleven military transport helicopters. At the same time, forward enemy units, numbering up to three BTGs, crossed the Teteriv River near Orane and reached the line from Ivankiv to Katyuzhanka to Dymer. After an unsuccessful attempt to cross the Irpin River on the outskirts of Demidiv, the enemy changed course and, with one BTG, began advancing towards Hostomel, unsuccessfully attempting to break through to the airfield to support their surrounded airborne forces.

By the end of the first day of fighting in the Polissia Operational Area, the enemy had advanced 50–60 km into Ukrainian territory from the State Border with Belarus. On 25 February, the enemy continued missile and air strikes on critical civilian and military infrastructure and deployed its air defence systems (S-300 SAMs) in the occupied areas of Kyiv Oblast to prevent the operations of the Air Forces of Ukraine. During the night of 25 February, a mechanised column, consisting of approximately 300 unmarked vehicles, moved from Chernobyl towards Ivankiv. To slow the enemy's advance, Armed Forces of Ukraine units blew up three bridges at 08:30: one on the Novoirpinsky road in Hostomel, another on the Warsaw highway, and one in Demidiv over the Irpin River. By 09:00, the enemy column had passed Ivankiv and reached the outskirts of Dymer. Engaging the enemy, Defence Forces of Ukraine bombed and set fire to the russian armoured vehicle column, and struck the enemy column near Zdvizhivka (north-west of Hostomel). Despite significant losses, the enemy reached the outskirts of Kyiv – Hostomel, Vorzel, and Bucha by midday, where intense fighting ensued. At 11:00, Defence Forces of Ukraine blew up a bridge near

the Kyiv Hydro-Electric Station (south of Vyshhorod) to prevent the enemy's advance. Around 14:00, the enemy launched a second assault on Hostomel Airfield, deploying 200 attack and transport helicopters. russian forces captured the airfield. Ukrainian missile and artillery units struck the enemy forces that had landed and were positioned along the runway, rendering it inoperable. This forced russian command to abandon plans to land the main airborne forces at Hostomel.

By 16:00 on 25 February, the occupiers were continuing their advance towards Kyiv with significant forces. To maintain their rapid pace, the enemy deployed second-echelon units along certain axes. In the vicinity of Dymer, the enemy deployed BM-30 Smerch multiple rocket launchers.

The enemy vehicle column's movement in Bucha was halted by artillery and tank fire, along with airstrikes. At Vyshhorod's entrance, National Guard of Ukraine, National Police, and Territorial Defence Forces successfully repelled the enemy's advance.



Lacking sufficient forces, the enemy was forced to deploy additional second-echelon units and reserves prematurely. To support its forces, the russian command ordered the establishment of field logistics camps near Borodyanka, Katyuzhanka, and the golf club in Havronshchyna.

On 26 February, the enemy, with up to seven battalion tactical groups, continued its advance towards Ivankiv–Vorzel, Ivankiv – Kukhari, and Dymer – Novy Petrivtsi. To aid their forces' push towards Kyiv, the enemy attempted a tactical airborne landing of up to two companies at Vasylkiv Airfield and in the areas of Tomylivka (near Bila Tserkva), Bucha, and Leonivka (Fastiv district). Enemy reconnaissance groups also attempted to infiltrate the outskirts of Kyiv (Kotsiubynske, Sofiivska Borshchahivka) and the city limits (Aviant factory, Nyvky area).

By the end of the third day of the large-scale invasion, fighting in the Polissia Operational Area continued along the Borodyanka, Bucha, and Vyshhorod line, 90 km from the state border. The enemy had deployed eight battalion tactical groups (BTGs), with four more held in reserve. To command the forces, the enemy established command posts in the following locations: Termakhivka for the Eastern Military District (Ulan-Ude), Vylcha and Radcha for the 29th Tank Division, Borodyanka for the 35th Tank Division, and Demidiv for the 36th Tank Division of the Eastern Military District.

As the rapid capture of Kyiv failed, from 27 February, the enemy shifted focus to encircling and blocking the capital. The pace of their advance slowed, and a shortage of material and technical resources became evident. To restart the offensive and maintain logistical support, enemy engineering units built river crossings over the Teteriv and Irpin rivers, setting up pontoon crossings near Orane and Demidiv.

Units from the 36th Tank Division of the russian Armed Forces advanced towards Bucha, Kapitanivka, and Bilohorodka. By 08:00, on the Chornobyl – Ivankiv – Vorzel axis, the enemy grouping, initially consisting of 7–10 BTGs, had been reinforced with an additional 2–3 BTGs. The enemy's attempt to establish a pontoon crossing over the Irpin River failed, as did their attempt to cross the only remaining intact bridge near Moschun, made by a special forces detachment and a parachute infantry company from the 104th Guards Airborne Assault Regiment. The enemy was pushed back by units from the 80th Airborne Assault Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, which had fortified positions in Moschun and destroyed the last intact bridge. Fighting then ensued

for control of the settlement, preventing further enemy advances towards Kyiv.

Battle for Moschun
(5–12 March 2022)

Units from the 76th and 98th Airborne Divisions, along with the 115th and 40th Motorised Rifle Brigades of the russian Armed Forces, were tasked with capturing Moschun and securing additional routes for advancing towards Kyiv from the north-west and north.

On 5 March, under heavy artillery cover from the 1065th Guards Artillery Regiment, enemy engineering units constructed the first pontoon bridge across the Irpin River on the outskirts of Moschun. During the night of 6 March, naval infantry from the 155th Motorised Rifle Brigade successfully crossed the river and entered the village.

To support the defending units from the 72nd Mechanised Brigade "Black Zaporizhzhia" in Moschun, special forces units (the "Rhinos" group), a unit from the National Guard of Ukraine - Special Forces Brigade "Azov", and Territorial Defence Forces from the 114th and 112th Territorial Defence Brigades were deployed.

A fierce battle unfolded. Taking advantage of their artillery superiority, russian forces subjected the settlement to heavy shelling from positions near the villages of Lubyanka and Ozera (7–10 km north-west of Moschun). Concentrating up to 200 armoured vehicles and around five thousand troops on the left bank of the Irpin River, the russians were able, between 6 and 7 March, to transport units from the 155th and 40th Motorised Rifle Brigades, the 331st Guards Airborne Regiment, the 215th Separate Rifle Battalion, and the 217th Guards Airborne Regiment across to the right bank. However, thanks to the skilful actions of artillery units from the 72nd Mechanised Brigade, the pontoon bridge was destroyed. The Defence Forces of Ukraine, having previously fallen back to the centre of the village for regrouping, then launched a counteroffensive and decisively defeated the occupiers, who failed to retreat to the western bank of the river.



After failing to advance on Kyiv through the capital's north-western outskirts, the enemy, using reserves, changed direction and attempted to encircle Kyiv from the south-west. They moved up to six battalion tactical groups (BTGs) along the route of Borodyanka, Makaryv, Byshiv, Kalynivka, Vasylkiv, and Pidhirtsi. To protect the advancing column from Ukrainian fire, the enemy placed civilians, including women and children, on their armoured vehicles. Throughout the day, enemy airborne troops landed in Pukhivka, Brovary, Vorzel, Stoyanka, and Lebedivka, while reconnaissance groups (DRGs) became active within Kyiv.

The enemy pressed on towards Makaryv – Fastiv, aiming to block the E40 (Kyiv – Chop) and E95 (Kyiv – Odesa) roads, as well as the railways linking Kyiv with the western and south-western regions of Ukraine. To speed up their progress, they launched a tactical airborne assault near Kalynivka, close to the E95 road. To restore their offensive capabilities, the enemy moved reserves from Belarus, consisting of up to three BTGs, towards Ovruch – Malyn – Borodyanka. Another three BTGs, having organised a crossing over the Teteriv River, advanced from Ivankiv towards Vyshhorod. In total, the russian command deployed 13 BTGs to the Polissia Operational Area, leaving six BTGs in reserve.

Continuing its offensive along the Horenychi, Hostomel, and Demidiv line, the enemy achieved partial success. russian forces also reached the northern outskirts of Fastiv. The enemy's aim to establish both an internal (Kazarovychi – Havrylivka – Hostomel – Bucha – Mykhailivka – Rubezhivka – Stoyanka – Horenychi – Yasnohorodka – Lyshnia) and external (Ivankiv – Sosnivka

– Shybene – Borodchyna – Druzhnya – Andriyivka – Lynivka – Fasova – Byshiv – Sosnivka – Fastiv) encirclement around Kyiv became clear. However, due to significant losses in personnel and equipment, the enemy lost the tactical initiative and slowed its advance. To bolster its forces on the Polissia axis, units from one BTG were deployed to Zavaliyka, Sytniaky, and Rozhiv. Throughout the operation in the Polissia Operational Area, the enemy deployed 18 BTGs (with two destroyed between 24 February and 1 March 2022), leaving five BTGs in reserve.

Siverskyi Operational Area
(24 February – 3 March 2022)

Alongside the threat to Kyiv from the Polissia axis, enemy forces operating in the Siverskyi Operational Area presented a significant danger, with up to 17 battalion tactical groups (BTGs) engaged on the Chernihiv and Sumy fronts. The objective of these russian formations was to capture or block the region's largest cities and railway hubs, with the aim of reaching Kyiv via Brovary and Boryspil. By 1 March 2022, five BTGs advancing from Chernihiv had captured the line from Kozelets to Bobrovytsia and Makiiv. Another eight BTGs had secured the line from Svytylnia to Peremoha and Hostroluchchia, advancing within 15–20 km of Brovary. A further grouping of four BTGs, meant to advance from Sumy through Konotop to Boryspil, had reached only Konotop by this point. By the start of March 2022, two of the 17 BTGs involved in the Siverskyi Operational Area had been destroyed by Defence Forces of Ukraine. The remaining units were significantly behind schedule, failing to capture or block Chernihiv, Sumy, Okhtyrka, Nizhyn, and other cities. russian command had no reserves available for the Chernihiv and Sumy fronts. Units concentrated around Kyiv were awaiting the arrival of two additional BTGs, as well as reinforcements from the north-eastern and south-eastern fronts.

Kyiv defends itself
(24 February – 29 March 2022)



From the outset of hostilities, an anti-sabotage operation was carried out in Kyiv to detect and eliminate enemy reconnaissance and sabotage groups (DRGs) that had begun operating within the city and its outskirts.

At approximately 05:00 on 24 February, a large-scale missile and airstrike (MRAU) targeted military command structures, air defence systems, airfields, and other key military infrastructure, including communication nodes, command posts, depots, and vital defensive sites across the country. Several facilities in Kyiv and its surrounding area were among the initial targets.

Preparations for Kyiv's defence began.

The task of defending Kyiv was entrusted to the Commander of the Land Forces of Ukraine, General Oleksandr Syrskyi, who had only the 72nd Separate Mechanised Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine at his disposal. This brigade, named after the Black Zaporizhzhia and based in Bila Tserkva under the command of Colonel Oleksandr Vdovychenko, had already been assigned combat orders to protect the capital before the aggression began.



All critical infrastructure was secured, and access to government offices in the capital was

restricted. Efforts were also made to protect Ukraine's cultural heritage and national landmarks.

From 24 February, a nationwide curfew was imposed, running from 20:00 to 07:00. During this period, public transport in Kyiv was suspended, and citizens were prohibited from moving around the city unless heading to shelters. Metro stations remained open 24/7 as bomb shelters.

Many residents of Kyiv began urgently leaving the city, using both private and public transport, predominantly by train. Over the following days, and continuing until mid-March, the central railway station in Kyiv saw large numbers of people, mainly women, children, and the elderly, heading towards the western regions of Ukraine and abroad.



On 25 February, Kyiv's mayor, V. Klitschko, stated that "the city entered a phase of defence." The National Guard of Ukraine took responsibility for securing and defending the Vyshhorod Hydroelectric Power Station, airports, and other key infrastructure. All bridges, central heating facilities, and other essential infrastructure were placed under increased security, while roadblocks were set up throughout the city.

A Territorial Defence Brigade, the 112th, was established in Kyiv, with over 6,000 personnel. Volunteers continued to join its ranks. Between 24 and 25 February, 18,000 automatic weapons, mainly AK-74 rifles, were issued. The Territorial Defence battalions were also provided with NLAW anti-tank guided missiles. Residents of the city were trained in making Molotov cocktails. The first missile strikes by the enemy targeted the positions of th Air Forces of Ukraine, airfields, military installations, and depots, continuing into the morning of 25 February.



Russian saboteurs stormed the capital in armoured vehicles.

Enemy reconnaissance and sabotage groups were detected in the Solomianskyi, Shevchenkivskyi, Podilskyi, Sviatoshynskyi, Desnianskyi, and Obolonskyi districts, where they seized vehicles and various facilities, including schools and kindergartens. Clashes erupted on Peremohy Avenue, Povitrioflotskyi Avenue, and in the Minsk District. In the morning, after capturing a Armed Forces of Ukraine vehicle and changing into military uniforms, russian saboteurs attempted to advance from Obolon towards central Kyiv. One of their APCs ran over a civilian car. The reconnaissance and sabotage group was either destroyed or captured and disarmed. Later that evening, enemy multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS) fired on the outskirts of Kyiv.

On 26 February, the enemy continued its efforts to break into Ukraine's capital. Operations to neutralise reconnaissance and sabotage groups attempting to infiltrate the city centre occurred along Peremohy Avenue, near the "Beresteiska," "Shuliavska," and Zoo Park metro stations, in the Solomianskyi district, and on the north-eastern outskirts of the city, near TETs-6 in the Desnianskyi district.

In Kyiv, spotters were active, leaving markings on roads and rooftops to direct enemy aircraft and missile strikes.





During the night, the 101st Brigade of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine was shelled. In response, near the "Beresteiska" metro station, they destroyed an enemy convoy consisting of two cars, two trucks carrying ammunition, and a tank. Throughout the day, Territorial Defence forces also destroyed several units of armoured and wheeled vehicles. A bridge was blown up on Peremohy Avenue. To prevent the breakthrough of russian forces from the western direction, the defenders blew up the road bridge over the Irpin River.

The President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyi dispelled rumours about his escape from the capital by releasing a video message filmed on Bankova Street. Mayor Vitaliy Klitschko reported

that by the end of the day, russian forces had not breached the city, although sabotage groups were active within Kyiv. These groups were being neutralised by the military, law enforcement, and self-defence units.

The enemy continued missile attacks on targets within the capital. Around 08:00, a russian missile hit a high-rise building in the Solomianskyi district (6 Lobanovskyi Avenue), causing significant damage. Several residents were killed. Two missile strikes were also launched on Zhuliany, though the airport was unaffected.

Fighting continued throughout the night of 27 February, particularly on Peremohy Avenue near the Central Registry Office and on Chornovola Street. Explosions were heard in Pechersk. In the morning, enemy columns were seen moving towards the right bank. The enemy destroyed railway tracks near the Darnytskyi Bridge. Several instances were noted where enemy columns were halted for resupply and refuelling.

The defence forces engaged systematically with small reconnaissance and sabotage groups, typically consisting of 3–15 armed individuals. These groups, in violation of international humanitarian law, disguised themselves in Armed Forces of Ukraine, National Guard, and National Police uniforms to infiltrate Kyiv through our military lines.



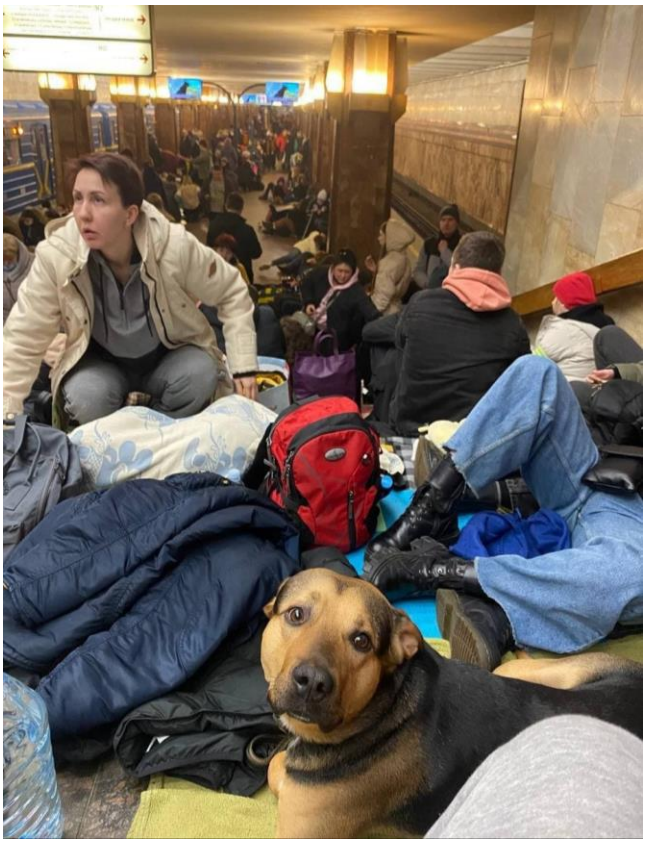

The defence forces in Kyiv continued to protect the city, holding the outer defensive lines and critical infrastructure, while preventing the advance of occupation units towards the capital's

suburbs. They reinforced their position by incorporating volunteers into the Territorial Defence and redeploying Armed Forces of Ukraine units, alongside other security and defence sector units, closer to Kyiv. A dense, multi-layered defence system was established, with improved command structures, refined defence plans, better coordination of military and other forces, and enhanced logistical support. Mobilisation efforts were actively pursued.

Despite significant losses from enemy air and missile strikes on air defence systems and attacks on key military, industrial, and logistical facilities, as well as transport networks critical for the defence, the defence remained resilient and effective.

The enemy attempted to block Kyiv entirely and disrupt communications between the city's left and right banks to undermine logistical support. russian forces were preparing to assault Kyiv on specific axes, deploying reconnaissance and sabotage groups within the city and launching fire strikes on key targets.

Over the next two weeks, thanks to the efforts of the military leadership and defenders of Kyiv, the capital continued to strengthen its defences. Checkpoints were established, barricades erected, and anti-tank obstacles placed on roads and in vulnerable areas. By mid-March, nearly 2 million people half the city's population had left. russian forces launched missile strikes on Kyiv using both air- and sea-launched missiles, as well as UAVs, while the city's outskirts were targeted with multiple launch rocket systems (MLRS). On 2 March, russian missiles struck the Kyiv TV Tower, killing 5 and injuring 5 more. The nearby Babyn Yar Memorial Holocaust Centre was also damaged.







On 14–15 March, missile strikes targeted the "Antonov" and "Artem" factories in Kyiv. The latter produced military equipment for the Ukrainian army, including air-to-air missiles, guided anti-tank missiles, and missile production equipment. The shockwave from the strike damaged the entrance to the "Lukianivska" metro station. Throughout March, missile debris, including that from

those downed by air defence systems, repeatedly struck residential buildings across the city, often starting fires. These missile attacks caused extensive damage and resulted in hundreds of casualties.

By 18 March, after 23 days of fighting, 222 people had died in Kyiv (including 60 civilians and 4 children), and 889 were wounded (including 241 civilians). Thirty-six residential buildings, six schools, and four kindergartens were damaged.

On the evening of 20 March, russian forces launched a missile strike that destroyed the "Retroville" shopping centre in the Vynohradar district on the outskirts of Kyiv. At least 8 people were killed, several nearby buildings were damaged, and vehicles parked in the vicinity were destroyed.

In the Svatoshyn district, shell fragments hit a residential area, damaging six houses, three of which were uninhabitable, along with two schools and two kindergartens. Approximately 200 people were evacuated.

By the end of March, following orders from the Military Administration, municipal services in Kyiv began dismantling unauthorised checkpoints that had been established without coordination with the Armed Forces of Ukraine and served no military purpose. All verified checkpoints remained in place, and defenders continued their duty to protect the city.

By 25 March, it was clear that russia's attempt to encircle Kyiv had failed. russian forces had been pushed back from the capital and were in the process of being surrounded. On 28 March, a US Department of Defence representative stated that the russian advance on Kyiv had stalled. Based on russian army manoeuvres in eastern Ukraine, it appeared Moscow was shifting its focus to Donbas.

On 29 March, following another round of negotiations between russia and Ukraine, russian Deputy Minister of Defence O. Fomin announced a decision to “significantly reduce military activity on the Kyiv and Chernihiv fronts.” russian Defence Minister S. Shoigu stated that russia could cease combat operations towards Kyiv and other cities and focus on Donbas. On 30 March, the russian Ministry of Defence declared it had “fulfilled all its objectives on the Kyiv and Chernihiv fronts and was now conducting a planned regrouping of forces there.” On 31 March, the Armed Forces of Ukraine liberated Vyshhorod and Irpin from russian troops, but neighbouring areas, including Vorzel, Bucha, and Hostomel, remained under enemy control and were subjected to continuous bombardment. The National Guard of Ukraine artillery units on the Kyiv front destroyed two self-propelled howitzers, multiple rocket launchers, and several dozen enemy armoured and wheeled vehicles. **On 2 April, the Ministry of Defence of Ukraine officially confirmed the complete withdrawal of russian forces from the Kyiv region, with the territory now back under Ukrainian control**.

Conclusion

The military operations from the start of russia’s large-scale aggression against Ukraine up to the end of March 2022 revealed that russia's military and political leadership failed to implement their strategic plan for the rapid occupation of Ukrainian territory and the suppression of organised resistance from Ukraine’s defence forces. The blitzkrieg objectives set by russia's leadership were not achieved within the designated timeframe.

In the initial days of the aggression, the enemy made partial progress, managing to breach the Defence Forces of Ukraine to a depth of 40 to 70 km. They took control of a significant portion of Ukrainian territory and seized key strategic facilities. Several factors contributed to this early success:

The surprise nature of the attack left some commanders of Ukrainian military formations, units, and subunits unaware of their combat tasks, as they had not been briefed in advance within the framework of the unified national strategic defence plan;

In the early stages of the invasion, the enemy bypassed obstacles, avoided direct combat, and

refrained from occupying Ukrainian territory to maintain the momentum of their offensive;

On most fronts, the enemy enjoyed numerical superiority in both personnel and military equipment, forcing Ukrainian units to retreat while conducting delaying defensive actions;

The enemy's efforts to disrupt the Armed Forces of Ukraine communication system led to temporary breakdowns in command and control.

Despite this, the enemy failed to build on their initial success or achieve the main objectives of their offensive: encircling the Joint Forces, capturing Kyiv, and overthrowing Ukraine's legitimate government within a matter of days. The early military actions of the large-scale aggression revealed significant miscalculations, with the enemy misjudging the operational situation, which ultimately led to the failure of their plans within the first week.

The enemy mistakenly believed the Armed Forces of Ukraine would not resist russian aggression. Specifically, the president of the aggressor nation, Vladimir Putin, in his announcement of the "special military operation," directly appealed to the Ukrainian military, urging them to surrender and not defend the "Kyiv regime." Furthermore, russia's military and political leadership displayed dangerous overconfidence, overestimating the capabilities of their forces and believing they could swiftly defeat the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Nevertheless, both the command and personnel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine remained steadfast in their constitutional duty and military oath. They were determined to carry out their tasks with dignity and resolve, ensuring national security and defence while resisting and repelling the armed aggression. The Command of the Armed Forces of Ukraine anticipated the enemy's plans before the invasion, redeploying units to threatened areas. Prompt orders from the Commander of the Land Forces of Ukraine, Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi, led to the relocation of the 72nd Mechanised Brigade (named after the Black Cossacks), and the active deployment of units in the most critical areas of resistance. The dispersal of Air Force assets was also initiated to prevent losses from anticipated missile and air attacks in the initial hours of combat, alongside the mobilisation of Ukraine's operational reserve to bolster defences.

The enemy also misjudged the potential response of Ukraine’s political and military leadership in the event of large-scale aggression, believing that Ukrainian officials would flee or be captured as russian forces advanced rapidly. However, the Ukrainian government – including the President, Cabinet of Ministers, and Verkhovna Rada – remained in the capital, maintained full functionality, and took the necessary steps to defend the state. Martial law was declared, general mobilisation was initiated, the deployment of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and other military formations was organised, and regional, district, and municipal military administrations were established. Ukraine’s defence plan was activated, and the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief was formed, among other actions.

The enemy’s war plan also failed to anticipate determined resistance from the civilian population. By the tenth day after the russian invasion, special service units – the FSB and Rosgvardiya – were expected to enter Ukrainian territory with the aim of occupying it, establishing occupation administrations, and systematically destroying Ukrainian civil society. The population was categorised by the enemy into four groups: the first was to be physically eliminated; the second was to face suppression and intimidation; the third included those considered neutral, who could be coerced into cooperation; and the fourth group consisted of citizens willing to collaborate with the occupiers. The enemy’s intelligence services had already compiled lists of citizens in the first category, including participants in the Revolution of Dignity and soldiers involved in the ATO/JFO operations. For those in the second and third categories, filtration camps were to be set up in the occupied territories to gather information on the population, eliminate dissenters, and identify and detain potential members of underground resistance movements.

In contrast, the majority of Ukraine's population across most regions showed a strong determination to resist the large-scale russian aggression. The rapid mobilisation of volunteers to the Territorial Defence Forces (TDF) of the Armed Forces of Ukraine is the most telling evidence of this. Under martial law, 30 days were allocated to mobilise 130,000 reservists and deploy TDF units. However, between 24 February and 5 March, over 100,000 individuals were mobilised into the TDF. Additionally, in the occupied areas, civilians actively and passively resisted the enemy: they organised rallies and demonstrations against the occupiers, joined the Resistance Movement, obstructed the movement of enemy military vehicles, provided the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Defence Intelligence of Ukraine of the Ministry of Defence with intelligence on enemy troop movements, and hid wounded Ukrainian soldiers, among other acts.

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