

Russia-Ukraine live updates: Russia says recognition of separatist areas includes territory held by Ukrainian forces; Germany halts major gas pipeline

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23-29 minutes

Moscow's recognition of the enclaves Monday spurred the United States and its allies to gear up for a [fresh set of sanctions](#) on Russia after it also sent in forces it described as peacekeeping troops.

European leaders said Tuesday morning that [Kremlin forces had arrived](#) in the self-proclaimed republics. European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that "Russian troops are on Ukrainian soil" but that it was not a "fully fledged invasion." Meanwhile, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Tuesday that he would halt authorization of Nord Stream 2, the controversial gas pipeline between Germany and Russia, for the time being.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said that "we will give up nothing to no one" and that Ukraine's internationally recognized borders "will stay that way, despite any statements or actions taken by the Russian Federation."

Russia's maneuvers were sharply rebuked by several nations at a hastily convened meeting of the United Nations Security Council on Monday night.

Here's what to know

- President Biden [signed an executive order](#) Monday blocking trade and investment by Americans in two separatist enclaves of Ukraine. Administration officials said additional measures — including more sanctions — would be announced Tuesday, distinct from the strict measures promised if Russia further invades Ukraine.
- The State Department [moved its personnel](#) from Ukraine to Poland on Monday amid fears of Russia's "plans for an invasion at any moment," Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.
- Beijing [continues to walk a tightrope](#) of supporting Russia without outright endorsing its actions in Ukraine, with China's ambassador to the United Nations calling on all parties involved to "seek reasonable solutions" and address concerns based on "equality and mutual respect."

White House says it welcomes Germany's decision on Nord Stream 2

White House press secretary Jen Psaki speaks during a daily briefing at the White House on Friday. (Jabin Botsford/The Washington Post)

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said Tuesday that the United States welcomes Germany's announcement that it would halt the regulatory approval process for Nord Stream 2, a controversial gas pipeline project between Germany and Russia, following Moscow's actions in Ukraine.

“@POTUS made clear that if Russia invaded Ukraine, we would act with Germany to ensure Nord Stream 2 does not move forward,” Psaki said in a tweet. “We have been in close consultations with Germany overnight and welcome their announcement. We will be following up with our own measures today.”

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz made the announcement regarding the pipeline Tuesday after reports emerged that Russia has moved troops into separatist regions of eastern Ukraine.

During a visit to the White House this month, Scholz said Germany was “absolutely united” with the United States on potential responses to Russian aggression toward Ukraine but remained vague about steps his country was prepared to take on the pipeline.

White House official says Russia's actions amount to an 'invasion'

Video from Feb. 22 showed military vehicles on the edge of Donetsk, one of two separatist areas in eastern Ukraine that Russia recognized as independent. (Reuters)

Jonathan Finer, the White House principal deputy national security adviser, used the term “invasion” Tuesday to describe Russia's deployment of troops into two pro-Russian separatist regions of Ukraine.

“We think this is, yes, the beginning of an invasion, Russia's latest invasion into Ukraine, and you're already seeing the beginning of our response,” Finer said during a CNN interview in which he was pressed on whether the term is appropriate. He added that the White House would have more to say Tuesday about additional sanctions on Russia in response to the “egregious step they took yesterday away from diplomacy and down the further path toward war.”

He made the comments after a weekend in which Biden administration officials sought to hit back at Russia's aggressive action while [stopping short of declaring that it had officially invaded Ukraine](#), which would trigger an array of hard-hitting sanctions that President Biden has been warning about for months.

Instead, the United States imposed a smaller set of sanctions prohibiting U.S. investment and trade specifically in the breakaway regions.

During the interview, Finer rejected any suggestion that there is a semantic difference between “invasion” and “beginning of an invasion.”

“An invasion is an invasion, and that is what’s underway,” he said.

“For the third or fourth time, I am calling it an invasion,” Finer said later in the interview.

In addition to the U.S. sanctions announced Monday, Finer also noted that Germany has announced it would halt the regulatory approval process for Nord Stream 2, a gas pipeline project between Germany and Russia, following Moscow’s actions in Ukraine.

In somber ceremony, Ukrainian service members honor officer killed in Donbas region

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A funeral in Kyiv on Feb. 22 for the Ukrainian service member who was reportedly killed by shelling in eastern Ukraine. (Sergey Dolzhenko/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock)

KYIV, Ukraine — Scores of Ukrainian service members gathered outside the country’s Defense Ministry on Tuesday morning for a somber ceremony honoring Capt. Anton Sydorov, 35, an intelligence officer who was killed in a shelling attack in the Donbas region on Feb. 19. He left behind three young daughters.

Six men in dress uniform carried Sydorov’s casket along the driveway in front of the ministry before lowering it onto a bier in front of his relatives and top Ukrainian officials, including Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov. They then carefully draped the blue and yellow Ukrainian flag over his casket. Reznikov described him as a “warrior who defended his country.”

“Excuse us for what happened,” he said, addressing Sydorov’s family. “But we will not forget that. And we will not forgive either.”

Lt. Gen. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, commander of Ukraine’s armed forces, reflected on Sydorov’s “cheerful character, his thirst for life.”

“Most importantly, we will find the man who killed him,” he said. “And will terminate him.”

Oleksandr Levchenko, who previously served under Sydorov, said he expects difficult times ahead but vowed not to panic.

“I will be here [in Kyiv] until the very last moment,” he said. But, he added, “should it be needed, I will go to the east right away.”

Blinken, calling Russia's move 'shameful,' is set to meet Ukrainian counterpart in Washington

Secretary of State Antony Blinken will hold talks with his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba, in Washington on Tuesday as the United States and its allies prepare to step up their response to Russia's [recognition of two breakaway enclaves](#) in eastern Ukraine and its move to send troops there in what could be a precursor to a wider invasion.

The two leaders spoke by phone Monday to discuss an executive order signed by President Biden blocking trade and investment by Americans in the separatist enclaves, along with additional measures set to be announced Tuesday, according to State Department spokesman Ned Price.

Blinken wrote on Twitter that Russia's move "to recognize the 'independence' of so-called republics controlled by its own proxies is a predictable, shameful act."

Blinken also spoke with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, as Beijing continues to walk a tightrope of supporting Russia without explicitly endorsing its actions against Ukraine.

Wang said the legitimate security concerns of any country should be respected, according to a readout from Beijing. He also called on all parties involved to "exercise restraint" and resolve the crisis through negotiation, noting that the situation in Ukraine is "getting worse."

Ukraine's president considering whether to 'sever diplomatic relations' with Russia

LVIV, Ukraine — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said he is considering "a request" from Ukraine's Foreign Ministry to "sever diplomatic relations between Ukraine and the Russian Federation."

"After the press conference, I will work on this issue," he said. "And not only this question."

Ukraine and Russia still maintain diplomatic and economic relations with each other, despite the eight-year-old conflict in eastern Ukraine between Kyiv government forces and Kremlin-backed militants.

Ukraine officially refers to Russia as an "aggressor nation" but has stopped short of cutting off relations or declaring war, as this could trigger a full-scale Russian attack or deliver a significant blow to the country's fragile economy.

But Zelensky also said that Ukrainian officials still believe that there would not be a “powerful escalation” in the conflict by Russia.

European Union expected to announce sanctions on Russia

BRUSSELS — The European Union on Tuesday will announce sanctions on Russia, the bloc’s top diplomat said, although the timing and scope of the potential measures remain unclear.

For weeks, European officials have been warning of “massive” sanctions in the case of further Russian escalation. However, the bloc has been split on the question of what counts as an escalation and what the package should include.

After Russia formally recognized two breakaway enclaves in eastern Ukraine on Monday, European leaders promised swift and coordinated action. Their decision about what that might look like is expected after an emergency meeting of E.U. foreign ministers in Paris on Tuesday evening local time.

The big question is whether the bloc will immediately issue the type of comprehensive sanctions package it has been touting, or — as looks more likely — take a narrower, more incremental approach along the lines of what the United States has already announced.

President Biden on Monday issued an executive order that expanded on existing sanctions, blocking new U.S. investment, trade and property transactions in the two separatist enclaves. U.S. officials said more would be announced Tuesday.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Tuesday that Britain will also introduce “immediate” economic sanctions against Russia, saying a “first barrage” is on its way.

Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov rejects Ukrainian sovereignty, raising fears of further Moscow aggression

MOSCOW — Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov rejected Ukraine’s sovereignty Tuesday in inflammatory remarks that underscored Russia’s military threat against Ukraine, with Moscow’s troops massed on Ukraine’s borders and inside separatist regions.

Lavrov, commenting on Russia’s recognition of two separatist enclaves in eastern Ukraine, argued that because Kyiv lost control of the regions to separatists in 2014, Ukraine is not a sovereign nation.

Lavrov’s comments skirted Russia’s role in fomenting the separatist rebellions after it annexed Crimea in 2014 and in providing military support to the rebels — although it denies doing so.

Only states that represent the entire population in their territory are entitled to sovereignty, and “no one can argue that the Ukrainian regime, starting from the coup d’etat in 2014, represents the entire people living on the territory of the Ukrainian state,” Lavrov told state television.

Russia’s 2014 military intervention in Ukraine came shortly after the country’s Maidan revolution — also called the Revolution of Dignity — which ousted a pro-Moscow leader. Moscow consistently refers to that popular uprising as a “coup.”

Russia’s recognition of the separatists, which paves the way for new military intervention in Ukraine, reflects President Vladimir Putin’s determination to prevent it ever joining NATO or deepening ties with Europe and strengthening its military and its democracy, in what appears to be a personal obsession.

He has also used the Ukraine crisis as leverage to demand that Washington and NATO accept his terms on reshaping Europe’s security architecture — pulling back NATO forces and materiel, ending military cooperation with Ukraine and other states and halting the alliance’s open-door policy.

Lavrov’s comments repeated aspects of Putin’s rambling, belligerent televised speech to the nation explaining his move to recognize the separatists, when he called Ukraine’s 2014 revolution a “coup” and asserted that Ukraine had never been a fully sovereign country.

Putin continued Tuesday to pile the blame for the crisis on Kyiv, saying Russia always tried to find mutually acceptable solutions but that relations frayed after 2014.

“Regretfully, we have not seen such a level and quality of interaction with Kyiv since the coup in Ukraine. It is gone. Please note that it happened after the coup and the illegal seizure of power,” Putin said, speaking in the Kremlin when meeting Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev.

Germany will halt authorization of Nord Stream 2 pipeline

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Tuesday that Berlin would halt the regulatory approval process for Nord Stream 2, a controversial gas pipeline project between Germany and Russia, following Moscow’s actions in Ukraine.

“Without this certification Nord Stream 2 cannot start to operate,” he said in a news conference Tuesday. He spoke after reports emerged that Russia has moved troops into separatist regions of eastern Ukraine but before Moscow said Tuesday that its recognition of the independence of those regions includes territory now under Ukrainian government control.

Whether or not to publicly threaten to switch off the pipeline in case of a Russian incursion into Ukraine had been a sticking point between the United States and the German government as measures to deter Russian aggression have been examined in recent weeks.

In his previous public comments, Scholz had refrained from directly saying that it would be switched off if Russia were to invade Ukraine, while President Biden had said that would happen.

Scholz gave no clear indication of how long the certification process for the newly completed but yet-to-be-switched-on \$12 billion pipeline project might be delayed.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba hailed Germany's move on Twitter. The suspension of the certification of Nord Stream 2 "is a morally, politically and practically correct step in the current circumstances," he wrote. "True leadership means tough decisions in difficult times. Germany's move proves just that."

David L. Stern contributed to this report.

Johnson says Putin bent on 'full-scale invasion of Ukraine'

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Feb. 22 said Britain would soon unveil sanctions that would "hit Russia very hard." (Reuters)

LONDON — Russian President Vladimir Putin has "gravely miscalculated" the situation and has "completely torn up international law," British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Tuesday.

"I'm afraid all the evidence is that President Putin is indeed bent ... on a full-scale invasion of the Ukraine, the overrunning, the subjugation of an independent, sovereign European country, and I think, let's be absolutely clear, that will be absolutely catastrophic," he said.

President Putin has violated Ukrainian sovereignty and international law by sending troops into eastern Ukraine.

We will immediately institute a package of economic sanctions targeting Russian economic interests. pic.twitter.com/RUucmNijFg

— UK Prime Minister (@10DowningStreet) [February 22, 2022](#)

Johnson said Britain would soon unveil sanctions that would "hit Russia very hard" and that more would be done "in the event of an invasion."

Earlier in the morning, Health Secretary Sajid Javid told Sky News that "we are waking up to a very dark day in Europe."

"We have seen that [Putin] has recognized these breakaway eastern regions in Ukraine, and from the reports we can already tell that he has sent in tanks and troops," he said. "From that you can conclude that the invasion of Ukraine has begun."

Russia's recognition of separatist regions in Ukraine covers areas under Kyiv's control, setting the scene for further invasion of Ukraine

MOSCOW — The Kremlin said Tuesday its recognition of two separatist enclaves in eastern Ukraine covers areas controlled by the Kyiv government, paving the way for a further invasion of Ukraine.

Russia on Monday recognized the self-proclaimed Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LPR), two Moscow-backed separatist regions in eastern Ukraine. Together they occupy about a third of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine, but the separatists claim the entire regions.

The claims include the key port city of Mariupol, currently under Kyiv government control, on the Sea of Azov.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Tuesday that Moscow recognized the borders as proclaimed by the separatists in 2014, fueling fears of an expanded conflict in Ukraine.

The regions were recognized “within the boundaries in which they proclaimed themselves, when these two republics were proclaimed,” Peskov told reporters. After the proclamation, the separatists were driven back to their current territory.

His comments followed a flurry of contradictory statements from Russian officials Tuesday about the matter. Earlier, Russia's Foreign Ministry said the recognition treaty applied only to areas that the separatists control and over which they have jurisdiction.

Moscow's decision to recognize Kyiv-held territory as belonging to the separatists risks igniting new fighting, which could be used by Moscow as a pretext to further invade. Separatists may launch military action against Ukraine, backed by Russian forces, to try to seize the claimed areas, analysts said.

A separatist official from the LPR in eastern Ukraine called on the Kyiv government Tuesday to “withdraw” its forces from Ukrainian-held territory or the separatist region backed by Russia's military would “take measures,” according to state-owned news agency RIA Novosti, in an ominous warning that could herald a wider war.

Ukraine calls on soldiers to brace for possible conflict: 'Defend our country' and 'overcome fear'

Ukraine's defense minister called on the military to prepare to defend the country after Russia's dispatch of forces into the contested east raised the specter of escalating war.

“Dear soldiers and sailors, sergeants and officers, generals and admirals ... the darkness of uncertainty has fallen,” Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said Tuesday in a message to Ukrainian troops. “Our choice is very simple — to defend our country, our home, our family,” he said.

“There are difficult trials ahead. There will be losses,” his statement added. “We will have to go through pain, overcome fear and despair. But we will definitely win. Because we are on our land, and the truth is behind us.”

The call to arms came after Russian President Vladimir Putin formally recognized two pro-Moscow separatist enclaves as independent and [sent forces there](#) for what he called “peacekeeping” purposes, an escalation of the crisis that drew rebukes from Western nations.

European officials said Tuesday that Russian [troops have entered](#) disputed territories in eastern Ukraine. The European Union’s foreign policy chief described it as not a “fully fledged invasion,” although he said the Kremlin’s latest moves would prompt sanctions.

Ukrainian government troops and pro-Russian separatist forces have been locked for years in a conflict in the eastern region, where shelling and cease-fire violations have intensified in recent days.

U.K. to impose ‘first of a barrage’ of sanctions on Russia

LONDON — Prime Minister Boris Johnson said Tuesday that the United Kingdom will “immediately institute a package of economic sanctions” that will hit the “interests that have been supporting Russia’s war machine.”

Johnson was set to announce details of the sanction package in the House of Commons later in the day.

Speaking to broadcasters after an early-morning meeting of COBRA, the government’s emergency committee, Johnson said that sanctions will “hit Russia very hard” and that this would be “just the first of a barrage of U.K. economic sanctions” against Russia “because we expect, I’m afraid, that there is more Russian irrational behavior to come.”

London has long been a playground for Russian oligarchs, who pour billions into the city’s property market. Johnson said that “if Russian companies are prevented from raising capital on the U.K. financial markets, if we unpeel the facade of Russian ownership of companies, of property, it will start to hurt.”

However, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov brushed off the threat of sanctions Tuesday.

“Our European, American, British colleagues will not stop and will not calm down until they have exhausted all their possibilities for the so-called ‘punishment of Russia,’” Lavrov said. “Well, we’re used to it. We know that sanctions will be imposed anyway.”

Separatist official calls on Ukraine to withdraw forces from territory controlled by Kyiv's forces

MOSCOW — A separatist official in eastern Ukraine called on the Kyiv government Tuesday to “withdraw” its forces from the region, backed by Russia’s military, would “take measures,” according to Russian state-owned media, an ominous warning that could signal a further invasion of Ukraine.

Russia on Monday recognized the self-proclaimed Donetsk People’s Republic (DPR) and Luhansk People’s Republic (LPR), two Moscow-backed separatist regions. Together, they occupy about a third of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, or regions, of eastern Ukraine but claim the entire areas.

The territorial claims include the key port city of Mariupol, under government control, on the Sea of Azov.

The text of Russia’s agreement to recognize the breakaway regions says it is doing so within their “existing borders,” yet some separatist and Russian officials immediately interpreted it to include territory under the control of the Kyiv government. It provides for joint enforcement of the borders and for Russian military bases in the region.

This means that separatists could launch military action against Ukraine, backed by Russian forces, to try to seize the claimed areas, constituting a further Russian invasion.

Almost as soon as the ink was dry on the Kremlin’s recognition treaty, an official from the separatist LPR parliament, Dmitry Khoroshilov, asserted the region’s claim to the whole of the Luhansk region and called on Ukraine to withdraw its forces “voluntarily,” Russia’s state-owned RIA Novosti news agency reported.

“Our territory is the whole Luhansk region. We call on Ukraine to withdraw its troops voluntarily, otherwise measures will be taken,” the agency quoted him as saying.

Fighting in eastern Ukraine has continued since 2014, killing almost 14,000 people.

Earlier, Leonid Kalashnikov, head of Russia’s Committee on Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs in the country’s lower house of parliament, or State Duma, said the treaty “did not specify” what territory was recognized, but he said he believed it covered the entire Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts claimed by the separatists.

The ambiguity echoed from one official to another, leaving Russia wiggle room to interpret the deal as it wishes.

Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said the “nuances” would be sorted out later. Andrei Klimov, deputy chairman of the upper house’s foreign affairs committee, told

state television that Russia recognized the “actual borders,” adding: “We shall remind you that part of the territories of Donetsk and Luhansk regions are controlled by Kyiv.”

Russia’s parliament was expected to rubber-stamp the recognition treaties Tuesday.

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