



Ukraine Braces for Grisly Russian Offensive in the East

Description

Ukraine is bracing for a grisly Russian offensive in the Donbas. Moscow has concentrated hundreds of thousands of troops in the country's east, using brute-force tactics and human waves in a bid to chip away at the Ukrainian Armed Forces' defenses.

Amid a recent surge in fighting, many military analysts believe the long-awaited Russian offensive is already underway and is expected to accelerate as the first anniversary of the invasion approaches.

"Something is brewing in the east," said Jonatan Vsevirov, secretary-general of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "More and more Russian soldiers are arriving on the front," he said.

Ukraine is bracing for a grisly Russian offensive in the Donbas. Moscow has concentrated hundreds of thousands of troops in the country's east, using brute-force tactics and human waves in a bid to chip away at the Ukrainian Armed Forces' defenses.

Amid a recent surge in fighting, many military analysts believe the long-awaited Russian offensive is already underway and is expected to accelerate as the first anniversary of the invasion approaches.

"Something is brewing in the east," said Jonatan Vsevirov, secretary-general of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "More and more Russian soldiers are arriving on the front," he said.

Ukrainian officials estimate that Russian forces inside the country have surpassed the 300,000 mark following a recent mobilization effort that began in September of last year. Military analysts believe the figure may be slightly lower, but even more conservative estimates of Russia's presence in Ukraine are significantly higher than the invading force that Russian President Vladimir Putin used to invade the country last February—and this time, they are highly concentrated in eastern Ukraine.

“We expect in the next 10 days a new, huge invasion,” a Ukrainian military official, speaking on condition of anonymity to talk about intelligence matters, told *Foreign Policy*. Over the weekend, Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said that he [expects](#) a surge in Russian operations around the upcoming anniversary of the invasion on Feb. 24.

As Russian forces contended with steep losses in the first months of the war, the Kremlin announced a partial mobilization effort in the fall to bring in about 300,000 new troops. Despite the chaotic nature of the recruitment drive and the lack of training afforded to new recruits, the mobilization effort appears to have been a crude success by deploying enough troops to stall Ukraine’s advance—albeit with devastating losses for Russian forces. U.S. and Western officials now estimate that close to 200,000 Russian troops have been killed or wounded in battle, the *New York Times* [reported](#) last week.

The new recruits are significantly less well-equipped and trained than Moscow’s initial invading force dispatched over the borders in February of last year. In many instances, recruits have been used to perform human-wave attacks, a tactic popular with the Soviet Red Army, moving across open ground while coming under heavy fire from Ukrainian forces, said Dara Massicot, a Russian military analyst with the Rand Corporation.

Russia’s brute assaults, while not the most sophisticated, have taken a toll on the Ukrainian Armed Forces, which now has to contend with a much denser Russian presence. “A lot of those ingredients that were present that allowed successful Ukrainian counteroffensives up in Kharkiv, those ingredients are no longer present. The lines are thicker. They’ve mined them. They’ve dug in,” Massicot said.

Russia has also begun arming up and digging in for a coming offensive. The Ukrainian military estimates that Russia already has 1,800 tanks, 3,950 armored vehicles, 2,700 artillery systems, 810 Soviet-era multiple-rocket-launch systems such as Grad and Smerch, 400 fighter jets, and 300 helicopters ready for the new wave of attacks, the official said. The Pentagon has described Russian troops that have already been rushed to the battlefield to plug up defensive holes as “ill-equipped, ill-trained, [and] rushed,” according to a senior U.S. military official.

Some European officials believe that Russia’s mobilization never truly stopped after the September call-ups by the Kremlin. “Mobilization has not ended,” Vsevirov said. “Mobilization is now continuing in Russia, but continuing quietly. They’re not making a fuss about it because of domestic considerations.”

Karolina Hird, a Russia analyst with the Institute for the Study Of War, said there has been a continued trickle of reports that suggest mobilization efforts are quietly continuing. “We’re seeing continued reports of people getting mobilization summonses or, for example, employers, enterprises, getting lists of employees that they need to send to the military registration office.”

The Pentagon believes that the Kremlin has begun sending in tens of thousands of troops to replace losses suffered from ongoing battles in the Donbas towns of Bakhmut and Soledar, but Kyiv believes that Putin could go even further, drafting more new troops around the Feb. 24 anniversary of the full-scale invasion.

“It’s much bigger than what took place in the first wave,” the Ukrainian military official said. “They don’t pay attention to any casualties or losses on the [battlefield].”

While there are no signs that Putin is backing down from his overall goal of seizing Ukraine in full, analysts and Ukrainian officials expect the brewing offensive to focus on eastern Ukraine amid a surge in fighting in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

“It seems to me that there probably has been some Kremlin guidance handed down to [Chief of the Russian General Staff Valery] Gerasimov. I think that includes, if they can, proceeding to the boundaries of Donetsk and Luhansk,” Massicot said, referring to two of the four Ukrainian regions the Kremlin pretended to annex in September.

But the fear that even poorly trained Russian units could overwhelm Ukrainian lines with human wave-style attacks has led to more urgent calls for Western weapons from Kyiv, despite nearly \$9 billion in U.S. military aid pledges to Ukraine since December—almost 50 percent larger than Kyiv’s entire yearly prewar defense budget.

Yet some of the key weapons put forward by the United States to withstand the Russian salvo of bullets and bodies—such as Patriot missile defense systems, Bradley armored fighting vehicles, and Abrams main battle tanks—might not get into the country until March or April, at the earliest. And ground-launched small-diameter bombs might not get to Kyiv for up to nine months.

While Moscow was already showing signs of stepping up its efforts in the Donbas, many analysts believe the Russian military is seeking to advance as much as possible before the arrival of that new slate of Western military equipment.

“I don’t know how we’re going to withstand this counteroffensive. It’s going to be extremely difficult,” said Sasha Ustinova, a Ukrainian lawmaker. “We don’t have enough rounds, or I mean—anything. The tanks are going to be later. Everything is going to be later. By the time they send us Abrams, we will already have seen how the Russian counteroffensive goes.”

By **Amy Mackinnon**

Category

1. Army-Wars-Conflict Zones-Military Tech.
2. Main

Date Created

02/09/2023