



News Brief Update 37

14 December 2022

Contact: Dr. Ian Davis
Email: idavis@natowatch.org
www.natowatch.org

Russia's war with Ukraine

In the last few months, the Russian army has suffered a series of reversals and Russian President Vladimir Putin has responded with a mass mobilisation of soldiers and attacks on core Ukrainian energy infrastructure. The political and military rationale for these attacks appears to be to seek to undermine Ukraine's morale, a strategy that draws on Russian military practice in other recent armed conflicts (in Syria, Libya and Mali). By seeking to create a form of 'state failure' the aim seems to be to undermine Ukraine's democratic institutions. These attacks on critical infrastructure are producing [power and water shortages](#) in Kyiv and other major Ukrainian towns and cities. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky [said](#) on 11 December that Russian missile strikes had destroyed about 50% of Ukrainian energy infrastructure. Ukraine now faces a major winter crisis with freezing temperatures.

President Zelensky [told](#) an emergency conference in Paris, convened on 13 December to coordinate infrastructure and humanitarian aid over the next four months, that generators are as important as armour in helping Ukraine "defeat Russian energy terror" this winter. Ukraine needed an additional €800 million to survive the winter and €1.5 billion to restore the long-term damage to the energy grid, Zelensky said. More than €1 billion was [pledged](#) by 46 countries and 24 international organisations in support for Ukraine at the aid conference. The money will be split between restoring Ukraine's depleted energy network, the food sector, water supply, health and transportation.

Due to power blackouts Ukraine's health ministry asked regional authorities to consider suspending non-essential surgeries and hospitalisations. In a [statement](#) on 6 December, the ministry said hospitals were continuing to provide emergency care but that planned surgeries should be temporarily suspended to ease the load on the medical system amid potential future blackouts. Meanwhile, Kyiv's mayor Vitali Klitschko [warned](#) on 7 December of an "apocalypse" scenario for the city this winter if Russian airstrikes on infrastructure continue. Russia has fired more than 1,000 rockets and missiles at Ukraine's power grid, Interfax Ukraine news agency [said](#).

In the wake of such strikes, Ukraine renewed its [call](#) for the West to supply Patriot missile batteries and other modern air defence systems amid growing concerns that attacks by Russia on its electricity grid could create a new wave of refugees. Indeed it is a call that seems to have been heeded with the United States said to be [finalising plans](#) to send the Patriot missile defence system to Ukraine. The head of Norway's refugee council [said](#) he expects another wave of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Ukraine to go to Europe over the winter because of "unliveable" conditions. The White House [said](#) the Russian strikes against Ukraine are a reminder of Vladimir Putin's brutality. John Kirby, the White House national security spokesperson, also told reporters that an oil price cap introduced on 2 December (see below) would not have any long-term impact on global oil prices.

Although US intelligence [expects](#) a “reduced tempo” in fighting over the winter months, heavy fighting has continued in recent weeks in eastern and southern Ukraine, mainly in regions that Russia illegally annexed in September. The epicentre of the fighting has been the town of [Bakhmut](#) where Russian forces have been struggling for six months to make minimal progress. Meanwhile, the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg expressed concerns that the fighting in Ukraine could spin out of control and become a war between Russia and NATO, according to an interview on 9 December. “If things go wrong, they can go horribly wrong”, he [said](#) in remarks to Norwegian broadcaster NRK.

Contradictory statements from President Putin

During a press conference in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, on 9 December President Putin raised the possibility of a settlement to end the war in Ukraine, while still claiming his “special military operation” is going to plan. “The settlement process as a whole, yes, it will probably be difficult and will take some time – but one way or another, all participants in this process will have to agree with the realities that are taking shape on the ground”, the Russian president [said](#). His remarks came just days after he [said](#) the military action could be a “long-term process” and having [vowed](#) to continue attacking Ukrainian energy systems despite international criticism of the strikes. Putin also claimed that Russia would not use nuclear weapons first in any conflict and that the Russian military would not need to mobilise more troops. However, during his press conference in Bishkek, Putin [said](#) Russia could amend its military doctrine and was considering whether to adopt what he called Washington’s concept of a pre-emptive strike, in an apparent reference to a nuclear attack.

Attacks on Russian territory

Russian authorities [accused](#) Ukraine of attacks on three Russian air bases near the cities of Saratov, Ryazan and [Kursk](#) on 5 and 6 December, which killed three people and damaged several aircraft in Russia’s strategic

bomber fleet. Kyiv acknowledged the attacks but did not take direct responsibility. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken [said](#) “We have neither encouraged nor enabled the Ukrainians to strike inside of Russia”. The strikes deep inside Russian territory once more revealed that Ukraine has long-range capabilities that Russian intelligence seemed to be unaware of and its air defence unprepared for. Whether Kyiv can use such capabilities repeatedly remains unclear, but it takes the war to a more expansive and dangerous level and Putin may up the ante raising fears of a military spillover or a further “globalisation” of the war.

Stalled diplomacy

On 12 December President Zelensky [urged](#) leaders of the G7 to support his idea of convening a special global peace summit dedicated to bringing peace to his country. The summit would be focused on the implementation of Kyiv’s [10-point peace plan](#) that insists on, among other things, Russia’s withdrawal of all its troops from Ukraine and no territorial concessions on Kyiv’s part. However, Russia shows no signs of being ready to respect Ukraine’s sovereignty and pre-war borders, and there are currently no formal peace talks.

Nonetheless, President Putin and US President Joe Biden have both expressed openness to peace talks to end the fighting, as have leaders in France, Germany and elsewhere. President Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron presented a united front on Ukraine in talks on 1 December with Biden [saying](#) he would talk to President Putin if he is willing to end the war and only in consultation with NATO allies. “I’m prepared to speak with Mr Putin if in fact there is an interest in him deciding he’s looking for a way to end the war. He hasn’t done that yet”, Biden told a news conference at the White House with Macron. President Putin’s spokesman [replied](#) that Russia is ready for negotiations aimed “to ensure our interests”.

Macron said he would continue to talk to Putin to “try to prevent escalation and to get some very concrete results” such as the safety of nuclear plants. Biden and Macron also [pledged](#)

to hold Russia accountable for “widely documented atrocities and war crimes” in Ukraine (see below). Biden said their support would continue in the face of Russian aggression, which he added has been “incredibly brutal”. In a joint [statement](#) with Macron, the leaders said: “Intentionally targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure constitutes war crimes whose perpetrators must be held accountable”.

In an interview with French television on 3 December President Macron went further and [said](#) the West should consider how to address Russia’s need for security guarantees if Putin agrees to negotiations about ending the war. He said Europe needed to address Putin’s fear that “NATO comes right up to its doors”, and the deployment of weapons that could threaten Russia, as Europe prepares its future security architecture. The comments drew sharp criticism from [Kyiv](#) and several of the [EU’s Russia hardliners](#).

European Council President Charles Michel [urged](#) Chinese President Xi Jinping to use the country’s “influence” on Russia over its war in Ukraine during a visit to Beijing on 1 December. “I urged President Xi, as we did at our EU-China summit in April, to use his influence on Russia to respect the UN charter”, Michel said. President Xi made it clear that China is not providing weapons to Russia and that nuclear threats are not acceptable, the European Council president added. (President Putin and Xi Jinping are scheduled to hold talks in late December, the Russian business daily *Vedomosti* [reported](#)). Meanwhile, writing in an opinion piece for *Foreign Affairs* magazine on 5 December, the German chancellor Olaf Scholz [warned](#) the west to avoid creating a new cold war by dividing the world into blocs and called for every effort to be made to build new partnerships.

In an [interview](#) on 6 December, economist and foreign policy scholar Jeffrey Sachs, said “This war needs to end because it’s a disaster for everybody, a threat to the whole world”, adding that four major issues need to be addressed to end the war: Ukraine’s sovereignty and security, NATO enlargement,

the fate of Crimea and the future of the Donbas region. However, Speaking at an event hosted by the Financial Times on 7 December, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg [said](#) Russia is attempting to “freeze” the fighting in Ukraine over the winter to prepare its forces for a renewed assault early next year. Stoltenberg urged NATO allies to continue sending weapons to Kyiv over the winter, adding that the conditions for a peaceful settlement to the war are “not there now”.

For options of what a possible settlement for Ukraine might look like, see Cambridge University’s [Ukraine Peace Settlement Project](#).

Prisoner exchanges

There have been some negotiations on key issues, such as the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, getting grain out of Ukraine and in organising prisoner swaps, but no Ukrainian-Russian negotiations since March on the big issues. Notably, a grain deal brokered by the UN and Turkey in July aimed at easing global food shortages was [extended](#) for four months on 17 November, although Russia said its own demands were yet to be fully addressed. And Russia and Ukraine have carried out numerous prisoner of war exchanges, and according to President Zelensky, more than 1,300 prisoners have been returned to Ukraine since the beginning of the war. Speaking after a new exchange of 50 prisoners with Russian and pro-Russian forces on 1 December, Zelensky said on Instagram that “After today’s exchange, there are already 1,319 heroes who returned home”, [posting a photo](#) showing a few dozen men holding Ukrainian flags.

Russia freed the jailed US basketball star Brittney Griner on 8 December in a high-level [prisoner exchange](#) for the notorious arms dealer Viktor Bout, who had been held in a US prison for 12 years. President Biden said in an address from the White House that he had spoken with Griner and found her “in good spirits”. Biden expressed regret the deal did not include Paul Whelan, an American jailed since December 2018 on espionage charges that his family and the US Government say are baseless. An anonymous US official told CNN

that leaving Whelan out of the deal had been “a difficult decision” but “it was a choice to get Brittney or nothing”. Since her release, Griner has been undergoing physical and mental [evaluation](#) at a Texas army facility as part of her rehabilitation to the US. Meanwhile, Viktor Bout has joined the Kremlin-loyal ultranationalist Liberal Democratic party (LDPR), its leader [said](#). The move could see Bout seek a seat in the Russian parliament.

Military and financial assistance to Ukraine and Russia

Ukraine continues to rely heavily on international military and financial support from Western states. Most of the military assistance has come in the form of bilateral arms transfers, training and other support, which is being coordinated by the US-led Ukraine Defence Contact Group, which meets on an ad hoc basis and involves Ministers of Defence and senior military officials from Western-aligned states from around the world. The most recent meeting took [place](#) on 16 November. In addition, NATO agreed at its June [Madrid Summit](#) to strengthen a 2016 [Comprehensive Assistance Package](#) for Ukraine. The additional elements to the package include both short-term assistance (ranging from fuel, protective equipment to portable anti-drone systems and secure communications) and longer-term support (to help modernize the Ukrainian armed forces to NATO interoperability standards and strengthen its defence and security institutions).

Since January 2021, the United States has [invested](#) approximately \$20 billion in security assistance to Ukraine, while America’s partners in Europe and beyond have [pledged](#) an additional \$12 billion in support. Currently, the United States is [reportedly](#) working with two Middle Eastern countries to transfer advanced Nasams air defence systems to Ukraine in the next three to six months. Kyiv received two of the eight approved deliveries of Nasams in early November. UK Defence Secretary Ben Wallace [said](#) he would be “open minded” about supplying Ukraine with longer-range weapons if Russia continued to target

civilian areas. Wallace said he “constantly” reviewed the weapons systems the UK sends to Ukraine, and that he “will be open minded to see what we do next” if Moscow tries to “break those Geneva conventions”, referring to agreed basic humanitarian principles during war. Meanwhile, Der Spiegel magazine [reported](#) on 2 December that Germany is [aiming](#) to deliver seven Gepard tanks that were due to be scrapped to Ukraine next spring, adding to 30 of the air-defence tanks that are already being used to fight against the Russian army.

External military support to Russia so far has been limited to a handful of states, principally [Iran](#) and [North Korea](#). The US [expressed](#) alarm on 9 December over a “full-scale defence partnership” between Moscow and Tehran, describing it as “harmful” to Ukraine, Iran’s neighbours and the world. Washington has previously condemned Iran-Russia security cooperation but on this occasion described an extensive relationship involving equipment such as helicopters and fighter jets as well as drones, with the latter items resulting in new US sanctions. Earlier, the US special envoy on Iran, Rob Malley, [told](#) a conference in Rome on 4 December that Iran’s leadership was locked into a “vicious cycle” over protests and arming of Russia. “The more Iran represses, the more there will be sanctions; the more there are sanctions, the more Iran feels isolated”, Malley said, adding “The more isolated they feel, the more they turn to Russia; the more they turn to Russia, the more sanctions there will be, the more the climate deteriorates, the less likely there will be nuclear diplomacy. So it is true right now the vicious cycles are all self-reinforcing”.

Canadian-made parts were found in ‘kamikaze’ Iranian drones used by Russia to attack Ukraine, according to an [investigative project](#) from the NGO Statewatch. It said components from 30 European and American companies, including antenna parts from Tallysman Wireless, a Canadian manufacturer, were used in Shahed 136 drones. Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was [reported](#) to be “extremely concerned” over the report

For further details on arms transfers to Ukraine, see, the [Forum on the Arms Trade](#). And for a timeline of every US arms shipment to Ukraine that has been announced since the war began, see [here](#).

Senior EU officials vowed to ensure Ukraine gets €18 billion in financial aid, after Hungary [vetoed](#) the release of the funds. Earlier Viktor Orbán's government was accused of "holding hostage" funds for Ukrainian hospitals and "cynical obstructionism" after Hungary confirmed on 6 December that it would block the financial aid. The move by the Orbán government is widely seen as an attempt to gain leverage in separate [disputes](#) over Hungary's access to €13 billion EU funds.

Price cap agreed on Russian seaborne oil

A price cap on Russian seaborne oil was [adopted](#) by the G7 and Australia, after it was agreed by EU countries on 2 December. (In November EU governments had [failed](#) to reach agreement over what level to cap Russian oil prices without causing a global oil supply shock). EU member states [agreed](#) to put a \$60 a barrel price cap on Russian oil after Poland, which was holding out, gave the green light to the deal. President Zelensky said the \$60 price cap is not serious and will do little to deter Russia from waging war in Ukraine. "It's only a matter of time before stronger tools will have to be used anyway. It is a pity that this time will be lost," he [said](#) in a video statement the same day. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the cap will particularly benefit low- and medium-income countries that have borne the brunt of high energy and food prices. "The price cap will immediately cut into Putin's most important source of revenue," Yellen said in a [statement](#).

Russian deputy prime minister Alexander Novak [said](#) on 4 December that Russia will not sell oil that is subject to a western price-cap even if it has to cut production, while Opec+ (which comprises the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including Russia) [agreed](#) to stick to its oil output targets at a meeting the same day.

Opec+ had angered the US and other western nations in October when it agreed to cut output by 2 million barrels a day, about 2% of world demand, from November until the end of 2023. Russia [warned](#) on 5 December that the price cap would destabilise global energy markets, but claimed it would not affect its invasion of Ukraine. Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said Russia was preparing its response to the move by the G7 and allies. The Chinese Foreign Ministry reportedly [said](#) it will continue energy cooperation with Russia on the basis of respect and mutual benefit, having increased its purchases of Russia's Urals oil blends this year.

Humanitarian consequences of the war

Exact figures for the number of war fatalities, both military and civilian, are difficult to verify and confirm. [Undercounting and manipulation](#) of the data is common in war. America's most senior general and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Mark Milley, [estimates](#) that Russia's military had seen more than 100,000 of its soldiers killed and wounded in Ukraine, adding Kyiv's armed forces have "probably" suffered a similar level of casualties in the war. Milley also suggested that around 40,000 civilians had died after being caught up in the conflict. In September Russia [acknowledged](#) nearly 6,000 war dead, while Ukraine [claims](#) to have killed more than 96,000 Russian soldiers in the war to date. Speaking on Ukrainian tv on 2 December, Kyiv's presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak [said](#) up to 13,000 Ukrainian soldiers have been killed since Russia invaded in February, apparently based on official figures from Ukraine's general staff. However, at certain points in the war, Ukraine [said](#) that between 100 and 200 of its forces were dying each day on the battlefield, making Podolyak's estimate seem conservative. In April, Russia [said](#) it had killed about 23,000 Ukrainian troops.

According to [data](#) collected by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), as at 12 December, 6,755 civilians have died since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, including 424 children. The actual civilian casualty figures are likely to be

considerably higher, as the receipt of information from some locations where intense hostilities have been going on has been delayed and many reports are still pending corroboration. According to [Action on Armed Violence](#) (AOAV) the number of civilian casualties from explosive violence in the Ukrainian conflict reached 9,611 people by 2 December. From this number, 3,492 were killed and 6,119 were injured. Ninety-four per cent (9,030) of civilian casualties have occurred in populated areas.

As of 22 November, there were 7,832,493 [refugees](#) from Ukraine recorded across Europe, 4,805,531 of whom were registered for Temporary Protection or similar national protection schemes in Europe. This gives them the right to live and work in any EU country and benefit from housing and schooling assistance.

Continuing concerns about the safety of nuclear facilities

There are ongoing fears Russia's relentless targeting of Ukraine's electricity grid will threaten the safety of the country's nuclear power plants. Most international concern has focused on the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, which is in Russian hands but operated by Ukrainian workers. It is Europe's largest, provided about a fifth of Ukraine's electricity before Russia's invasion, was shut down in September due to fighting in and around it over the previous two months, and has been forced to operate on backup generators several times since. These events raised concerns about the potential for a [nuclear accident](#). A 14-member International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) [expert mission](#) carried out an inspection of the plant in early September. For further details see NATO Watch updates [23](#) through to [27](#).

Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu [said](#) on 6 December that Ukraine was shelling the Zaporizhzhia plant, deliberately creating the threat of a possible nuclear catastrophe. Shoigu added that Russian forces were taking "all measures" to ensure the safety of the power plant, in the face of what he called "nuclear terrorism" from Kyiv. Both Russia and

Ukraine have claimed to want to establish a safety zone around the plant. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [said](#) on 8 December that his government was working with the IAEA to create such a zone. The head of the IAEA Rafael Grossi had [said](#) earlier on 2 December that the IAEA hopes to reach an agreement with Russia and Ukraine to create a protection zone at the plant by the end of the year.

Further reading:

On outcomes and consequences of the war

[How Putin's Gamble Backfired: Ukraine Invasion Has Brought Them Nearer NATO](#), Newsweek, 12 December 2022

[Trust between the West and Russia has been destroyed, NATO chief says](#), CNBC, 12 December 2022

Simon Tisdall, [Putin has to escalate to survive. There can be no lasting peace until he falls](#), The Observer, 11 December 2022

[Heavy Fighting In Donbas As West Says Moscow Turns To 'Sanctioned States' For Weaponry](#), RFE/RL, 10 December 2022

[NATO chief fears Ukraine war could become a wider conflict](#), Associated Press, 9 December 2022

Connor Echols, [Diplomacy Watch: NATO infighting continues as Putin signals long war](#), Responsible Statecraft, 9 December 2022

[Answering Four Hard Questions About Russia's War in Ukraine](#), International Crisis Group, Europe Briefing no.96, 8 December 2022

Anatol Lieven and Artin DerSimonian, [The Threat of New Wars in the Caucasus: A Good Case for U.S. Restraint](#), Quincy Brief No. 36, 8 December 2022

Robert Vass and Robin Shepherd, [The Ukraine Fight Is Just Part of Russia's War](#), Defense One, 8 December 2022

[Judy Asks: Are France and Germany Wavering on Russia?](#) Carnegie Europe, 8 December 2022

Alexander Graef and Tim Thies, [Lessons from the past: Arms control in uncooperative times](#), ELN Policy Brief, 7 December 2022

[NATO Secretary General: "Russia trying to freeze Ukraine conflict"](#), NATO News Release, 7 December 2022

Connor Echols, [Ukraine hits targets deep inside Russia in break with Biden administration](#), Responsible Statecraft, 6 December 2022

[Jeffrey Sachs: A Negotiated End to Fighting in Ukraine Is the Only Real Way to End the Bloodshed](#), Democracy Now, 6 December 2022

Lili Bayer, [The West's last war-time taboo: Ukraine joining NATO](#), Politico, 6 December 2022

Michal Onderco and Clara Egger, [Why a new convention to protect nuclear installations in war is a bad idea](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 5 December 2022

Jeffrey Sachs, [A Mediator's Guide to Peace in Ukraine](#), Common Dreams, 5 December 2022

[Ex-NATO chief says Russian army disorganised, using old weapons](#), Al Jazeera, 2 December 2022

Connor Echols, [Diplomacy Watch: Divisions flare in the West as winter looms](#), Responsible Statecraft, 2 December 2022

Valentin Weber, [The Benefits and Risks of Extending Weapons Deliveries to the Cyber Domain](#), Lawfare, 2 December 2022

[Russia accuses U.S. of direct Ukraine war role, but says it's open to potential talks](#), Reuters, 1 December 2022

Yaroslav Zhalilo, [Nine Steps Towards Post-War Europe](#), Globesec commentary, 1 December 2022

Federica Prandin, [EU climate policy amid Russia's war in Ukraine: A critical overview of key REPowerEU challenges and trajectories towards net-zero](#), Globsec, 1 December 2022

Dionis Cenuşa, [Collateral Victim or Separate Target? Russia's Tactics Against Moldova](#), RUSI Commentary, 1 December 2022

Matthew Bunn, [Russia's "dirty bomb" disinformation, annotated](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 1 December 2022

Luke Cooper, [Market economics in an all-out-war? Assessing economic and political risks to the Ukrainian war effort](#), Conflict and Civiness

Research Group, The London School of Economics, December 2022

[Reinsalu in Bucharest: NATO members must increase heavy weaponry shipments to Ukraine immediately](#), Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, News Release, 30 November 2022

[Ukraine seeks more NATO aid amid 'difficult' front-line situation](#), Al Jazeera, 30 November 2022

[Russia's Medvedev warns NATO over supplying Ukraine with Patriot systems](#), Reuters, 29 November 2022

Jocelyn Trainer, [To Designate or Not? Russia and SST Status](#), Lawfare, 29 November 2022

[Canada says Nato fully behind Ukraine through hard winter](#), The Guardian, 29 November 2022

[Seven Priorities for Preserving the OSCE in a Time of War](#), International Crisis Group, Special Briefing N°9, 29 November 2022

[NATO will ramp up aid for Kyiv, says Putin uses winter as 'weapon of war'](#), Reuters, 29 November 2022

[NATO Secretary General: "we will not back down" in support for Ukraine](#), NATO News Release, 29 November 2022

[NATO Secretary General in Bucharest: no lasting peace if the aggressor wins](#), NATO News Release, 29 November 2022

[14 years later, NATO is set to renew its vow to Ukraine](#), Associated Press, 28 November 2022

[Weapons industry booms as Eastern Europe arms Ukraine](#), Tribune, 24 November 2022

On the risk of nuclear war

There have been concerns for several months that the war in Ukraine might be approaching "a moment of [maximum danger](#)". In particular, there are worries that a cornered, desperate Vladimir Putin may resort to nuclear, chemical or biological weapons. Recently Putin warned the risk of nuclear war is increasing (see above), but has vowed not to use nuclear weapons first. However, according to German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in an interview published on 8 December, the risk of nuclear weapons being used in the Ukraine conflict has lessened thanks to international pressure on

Russia. “One thing has changed for the time being: Russia has stopped threatening to use nuclear weapons. In response to the international community marking a red line”, Scholz [said](#) in the interview with Germany’s Funke media group.

Meanwhile, Russia’s foreign ministry spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, [said](#) the US withdrawal from the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty in August 2019 was a “destructive” act that created a vacuum and stoked additional security risks. Zakharova was speaking on the 35th anniversary of the signing of the treaty by US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev in 1987.

Pierre de Dreuzy and Andrea Gilli, [Russia’s nuclear coercion in Ukraine](#), NATO Review, 29 November 2022

On investigations of war crimes in Ukraine

Russian forces killed at least 441 civilians in the early days of Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine, the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) said in a [report](#) published on 7 December. The report documents attacks in dozens of towns and summary executions that it said might be war crimes. The actual number of victims in the Kyiv, Chernihiv and Sumy regions was likely to be much higher, the UN human rights office added. The report covers the period from the invasion’s start on 24 February until early April, when Russian forces withdrew from the three areas.

A [draft resolution](#) is apparently circulating at the United Nations for a Nuremberg-style tribunal to hold Russia accountable for crimes of aggression in Ukraine. Signs also indicated that US opposition to the proposal may be softening in the face of lobbying by President Zelensky. Beth Van Schaack, the US ambassador for global criminal justice, said: “So far, all of the [UN general assembly] resolutions on Ukraine have prevailed. The numbers have been quite strong”. The International Criminal Court (ICC) has already started investigating war crimes in Ukraine (see below) but cannot prosecute the Russian

leadership over the broader crime of aggression since Russia is not a signatory to the relevant statute.

Meanwhile, an international team of legal advisers from Global Rights Compliance, an international legal practice headquartered in The Hague, has been [working](#) with local prosecutors in Ukraine’s recaptured city of Kherson to gather evidence of alleged sexual crimes by Russian forces. The team are conducting a full-scale investigation as part of a broader international effort to support overwhelmed Ukrainian authorities as they seek to hold Russians accountable for crimes they allegedly committed during the conflict.

International fact-finding missions and investigations have identified clear patterns of violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law in Ukraine since the Russian invasion in February 2022. The violations are wide-ranging, including the conduct of fighting as well as treatment of prisoners of war, forced abductions, torture, restriction of civil and human rights, and denial of essential services. The United Nations, the International Court of Justice, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the European Court of Human Rights, the ICC and Ukrainian national courts have all been active in attempting to hold criminals accountable. The ICC, for example, opened an [investigation](#) into possible war crimes in Ukraine just days after Moscow’s forces invaded and it dispatched dozens of investigators to the country to gather evidence. A substantial ICC investigative team [appears](#) to be working in Ukraine on a near permanent basis. Similarly, within the OSCE the Moscow Mechanism was activated to establish two expert missions to investigate violations and abuses committed in the war (see the subsequent [April](#) and [June](#) reports). On 14 July, 45 countries [agreed](#) at a conference in the Hague to coordinate investigations into suspected war crimes in Ukraine. In October, a [report](#) published by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine found reasonable grounds to conclude that an array of war crimes, violations of human rights and international humanitarian

law have been committed in Ukraine. Russian armed forces are responsible for the vast majority of the violations identified.

Finally, according to a [report](#) issued by the US and Ukrainian chapters of the international writers' organisation PEN on 2 December, Russian troops in Ukraine are deliberately attacking the country's museums, libraries and other cultural institutions. Meanwhile, Ukraine's culture minister, Oleksandr Tkachenko, has called on the country's western allies to boycott Russian culture. [Writing](#) in the Guardian on 7 December, Tkachenko argues that a [halt to performances](#) of the music of Tchaikovsky and other Russian composers until the end of the war would be "pausing the performance of his works until Russia ceases its bloody invasion".

On sanctions against Russia and post-war reconstruction in Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine galvanized the US, UK and EU, and a handful of other Western-aligned countries, to unleash a series of [sanctions](#) meant to punish Vladimir Putin's government and pressure him to pull his forces back. While the sanctions lists are sometimes difficult to interpret, the EU has [sanctioned](#) 1,236 individuals and 115 entities—an approximate doubling of its entire sanctions portfolio across the dozens of sanctions regimes it implements; the UK Government has [frozen](#) more than £18bn of assets belonging to oligarchs and other Russians and UK [sanctions](#) have been imposed on 1,271 people according to [the annual review](#) of the Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation (OFSI), published on 10 November; and the US has [sanctioned](#) more than 1,000 individuals or organizations since the invasion. The numbers, and the pace of the rollout, dwarf the sanctions lists for the likes of Iran, North Korea, Libya, the thematic counterterrorism lists, and all others. However, rather than dissuading the Kremlin as intended, the penalties appear instead to be exacerbating inflation, worsening food insecurity and punishing ordinary Russians more than Putin or his allies. Moreover, Russia has claimed (see NATO Watch [Update 17](#) and [Update 18](#)) that it is getting more revenue from

its fossil fuel sales now than before its invasion of Ukraine, despite (or partly because of) Western sanctions.

On 7 December the European Commission proposed a ninth package of sanctions on Russia, including adding almost 200 additional individuals and entities on the sanctions list. In a [statement](#), the head of the Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, accused Russia of "deliberately targeting civilians and civilian infrastructure" and of continuing to "bring deaths and devastation to Ukraine". In addition, Australia's Foreign Minister Penny Wong [said](#) on 10 December that the government would place targeted sanctions on Russia and Iran in response to what it called "egregious" human rights violations. Finally, the UK [announced](#) a fresh round of sanctions on 30 November against 22 Russians, including those the Foreign Office said were involved in enlisting criminals to fight in Ukraine.

French company TotalEnergies, the world's fifth-largest oil company, has bowed to international pressure and [announced](#) on 9 December that it intends to "gradually withdraw" from its Russian investments. It also said that it would remove its two representatives from the board of Novatek, Russia's dominant private gas exporter. Similarly, in a UK parliamentary [debate](#) on 7 December, MPs from all parties put pressure on the Government to ensure that the oil company BP, which still owns stock in Russian oil, sever all ties with the country. There were also calls for BP to donate its "wartime profits" in Russia to the reconstruction of Ukraine or ministers should impose a special windfall tax on the oil company to force it to do so, British MPs told parliament. BP has a 19.75% stake in Rosneft, one of Moscow's most important oil assets, despite [signalling](#) its intent to exit Russia nine months ago, after Russia invaded Ukraine.

It has been widely reported, however, that sanctions are not being universally applied, with very little enthusiasm for them in the Global South. China and [India](#), for example, are buying Russian oil at a [discount](#). And as India seeks to narrow a growing trade deficit with

Russia at a time when Moscow faces acute shortages of some crucial materials due to Western sanctions, Indian Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar [said](#) on 5 December that his country had given a list of its products to Moscow for access to Russian markets.

On international food security and Ukrainian grain exports

UN Secretary General António Guterres met the Belarus Deputy Foreign Minister Yury Ambrazevich in New York on 9 December, and was [told](#) that Belarus will accept, without preconditions, the transit of Ukrainian grains through its territory for export from Lithuanian ports. A UN spokesman said after the meeting that Ambrazevich also “reiterated the requests from his government to be able export its own fertiliser products, which are currently subject to sanctions”.

The [grain deal](#) between Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and the UN was agreed on 22 July and is considered to be crucial for Ukraine's economy as well as global food security (on international food security and Ukrainian grain exports, see NATO Watch [Update 17](#), [Update 18](#), [Update 20](#) and [Update 21](#)). The grain exports are being overseen by a [Joint Coordination Centre](#) (JCC) in Istanbul where Russian, Ukrainian, Turkish and UN personnel are working. It had allowed Ukraine to transport more than 9 million tonnes of grain and oilseed commodities, while Russia was allowed to export food and fertiliser, [helping to bring down food prices](#) by 15% from their March peak after the war made the route treacherous.

On energy security in Europe

The European Commission and the International Energy Agency (IEA) [warned](#) on 12 December that the EU has secured enough gas for this winter but could face a gas shortage next year if Russia further cuts supplies. Europe is striving to diversify its energy supply sources in order to curb its dependence on Russia. Gas shortages are occurring across Europe, raising the prospect of energy rationing as governments push to develop alternative

supplies. The West accuses Russia of restricting energy supplies to boost prices in retaliation for sanctions imposed after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine. Russia denies it is to blame, and instead attributes responsibility to Western sanctions and various technical problems.

On developments in Ukraine

Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba [said](#) on 7 December that 31 “suspicious packages” had been sent to Ukrainian missions in 15 countries in the past week. Ukraine says its embassies and consultants across Europe have received [“bloody” packages](#), some containing animal eyes, in what Kyiv has described as a “campaign of terror and intimidation”.

On developments within Russia

President Putin will not hold a year-end [press conference](#) for the first time in at least a decade, neither will there be a New Year reception at the Kremlin. This break with protocol is being widely attributed to the war in Ukraine and the reluctance to celebrate because Russia's war in Ukraine has not gone to plan. Indeed, internal dissent about the poor execution of the war appears to be growing. For example, an influential Russian nationalist blogger and former Federal Security Service (FSB) officer, Igor Girkin, [said](#) some Russian officers fighting in Ukraine were unhappy with the military leadership and President Putin over the conduct of the war. After visiting the conflict zone Girkin recorded a scathing 90-minute video analysing Russia's execution of the war. He said the “fish's head is completely rotten” and that the Russian military needed reform. “It is not just me ... people are not blind and deaf at all: people at the mid-level there do not even hide their views which, how do I put it, are not fully complimentary about the president or the defence minister”, he added. Meanwhile, Russia's ex-president Dmitry Medvedev [said](#) the country is ramping up production of next-generation weapons to protect itself from enemies in Europe, the United States and Australia.

Avril Haines, the US director of national intelligence, [said](#) on 3 December that President

Putin is now “better informed” about the difficulties facing his forces in Ukraine. Haines indicated the Russian president was no longer as insulated from bad news arising from his invasion of Ukraine. Alluding to past assessments that Putin’s advisers could be shielding him, Haines said he was “becoming more informed of the challenges that the military faces”. Meanwhile, Russian troops are reportedly taking part in tactical exercises in Belarus, [according](#) to the Russian defence ministry. Video clips posted by the ministry showed Russian soldiers in snow gear training near tanks in a winter landscape, firing weapons including artillery.

A neo-Nazi paramilitary group linked to the Kremlin has [reportedly](#) asked its members to submit intelligence on border and military activity in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, raising concerns over whether far-right Russian groups are planning an attack on NATO countries. The official Telegram channel for “Task Force Rusich” – currently fighting in Ukraine on behalf of the Kremlin and linked to the notorious Wagner Group – last week requested members to forward details relating to border posts and military movements in the three Baltic states, which were formerly part of the Soviet Union.

[“Russia Is Losing the War”: Russian Marxist Boris Kagarlitsky on Ukraine & What Comes After Putin](#), Democracy Now, 8 December 2022

Ivan U Klyszcz, [The New Boyars? How Russia’s Governors Facilitate Mobilisation](#), RUSI Commentary, 7 December 2022

[Ukraine conflict spurs some Russians to seek Kalashnikov training](#), Reuters, 6 December 2022

Liam O’Shea, [Can Russia Police Its Protests – and Its Elites?](#) RUSI Commentary, 30 November 2022

Samuel Ramani, [Is Russia’s Post-Soviet Sphere of Influence in Jeopardy?](#) RUSI Commentary, 29 November 2022

On developments within NATO

Cyber exercises

[Cyber Coalition](#) 22, one of the world’s largest cyber defence exercises, took place between 28 November and 2 December and brought

together some 1,000 cyber specialists from 26 member states, as well as Finland and Sweden, Georgia, Ireland, Japan, Switzerland, the EU, and participants from industry and academia. Participants trained to tackle real-life cyber challenges such as cyber-attacks on power grids, programmes and NATO and allied assets. In another annual cyber exercise, [Crossed Swords](#), organized by the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defense Center of Excellence (CCDCOE), in Tallinn on 5 December, the 120 participants from 24 countries experimented “with the integration of offensive cyberspace operations in a modern battlefield”. “The CCDCOE continues to provide a unique full-spectrum training session in the areas of cyber red teaming, penetration testing, digital forensics and situational awareness,” said Carry Kangur, head of cyber exercises at the CCDCOE. Red teaming is a cybersecurity technique in which a designated “red team” of experts or ethical hackers takes on the role of adversary and attacks existing security and defence systems, mirroring the conditions of a genuine attack, in order to identify weaknesses and provide feedback to improve defences.

Kosovo tensions

At a news conference in Kosovo’s capital Pristina on 11 December, Prime Minister Albin Kurti asked the Kosovo Force (KFOR), a NATO-led international peacekeeping force, to guarantee “freedom of movement,” as he accused “criminal gangs” of blocking roads. It was Serbian protesters that had blocked roads and unknown gunmen exchanged fire with local police amid rising ethnic tensions in the north of the country. A fragile peace has been preserved in Kosovo since it declared independence from Serbia in 2008 following the 1998-99 war in which NATO intervened to protect Kosovo’s Albanian majority. Serbia does not recognize Kosovo’s independence, and many people living in majority Serb areas of the north of Kosovo refuse to recognise Kosovan institutions. Serbia’s President Aleksandar Vučić met with his national security council on 12 December to [discuss the tensions](#).

[Kosovo calls for NATO intervention after weekend of violence amid rising ethnic tensions](#), CNN, 12 December 2022

[Serbia's Vucic seeks NATO approval to send forces to north Kosovo](#), Al Jazeera, 11 December 2022

[NATO's bi-annual Familiarization Programme testifies to increased importance of Allies' engagement with Partners](#), NATO News Release, 9 December 2022

[NATO Deputy Secretary General to Moldova: Our partnership helps make you safer, and makes us all more secure](#), NATO News Release, 8 December 2022

['In the blink of an eye, the challenges of tomorrow will be here', notes Director General of the NATO International Military Staff at the Alliance Warfare Development Conference](#), NATO News Release, 8 December 2022

[NATO Deputy Secretary General emphasises importance of good governance](#), NATO News Release, 8 December 2022

[NATO military delegation holds staff-to-staff talks with partner, Mongolia](#), NATO News Release, 8 December 2022

[US to deploy more troops to Estonia to boost NATO defenses](#), Military Times, 8 December 2022

[Interview](#) with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in the sixth edition of the Financial Times's Global Boardroom event, 7 December 2022

[Japan Seeks Deeper Defense Ties with NATO](#), National Defense, 6 December 2022

[NATO red teaming cyber exercise Crossed Swords gets underway in Tallinn](#), ERR News, 5 December 2022

Dominic Solari and Hannah Sweeney, [Human Security and Changing Threats: NATO's Policies for 2022 and Beyond](#), Lawfare, 5 December 2022

[Macron's new security architecture opens Pandora's Box in NATO politics](#), Euractiv, 5 December 2022

[NATO Exercise Cyber Coalition 2022 Concludes In Estonia](#), Eurasia Review, 4 December 2022

[NATO Units Increase Readiness In Baltic Sea During Finnish-Led Maritime Exercise Freezing Winds](#), NATO News Release, 3 December 2022

[Dutch defense chief talks Ukraine help and stocking ammo for NATO](#), Defense News, 3 December 2022

[NATO prepares for cyber war](#), Politico, 3 December 2022

Una Aleksandra and Bērziņa Čerenkova, [Mega - Event Sports Diplomacy: A Strategic Communications Perspective](#), NATO Strategic Communications Centre of Excellence, December 2022

[Keynote speech](#) by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Berlin Security Conference, 1 December 2022

[Joint press conference](#) by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Olaf Scholz, 1 December 2022

[Germany, Norway seek NATO role in undersea infrastructure](#), Deutsche Welle, 30 November 2022

[NATO Foreign Ministers end meetings in Bucharest with focus on China, more support for partners](#), NATO News Release, 30 November 2022

[NATO allies vow to back Moldova, Georgia, and Bosnia](#), Associated Press, 30 November 2022

[NATO seeks to reassure Russia's neighbours fearful of instability](#), Reuters, 30 November 2022

[Statement](#) by NATO Foreign Ministers, Bucharest, 29-30 November 2022

[NATO renews membership vow to Ukraine, pledges arms and aid](#), Associated Press, 29 November 2022

Kelley Beaucar Vlahos, [NATO again dangles membership in front of Ukraine](#), Responsible Statecraft, 29 November 2022

[NATO's looming fault line: China](#), Politico, 28 November 2022

[NATO's flagship cyber defence exercise kicks off in Estonia](#), NATO News Release, 28 November 2022

North Atlantic Treaty Organization



On Finland and Sweden joining NATO

Finland and Sweden were invited to join NATO, after a [trilateral memorandum](#) with Turkey agreed on the eve of the NATO Madrid Summit assuaged Ankara's previous objections. The two Nordic countries will become NATO members after the Accession Protocol is ratified by all 30 member states. The invitation to Finland and Sweden represents a major geopolitical shift in Europe as the two countries move away from neutrality. To date, 28 NATO member states have ratified the decision. Hungary and Turkey are the two member states where parliaments have not

yet been asked to vote on the issue. Hungary will ratify the bids early next year, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán [announced](#) on 24 November at a V4 group meeting in Slovakia. The assumption is that Turkey is likely to wait until after a general election in June 2023, but ratification by Turkey is still by no means certain.

Finland's government said on 5 December it had asked parliament to formally adopt NATO's founding treaty, thus preparing the country for membership of the alliance once hold-outs Hungary and Turkey approve the application. Earlier, speaking in Sydney on 2

December, the Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin [called](#) for Europe to build its own defence capabilities in the wake of the war in Ukraine, saying that without US help Europe is not resilient enough.

On 2 December Sweden deported a Kurdish man with alleged links to Kurdish militant group, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK)—a group that Turkey and the United States consider a terrorist organization. Mahmut Tat had sought asylum in Sweden in 2015 after being sentenced in Turkey for six years and 10 months for alleged links to the PKK. His final asylum application was denied last year by the Swedish Migration Agency. On 5 December, Turkey's justice minister, Bekir Bozdag, praised Sweden's decision to extradite Tat, but also made it clear that Sweden and Finland would have to go much further if they want to secure Turkey's approval to join NATO. "In line with the trilateral memorandum with Sweden and Finland, they should lift all [arms] embargoes on Turkey, change their legislation for the fight against terrorism, and extradite all terrorists that Turkey wants", he [said](#). "All of these conditions should not be reduced to extraditions".

[Finland may end arms embargo on Turkey for NATO's sake](#), Euractiv, 13 December 2022

[Blinken: U.S. will be able to call Sweden, Finland NATO allies soon](#), Reuters, 8 December 2022

Robin Forsberg, Aku Kähkönen and Jason Moyer, [If Finland joins NATO, it needs a new nuclear weapons policy](#), Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, 8 December 2022

[Turkey is keeping Finland and Sweden from joining NATO](#), NPR, 8 December 2022

[Sweden getting into the NATO groove by aiding Ukraine, boosting budget](#), Defense News, 6 December 2022

[Turkey says Finland must end arms embargo to join NATO](#), ABC News, 6 December 2022

[Turkey says it expects more extraditions from Sweden before approving its NATO bid](#), Alarabiya News, 5 December 2022

[Finnish parliament to hold NATO vote while awaiting Hungary, Turkey decisions](#), Reuters, 5 December 2022

[Sweden extradites PKK member to Turkiye, as it continues to seek NATO membership](#), Middle East Monitor, 4 December 2022

[Sweden deports man with alleged ties to Kurdish militant group](#), Reuters, 3 December 2022

[Russian nuclear threats behind Finland NATO move: foreign minister](#), Kyodo News, 3 December 2022

[Sweden, Finland and Turkey have made progress on NATO membership, Sweden says](#), Reuters, 30 November 2022

['We humiliated ourselves': Sweden's bid to join NATO meets continued resistance from Turkey](#), France 24, 28 November 2022

[Sweden makes progress in NATO bid talks: Chief negotiator](#), Hurriyet Daily News, 27 November 2022

For further details see:

[Murky trilateral agreement results in Turkey lifting objections to Finland and Sweden's NATO application](#), NATO Watch News Brief, 29 June 2022

[Should Finland and Sweden hold a referendum on NATO membership?](#) NATO Watch Briefing no. 93, 6 May 2022

DONATE NOW PLEASE

NATO Watch is a small non-profit organisation that provides **independent oversight and analysis** of NATO. **If you share our vision for a transparent and accountable NATO** please donate whatever you can afford to help NATO Watch thrive. Click on the picture below to find out how you can make a donation.

