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afgazad@gmail.com

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Clara Weiss
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After Russia announces “special military operation” in Ukraine, Biden declares US will “hold Russia accountable”

At 5:50 a.m. Moscow time on Thursday, Russian President Vladimir Putin initiated a “special military operation” in Ukraine.

Explosions were reported in parts of Ukraine starting at around 5:00 a.m. local time, including in the capital Kiev, in the eastern city of Kharkov and in other parts of the country. The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry claimed that military bases in Kiev and Kharkov were subject to missile strikes. Later Thursday morning, Ukrainian official Oleksiy Arestovych reported that 40 Ukrainian soldiers and 10 civilians had been killed, and dozens of soldiers wounded.



In this image made from video released by the Russian Presidential Press Service, Russian President Vladimir Putin addresses to the nation in Moscow, Russia, Thursday, Feb. 24, 2022. (Russian Presidential Press Service via AP)

The Ukrainian government also alleged that Russian troops had landed in Odessa and were crossing the border in Kharkov. Contradicting this information, CNN reported that no ground forces had been sighted. On social media, footage was shared showing cars racing on highways to flee Kiev.

The Russian Ministry of Defense denied that Ukrainian cities had been subject to any missile strikes and insisted that only military infrastructure was being targeted. Later, it reported: “Military infrastructure at Ukrainian army air bases has been rendered out of action.”

The Ukrainian government of Volodymyr Zelensky has proclaimed martial law, without specifying what restrictions would be in place.

The Ukrainian government already declared a state of emergency to go into effect Thursday. It involves a ban on strikes, demonstrations and the production and dissemination of “destabilizing” information in the media, as well as unspecified restrictions on the use of social media.

Russia has closed the airspace over East Ukraine and bordering Russian regions. The airport in Rostov on Don, the main Russian city near Ukraine’s border, has been closed entirely. The Ukrainian government had earlier closed several international airports in East Ukraine, including in Kharkov (Kharkiv), Dnepr, Zaporozhe and Kherson. It has now closed its airspace entirely.

US President Joe Biden, who spoke with Zelensky Wednesday night US time, denounced Russia’s troop deployment as a “chosen premeditated war that will bring a catastrophic loss of life and human suffering.” He will deliver a national address today.

Russia initiated its military operation after the separatist leaders of the so-called “People’s Republics” of Donetsk and Lugansk (Luhansk) (DNR and LNR) in eastern Ukraine had appealed to the Kremlin for military support. Putin had recognized the independence of the separatist enclaves on Monday.

Russia's Rossiya 24 state television channel reported Wednesday night that the Ukrainian armed forces had crossed the border of the LNR and had launched artillery bombardment of the city of Nikolaevka (Mykolaivka).

The DNR and LNR were proclaimed by pro-Russian separatists in 2014, after a civil war broke out following the US-backed far-right coup in Kiev that ousted a pro-Russian government.

In his speech early Thursday morning, Putin denounced NATO's expansion to Eastern Europe and the US wars in the Middle East and Yugoslavia and threatened: "Anyone who tries to interfere with us, or even more so, to create threats for our country and our people, must know that Russia's response will be immediate and will lead you to such consequences as you have never before experienced in your history."

He said that Russia did not intend to "occupy" Ukraine, but only to "demilitarize" and "de-Nazify" it.

The Moscow stock exchange halted trading on Thursday, after the index had fallen by 11 percent in the early morning. The ruble has begun a rapid collapse.

European stock markets fell heavily as trading began yesterday morning, with the FTSE-100 down 2.34 percent in London, the Dax down 3.62 percent in Frankfurt, and the CAC-40 down 3.36 percent in Paris. Oil prices surged above US\$100 per barrel for the first time in seven years. In Paris, wheat prices rose 10 percent overnight to over €300 per ton

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