

Europe | Ukraine

Six months of war in Ukraine

The conflict has turned into one of attrition

August 24th 2022



IMAGE: GETTY IMAGES

VLADIMIR PUTIN'S invasion of [Ukraine](#) was long predicted by the West and long denied by Russia's president. It began on February 24th with volleys of cruise missiles, artillery and other weapons. The scope of the attack was not immediately clear, but all the evidence pointed to a large-scale operation. [Six months later](#), Russian forces have failed to capture much of the country, having been pushed back to the east and south of Ukraine. The conflict has turned into a war of attrition, with Russian and

Ukraine. The conflict has turned into a war of attrition. Ukrainian and Russian losses have been severe, but neither side looks likely to make a decisive breakthrough soon. These maps and images recall some of the most important moments of the war in the past six months.

February 24th

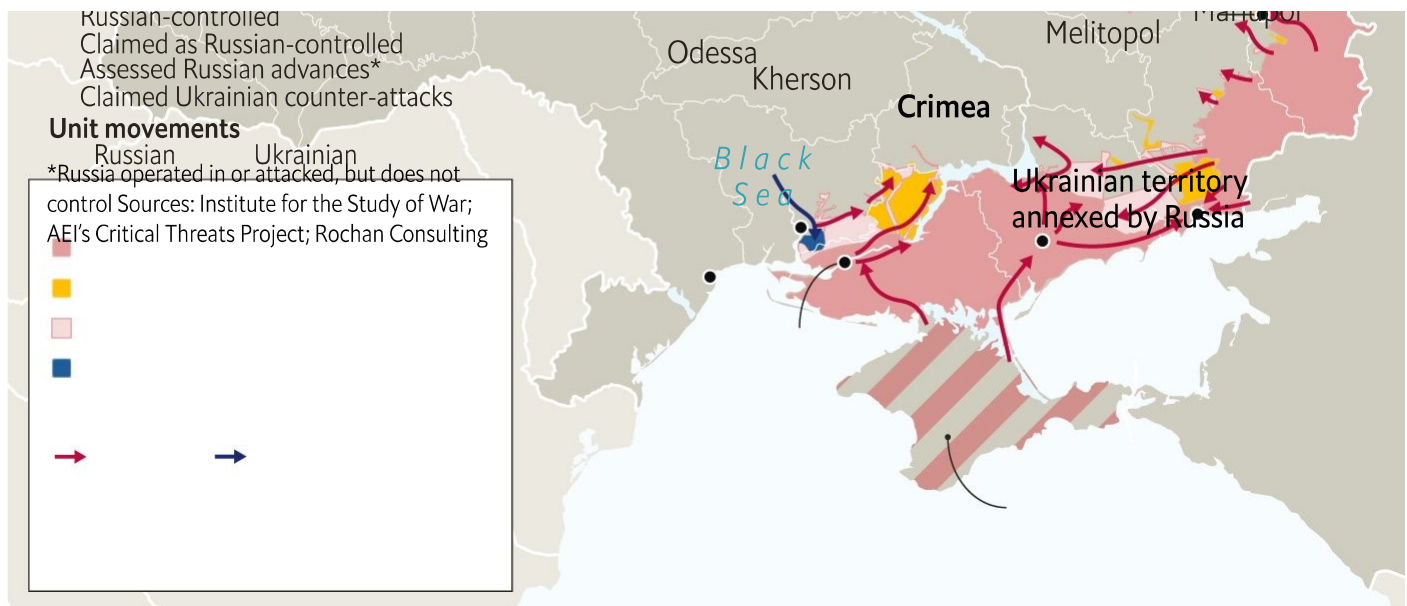
The invasion begins

Russia's invasion was shocking, but it did not come as a surprise. Western intelligence agencies had been warning of Vladimir Putin's intentions for months. Russia had demanded that NATO pull back from eastern Europe and rule out Ukraine joining the alliance, but diplomacy had stalled. Around 100 Russian battalion tactical groups—fighting formations of 1,000 or so troops, accompanied by air defence, artillery and logistics—had gathered on Ukraine's borders. It was the largest military build-up in Europe since the cold war. On the morning of February 24th, as dawn broke over Ukraine, Mr Putin took to television to declare war in the form of a “special military operation” to “denazify” the country. Within minutes explosions were heard near the main airport of Kyiv, the capital, as well as in many other cities. Cruise missiles sliced through the air and slammed into buildings. Armoured forces then began rolling from Russia and Belarus, as well as Crimea to the south.

March 23rd

Russia falters following early gains





In the early weeks of the war Russian forces had hoped to make swift progress. At first this seemed assured. They almost surrounded Kyiv and took Kherson, a city in the south. But this map shows the apogee of Russia's gains. By the end of March the pincer movement on the capital from the north-west and north-east had stalled in the face of staunch Ukrainian resistance, jammed-up supply lines and a shortage of manpower. Russia quickly announced that its war aims had changed. Its generals declared that "The main tasks of the first stage of the operation have been completed," despite much evidence to the contrary. Having failed to take Kyiv, Russia refocused on the east.

April 3rd

Evidence of war crimes emerges





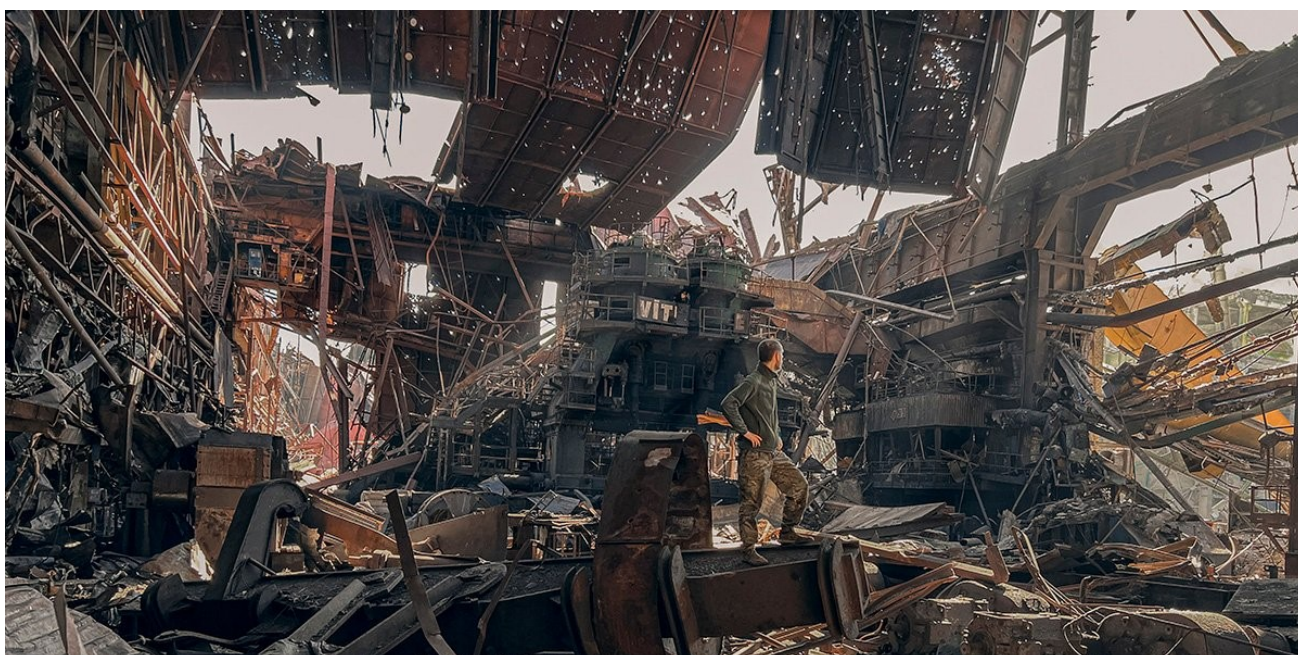
IMAGE: AP

As Russia withdrew to the south and east, evidence emerged of atrocities in Kyiv's suburbs. In all, said Ukraine's prosecutor-general on April 3rd, 410 civilians had been killed around Kyiv. *The Economist* was able to verify reports of what appears to have been a summary execution. The American president, Joe Biden, said that what happened in Bucha was a war crime and that Vladimir Putin, Russia's president, should face an international tribunal.

On April 14th the *Moskva*, the flagship of Russia's Black Sea fleet, sank 60-65 nautical miles (111-120km) south of Odessa. Ukraine quickly claimed it as a scalp. Russia insisted that the *Moskva* succumbed to an accident, but moved the rest of its fleet back from Ukraine's coastline immediately after the incident. It also launched retaliatory strikes on Ukraine.

May

Mariupol counts the heavy cost of resistance



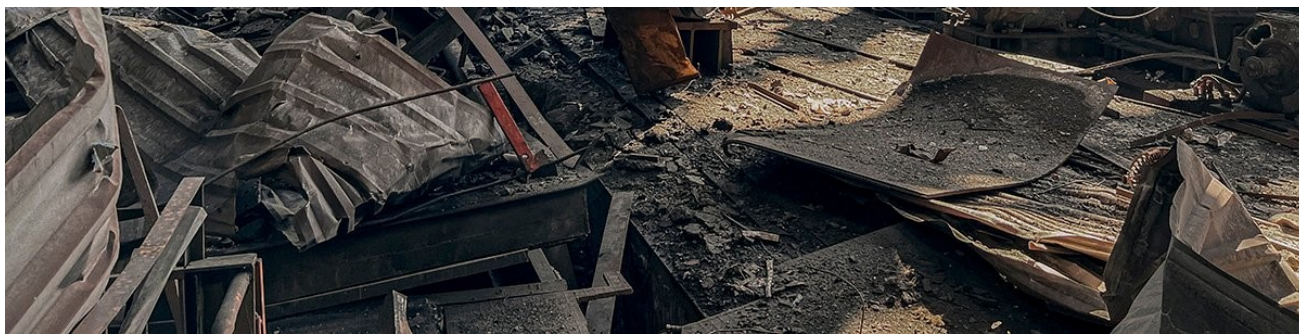


IMAGE: AP



By May the focus of the war had moved to the Donbas region in the east, where Russia continued to make gains. On May 16th its forces captured Mariupol, a port city of 400,000 people that had been under siege and constant bombardment. Authorities claimed that the eventual civilian death toll was more than 20,000. To the south, Ukraine pushed back Russia's advance towards Odessa.

June

Ukraine begs the West for weapons

Ukraine begs the west for weapons



IMAGE: UKRAINE DEFENCE MINISTRY

Ukraine wrested back control of [Snake Island](#), a small Russian-occupied fortress in the Black Sea, after an assault that lasted ten days. The victory was not just symbolic; the island, only 45km from Romania, a member of NATO, has strategic importance. It could also serve as a bridgehead for an amphibious attack on Odessa. But Russia continued to make gains in Donbas, where the fighting is concentrated. Ukraine's generals repeatedly insisted that its allies must provide more weapons. In June Ukraine received the first four [High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems](#) (HIMARS) from America. They have proved [devastatingly effective](#), and America has since pledged more.

July

Digging in

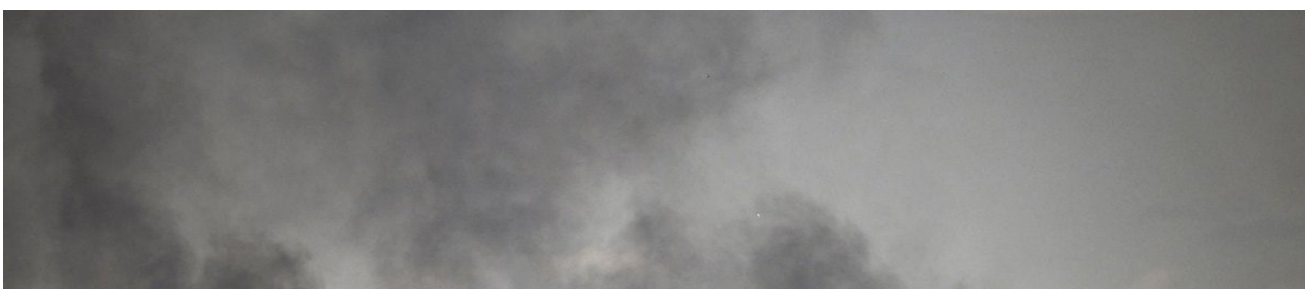




IMAGE: AFP

By the fifth month of fighting, the war was showing signs of settling into stalemate. Russia's gains in the east petered out after it took complete control of the town of Severodonetsk, in Luhansk province, at the start of the month. A limited counter-offensive by Ukraine started in the south. The Russian advance was slow and costly. With NATO-calibre weapons, fresh tactics and enough financial aid, Ukraine had a chance of forcing back Russia's armies.

August 24th

Ukraine talks up a counter-offensive





IMAGE: NEW YORK TIMES / REDUX / EYEVINE

Ukraine's counter-offensive has so far failed to gather much momentum. For months Ukrainian officials have hinted that an attack in the south is imminent. Kherson, the city taken by Russia early in the war, would be liberated by the end of the year, boasted Dmytro Marchenko, a Ukrainian general. Such lofty expectations will be hard to meet. Meanwhile, the impact on the wider world continues, most notably on the sky-high gas prices. [Europe is preparing](#) for Russian gas to be cut off this winter. But food prices have [started to fall](#) from their war-driven peak, helped in part by [a deal](#) to allow the resumption of Ukrainian grain exports. Half a year into the fighting, a long war looks ever more likely. ■

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