

Defence Secretary statement to the House of Commons on Ukraine: 25 April 2022

Thank you, Mr Speaker. It has now been 61 days since Russia invaded Ukraine, and it has been 74 days since my Russian counterpart assured me that the Russian army would not be invading.

As the invasion approaches its ninth week, I want to update the House on the current situation and what steps we are taking to further our support to the Ukrainian people.

It is our assessment that approximately 15,000 Russian personnel have been killed during their offensive. Alongside the death toll are the equipment losses. In total, a number of sources suggest that to date over 2,000 armoured vehicles have been destroyed or captured. This includes at least 530 tanks, 530 Armoured Personnel Carriers and 560 Infantry Fighting Vehicles. Russia has also lost over 60 helicopters and fighter jets.

The offensive that was supposed to take a maximum of a week has now taken weeks.

Last week Russia admitted that the Slava-class cruiser Moskva has sunk – the second key naval asset that they have lost since invading – significantly weakening their ability to bring their maritime assets to bear from the Black Sea.

As I said, Mr Speaker, in my last statement, Russia has so far failed in nearly every one of its objectives. In recognition of this failure, the Russian high command has regrouped, reinforced, and changed focus to securing the Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts. A failure of the Russian Ministry of Defence command and control at all levels has meant they have now appointed one overall commander – General Dvornikov. At the start of this conflict Russia had committed over 120 battalion tactical groups, approximately 65% of its entire ground combat strength. As of now we assess that over 25% of these have been rendered not combat effective.

Ukraine, Mr Speaker, is an inspiration to us all. Their brave people have never stopped fighting for their land. They have endured indiscriminate bombardment, war crimes and overwhelming military aggression. But they have stood firm, galvanised the international community and beaten back the army of Russia in the North and the North-East.

We anticipate that this next phase of the invasion will be an attempt by Russia to occupy further the Donbas and connect, via Mariupol, the Crimea. And so it is urgent that we in the international community ensure Ukraine gets the aid and weapons it so much needs.

As Defence Secretary I have ensured that, at each step of the way, the UK's support is tailored to the anticipated actions of Russia. To date we have provided more than 5,000 anti-tank missiles, 5 Air Defence systems with more than 100 missiles, 1,360 anti-structure munitions, and 4.5 tonnes of plastic explosives. And in response to indiscriminate bombing from the air, and escalations by President Putin's forces, on 9 March I announced that the UK would supply Starstreak high velocity and low velocity anti-air missiles. I am able to now report to the House that these have been in-theatre for over 3 weeks and they have been deployed and used by Ukrainian forces to defend themselves and their territory.

Over recess my ministerial team, Mr Speaker, hosted a Ukrainian government delegation at Salisbury Plain Training Area to explore further equipment options. This was quickly followed by the Prime Minister announcing a further £100 million worth of high-grade military equipment, 120 armoured vehicles, sourcing anti-ship missiles, and high-tech loitering munitions for precision strikes.

But as we can see from Ukrainian requests, more needs to be done. So for that reason I can now announce to the House that we shall be gifting a small number of armoured vehicles fitted with launchers for those anti-air missiles. These Stormer vehicles will give Ukraine forces enhanced short range anti-air capabilities, both day and night.

Since my last statement more countries have answered the call and more have stepped up to support. The Czech Republic has supplied T72 tanks and BMP Fighting Vehicles, and Poland has also pledged T72 tanks.

Mr Speaker, the quickest route to helping Ukraine is with similar equipment and ammunition to what they already use. The UK government obviously does not hold Russian equipment but, in order to help where we do not have such stock, we have enabled others to donate. Alongside Canada and Poland, the Royal Air Force has been busy moving equipment from donor countries to Ukraine. At the same time, if no donor can be found, we are purchasing equipment from the open market.

On 31 March I held my second international donor conference, involving an increase of countries to 35 countries, including representation from the EU and NATO. So far these efforts have yielded some 2.5 million items of equipment, worth over £1.5 billion.

These next three weeks are key. Ukraine needs more long-range artillery and ammunition and both Russian and NATO calibre types to accompany them. They also seek anti-ship missiles to counter Russian ships that are able to bombard Ukrainian cities. Mr Speaker, it is therefore important to say that, if possible, the UK will seek to enable or supply such weapons. I shall keep the House up to date, and also members of each front bench across the House, as we proceed. The MOD is working day and night to support, alongside the US, Canada, and the EU, continued logistical supplies.

But not all the aid is lethal. We have also sent significant quantities of non-lethal equipment to Ukraine. To date we have sent over 90,000 ration

packs, over 10 pallets of medical equipment, more than 3,000 pieces of body armour, nearly 77,000 helmets, 3,000 pairs of boots and much more including communications equipment and ear defence.

On top of our military aid to Ukraine, we contribute to strengthening NATO's collective security, for both the immediate challenge and the long term. We have temporarily doubled the number of Defence personnel in Estonia, sent military personnel to support Lithuanian intelligence resilience and reconnaissance efforts, deployed hundreds of Royal Marines to Poland, and sent offshore patrol vessels and Navy destroyers to the Eastern Mediterranean. We have also increased our presence in the skies over south-eastern Europe with four additional Typhoons based in Romania. That means we now have a full squadron of RAF fighter jets in southern Europe, ready to support NATO tasking.

As the Prime Minister announced on Friday, we are also offering a deployment of British Challenger 2 Tanks to Poland to bridge the gap between Poland donating tanks to Ukraine, and their replacements arriving from a third country.

Looking further ahead, NATO is reassessing its posture and the UK is leading conversations at NATO about how best the Alliance can deter and defend against threats. My NATO colleagues and I tasked the Alliance to report to leaders at the summit in June with proposals for concrete, long-term and sustainable changes.

Mr Speaker, some of us in this House knew that, behind the mask, the Kremlin was not the international statesman it pretended to be. With this invasion of Ukraine, all of Europe can now see the true face of President Putin and his inner circle. His intention is only to destroy, to crush, to rub out the free peoples of Ukraine. He does not want to preserve. He must not be allowed to prevail. Ukrainians are fighting for their very lives and they are fighting for our freedoms.

The President of Ukraine himself said as much: if Russia stops fighting, there will be peace. If Ukraine stops fighting, there will be no more Ukraine.

Thank you.