

Russia's horrendous attacks on civilians continue: UK statement to the OSCE

Thank you Mr Chair. Since commencing its illegal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, the Russian military have demonstrated a complete disregard for international law, including international humanitarian law (IHL). President Putin and his Russian military leaders have consistently planned and authorised operations which clearly breach the principles and substantive protections of the law of armed conflict. Ukrainian towns and cities reduced to rubble and the horrendous number of civilian casualties are the shocking consequences of this reprehensible and cowardly approach.

Over the past week, as Putin's ill-conceived invasion continues to falter on the battlefield, Russia has resorted to employing Iranian-provided Shaed-136 UAVs (or "Kamikaze drones") against civilians, residential buildings and civilian infrastructure in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities. They cause yet more unnecessary suffering and spread terror among the civilian population – another reprehensible breach of IHL.

I ask our Russian colleague directly, to explain to the participating States here: how they can justify such callous attacks? They are in clear breach of international humanitarian law. As a diplomat, to condone these attacks on civilians would be nothing short of disgraceful. To advocate and justify them as part of the so-called "Special Military Operation" infers complicity in the atrocities committed.

Mr Chair, these horrendous attacks on civilians are another terrible example of the increasingly desperate and vindictive decision making from Putin and his military leadership. We condemn Iran's decision to supply drones and training to Russia. Iran's supply of drones to Russia is inconsistent with UN Security Council resolution 2231.

Russia's indiscriminate attacks against Ukrainian cities and residential areas seek to distract from the enduring poor performance of the Russian military on the battlefield. In southern Ukraine, Russia faces significant challenges supporting its already strained forces in Kherson. Their acute logistical issues are exacerbated by the damage caused to the Kerch Bridge on 8 October. Now, as mobilised Russian reservists are deployed into Ukraine, it is also evident that their issued equipment is of a lower level than that of the already poorly equipped professional forces. Badly trained, badly equipped and badly led, demoralised professional soldiers are being reinforced by even more poorly trained and equipped amateurs.

Mr Chair, the announced "counter terrorist operation" in Belarus in response to contrived threats on its borders appears to be nothing more than a thinly veiled attempt at distraction and misdirection ordered by the Kremlin. Lukashenko said that 70,000 Belarusian troops would be involved in the

“Grouping of Forces”, along with 10,000-15,000 Russians. However, Russia is unlikely to be able to generate combat ready formations of this size because of the number of forces it has committed in Ukraine. In truth, this Russian/Belarusian “Group of Forces” are unlikely to be combat capable and are probably an attempt to convince Ukraine to divert forces to guard their northern border – a tactic we also saw the Belarusian regime attempt earlier this year.

We also note the announcement on 16 October by the Belarusian Ministry of Defence which updated that “just under 9000 Russian troops” would be stationed in Belarus as part of the “regional grouping”. The apparent coincidence that the [Vienna Document](#) notification threshold of the arrival or concentration of troops in the zone of application is “at least 9000 troops” is also noted – as is Belarus’ recent but solid history of Vienna Document tokenism. In this regard, we would also remind our Belarusian colleagues that providing briefings to accredited military attaches in Minsk is not a substitute for their obligation to provide necessary transparency to this Forum for Security Cooperation.

Mr Chair, we call on the Belarusian regime to desist from supporting Russia’s attempts to stoke further instability in the region and to stop its active support of Russia’s illegal invasion, which itself constitutes a breach of international law. Since 24 February, it has been overwhelmingly clear to the world from which side of the Belarusian/Ukrainian border the threat is emanating – and it is not from Ukraine.

Mr Chair, as Putin’s miscalculations continue to mount, he and the Russian military leadership are resorting to new depths of depravity against the Ukrainian people. But they continue to underestimate the determination and courage of the Ukrainian military and civilians to defend their homeland from a barbaric invader. The escalation to the horrendous drone attacks this week only strengthens our resolve to support our brave and resolute Ukrainian friends. We remain steadfast – for however long it takes – to ensure that the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the independence of Ukraine is fully restored. Thank you.