The Moscow Times
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Battle Underway for Airbase on Kyiv Outskirts

By AFP

February 24, 2022

A Russian Ka-52 helicopter gunship is seen in the field after a forced landing outside Kyiv, Ukraine. **Efrem Lukatsky / AP / TASS**

Russian and Ukrainian forces are battling for control of an airbase on the northern outskirts of Kyiv, a senior Ukrainian officer said Thursday, as dozens of attack helicopters swooped on the area.

"Fighting is underway for Gostomel airfield," armed forces chief Valeriy Zaluzhny said in a statement posted online. Shortly earlier, AFP reporters had seen helicopters flying low over the city from the north.

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The Gostomel airfield, which is alongside the Antonov airport, is immediately on the northern

edge of Kyiv, and the fighting there is the closest that Russian forces had got to the capital on the first day of their invasion.

Alexander Kovtonenko, a 30-year-old civilian living nearby, said that two fighter jets had fired missiles at Ukrainian ground units as the assault got underway.

"Then there was shooting, it lasted three hours," he told AFP. "Then three more jets flew in and they started shooting again."

Smoke was rising from the scene and social media images appeared to show an assault by helicopter-borne troops. CNN showed footage of Russian troops at the airport and a reporter said he had spoken to them.

Earlier, Ukrainian border guards had confirmed that Russian ground forces equipped with tanks had also crossed south over the Belarus-Ukraine border into the Kyiv administrative region, headed towards the capital.

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