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Russia Not Bombing Ukrainian Cities, Military Claims

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Russia's Defense Ministry in Moscow. **A.Savin (CC 1.3)**

Russia's military claimed Thursday that its Armed Forces are not carrying out missile, aviation or artillery attacks on Ukraine's cities after President Vladimir Putin announced an invasion of the pro-western neighbor.

"The Ukrainian armed forces' military infrastructure, air defense facilities, military airfields and aviation are being put out of action by high-precision means of destruction," Russia's Defense Ministry said in statements to state-run news agencies.

Ukraine's civilian population is not in danger, the TASS news agency cited the Defense Ministry as saying.

Follow-up statements said the Russian military has incapacitated Ukraine's air bases and air defenses and that Ukraine's troops did not put up armed resistance to the attacks.

Russia's Defense Ministry website was inaccessible early on Thursday.

"I have made the decision of a military operation," Putin said in a surprise television announcement that triggered immediate condemnation from U.S. President Joe Biden and sent global financial markets into turmoil.

Shortly after the announcement, explosions were heard in Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, and several other cities, according to AFP correspondents.

Putin called on Ukrainian soldiers to lay down their arms, and justified the operation by claiming the government was overseeing a "genocide" in the east of the country.

The Kremlin had earlier said rebel leaders in eastern Ukraine had asked Moscow for military help against Kyiv.

Their appeals, dated Feb. 21, came after Putin recognized their independence and signed friendship treaties with them that include defense deals.

NATO's chief condemned Russia's "reckless and unprovoked attack" on Ukraine.

Putin's move came after Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy made an emotional appeal late on Wednesday night to Russians not to support a "major war in Europe."

Zelensky declared martial law, a move backed by Ukraine’s parliament, shortly after Putin’s announcement.

AFP contributed reporting.

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