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Russia Claims Ukraine Troops Abandoning Positions as Kyiv Maintains Situation 'Under Control'

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Russian military equipment. **TASS**

Russia's military claimed Thursday that Ukrainian troops were abandoning their posts after President Vladimir Putin ordered a full-scale invasion of Russia's pro-Western neighbor, claims denied by Kyiv.

Ukraine's military has reported several casualties in the early attacks that stretched from its eastern breakaway regions — which Putin recognized as independent this week —its to western cities near the Polish border.

"Intelligence data show that the Ukrainian army's units and servicemen are leaving their positions en masse and abandoning weapons," the RBC news website quoted Russia's Defense Ministry as saying.

It added that Russia is not attacking "the positions of Ukrainian army units that have laid

down their arms."

Ukraine's military denied the claims, saying it is repelling Russia's missile strikes and artillery shelling.

"The state's defense forces are in full combat readiness, have occupied and are holding defensive positions," the Ukraine armed forces' general staff said in a Facebook post.

"The situation is under control."

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy on Thursday vowed to defend "our land" and urged Russians to stand up against the war.

Russia's Defense Ministry claimed earlier that its Armed Forces are not carrying out missile, aviation or artillery attacks on Ukraine's cities despite pre-dawn explosions heard in cities including Kyiv, Odesa and Kharkiv, and authorities reporting shelling and firing across 17 of Ukraine's 27 regions.

Hours later, Russia's Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu issued orders to "act respectfully" toward Ukrainian soldiers and organize "safety corridors" for those that lay down arms, the military said.

It said its forces destroyed 11 Ukrainian airfields, three command posts, one naval base, 18 radar stations, one attack helicopter and four Turkish-made combat drones, as well as an S-300 and a Buk M-1 missile system.

Countries have suspended flights to Ukraine and flight tracking services showed empty airspace over the country.

Zelenskiy declared martial law shortly after Putin's address ordering the "demilitarization" and "denazification" of the country, launching potentially the largest conflict on European soil since World War II.

Russia's Defense Ministry website has remained down since the start of the military operation in Ukraine.

The United States and Western allies have for months warned that Russia has been massing more than 100,000 troops with the intent of invading Ukraine.

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