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Russia’s War in Ukraine Is ‘Dragging On,' Belarus Leader Admits

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Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko has said he didn’t anticipate the war in Ukraine would “drag on this way,” over two months after close ally Russia invaded its pro-Western neighbor that also shares a border with Belarus.

Analysts have said Russia’s leadership aimed to swiftly crush Ukraine’s military and take the capital Kyiv in the days after launching its invasion on Feb. 24. Roughly a month later, Russia abandoned this goal and pivoted to the eastern Ukrainian front, thwarted by fierce Ukrainian resistance and a series of misjudgments and logistical issues.

“I am not immersed in this problem enough to say whether it goes according to plan, like the Russians say, or like I feel it. I want to stress one more time, I feel like this operation has dragged on,” Lukashenko said in an interview with the Associated Press published Thursday.

Belarus' authoritarian leader has publicly backed Russia’s invasion and is accused of providing a launch point for Russian troops to advance into northern Ukraine and toward

Kyiv.

Speaking with AP, he claimed that Belarus is "doing everything now so that there isn't a war," including hosting Ukraine-Russia peace talks on its territory.

"Thanks to yours truly, me that is, negotiations between Ukraine and Russia have begun," he said.

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Amid concerns that Russia could use nuclear weapons to turn the tide in its favor, Lukashenko said the use of such weapons would be "unacceptable" but stressed that only Russia's leaders know whether that option is on the table.

"Whether or not Russia is capable of that — is a question you need to ask the Russian leadership," he told AP.

The Belarusian strongman also noted his disappointment with Ukraine's "disinterest" in committing to peace talks.

"But why is Ukraine, on whose territory a war in effect is ongoing, military action, people are dying — why is Ukraine not interested in these negotiations?"

Ukrainian officials have said the discovery of apparent mass atrocities against civilians in cities like Bucha following Russian forces' withdrawal dulled their interest in the peace negotiations.

Lukashenko's comments come a day after Belarus launched surprise large-scale military drills.

Belarus has stressed that the in-country exercises don't pose a threat to neighboring states.

Yet British intelligence has warned of Russia's attempts to capitalize on the drills to gain a strategic advantage in its ongoing battle for the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine.

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