

UN Demands Russia Withdraw From Ukraine

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February 24, 2023



Michael M. Santiago / Getty Images / AFP

The United Nations voted overwhelmingly Thursday to demand Russia immediately and unconditionally withdraw its troops from Ukraine, marking the one-year anniversary of the war with a call for a "just and lasting" peace.

Ukraine earned strong backing in a nonbinding vote that saw 141 of the 193 UN members in support, seven opposed and 32, including China and India abstaining.

Coming on the eve of the first anniversary of the brutal war, support for Kyiv was little-changed from that of last October when 143 countries voted to condemn Russia's declared annexation of four Ukraine regions.

"Today, United Nations General Assembly has just spoken very clear," said European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell.

"This vote shows that the international community stands with Ukraine."

President Joe Biden's national security advisor, Jake Sullivan, called the vote "a powerful call for a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in Ukraine in line with the principles of the UN Charter."

The vote came after two days of debate during which Ukraine Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba urged the international community to choose "between good and evil."

He rejected the idea that Kyiv only enjoyed the support of the West — the European Union, the United States and their key allies.

"The vote defies the argument that the Global South does not stand on Ukraine's side, because many countries representing Latin America, Africa, Asia voted in favor today," Kuleba said.

"The support is much broader, and it will only continue to be consolidated and to be solidified," he added.

Andriy Yermak, chief of staff to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, expressed gratitude to all those "who stood up for Ukraine on the anniversary of the unprovoked Russian aggression."

"The world understands whose side the truth is on," he said.

'Imperialist plan'

The resolution reaffirmed support for Ukraine's "sovereignty" and "territorial integrity," rejecting any Russian claims to the parts of the country it occupies.

It also demanded "that the Russian Federation immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders," and called "for a cessation of hostilities."

The vote showed Moscow's continued isolation on the world stage after 12 months of war.

It only earned support from six other nations: Belarus, Syria, North Korea, Mali, Nicaragua, and Eritrea.

Despite its limited backing, Russia has used its veto power to block any binding motions against it in the UN Security Council.

Instead, the UN General Assembly has taken up the issue, displaying solid support for Kyiv in successive votes.

"Next year, we should not meet here to mark the second anniversary of this senseless war of aggression," said Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa Hayashi during the debate.

"Russia can and must stop, tomorrow," French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said.

"This war waged by Russia is everybody's business because it threatens the existence of a

state, because it represents a domineering and imperialist plan, and because it denies the existence of borders."

But Russia dismissed the resolution, with its UN representative Vasily Nebenzya calling Ukraine "neo-Nazi" and accusing the West of sacrificing the country and the developing world in their desire to beat Russia.

"They are ready to plunge the entire world into the abyss of war" to maintain their own "hegemony," Nebenzya said.

China, India still abstain

The vote showed India and China had not been swayed to outright condemn Moscow's invasion, even while both have criticized Moscow's threats to deploy nuclear weapons in the conflict.

Before the vote Dai Bing, China's deputy representative at the United Nations, took a neutral stance, calling on both sides to cease fighting and enter peace talks.

"We support Russia and Ukraine moving towards each other, resuming direct dialogue as soon as possible," he said.

But he also gave voice to one of Russia's justifications for the invasion, that its own security was under threat by Ukraine's tilt toward Western Europe and NATO.

Any settlement, he said, should give "due regard to ... the reasonable security concerns of all countries, thereby properly addressing their legitimate security aspirations."

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