

Putin's only aim is to spread terror in Ukraine: UK statement to the OSCE

Thank you Mr Chair. This week, President Putin has continued to mercilessly punish the Ukrainian people for Russia's poor performance on the battlefield. His military commanders have conducted missile strikes targeting power stations and water supplies throughout Ukraine. More widely, they continue to employ Iranian-provided Shaed-136 UAVs (otherwise known as suicide drones) and cruise missiles against civilians, residential buildings and civilian infrastructure in Kyiv and other Ukrainian cities.

None of this achieves any military purpose. Putin's only aim is to spread terror and to deprive Ukrainian families of shelter, light, and heat as harsh winter approaches. This is a particularly cruel act of vengeance which will cause most suffering amongst Ukraine's most vulnerable, including the elderly and young.

President Putin and his Russian military leaders have consistently planned and authorised operations which have breached international humanitarian law.

Mr Chair, when this Forum last convened, I asked our Russian colleague directly to explain how they could justify such callous attacks on civilians. He did not respond. Instead, he again elected to retreat from this chamber – a message in itself.

Perhaps my Russian colleague knows he is complicit in trying to hide the disastrous truth of the Kremlin's appalling and failing illegal invasion of Ukraine from his fellow citizens. Perhaps he knows that deliberate attacks on civilians are a clear breach of international humanitarian law. Perhaps he recognises the horrifying irony that whilst President Putin claims that Ukraine is part of Russia and Ukrainians are Russians, he also calls them Nazis who must be bombed without mercy.

Mr Chair, today we have again heard a litany of the Kremlin's lies, disinformation and incredulous conspiracy theories. These are clumsy attempts to distract from the enduring poor performance and failings of the Russian military on the battlefield.

The Wagner Group, the private military company on which the Russian military has been increasingly reliant, now appears not only to be recruiting Russian convicts, but has expanded its recruitment to include individuals suffering from serious diseases and medical conditions – a sign of desperation to recruit numbers not fighters.

Meanwhile, in many cases, newly mobilised Russian reservists have been deployed to Ukraine poorly equipped. Open source images suggest they are typically issued with AKMs, a weapon first introduced in 1959, many of which are likely to be in barely usable condition. Some appear to have been sent to Ukraine without weapons at all.

Badly trained and badly equipped amateurs are being sent to reinforce Russia's poorly equipped and poorly led, demoralised professional soldiers.

Mr Chair, the nuclear rhetoric we have heard today is irresponsible, including the absurd claim that Ukraine plans to detonate a radiological "dirty bomb" on its own territory. No other country is talking about nuclear use. No country is threatening Russia nor threatening President Putin. He should be clear that for the UK and our Allies, any use at all of nuclear weapons would fundamentally change the nature of this conflict. There would be severe consequences for Russia.

Mr Chair, as we have discussed previously, the Russian/Belarusian "regional grouping of forces" remains unlikely to be combat capable, not least because Russia is unlikely to be able to generate combat-ready formations of the size announced because of the number of forces it has committed in Ukraine and associated resourcing issues.

Separately, on 17 October, imagery showed two MiG-31K interceptor jets were almost certainly parked at the Machulishchi Airfield in Belarus. Also located with the aircraft were objects likely associated with the AS-24 KILLJOY air launch ballistic missile – which has not previously been deployed in Belarus.

It is worth noting that neither the "regional grouping of forces" nor the deployment of the KILLJOY ballistic missile currently provide a significant tactical advantage to Russia and so it is likely that these deployments aim to provide a distraction and to portray Belarus as increasingly complicit in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

We call on the Belarusian regime to recognise this, desist from supporting Russia's attempts to stoke further instability in the region and to stop its active support of Russia's illegal invasion, which itself constitutes a breach of international law.

Mr Chair, President Putin and the Russian military leadership are demonstrating an unimaginable level of barbarity and depravity as they unleash their frustrations on the Ukrainian people. But they continue to fail to understand that every horrendous attack strengthens the Ukrainian resolve to defend their homeland from a brutal and barbaric invader. The UK remains steadfast – for however long it takes – to ensure that the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the independence of Ukraine is fully restored. Thank you.