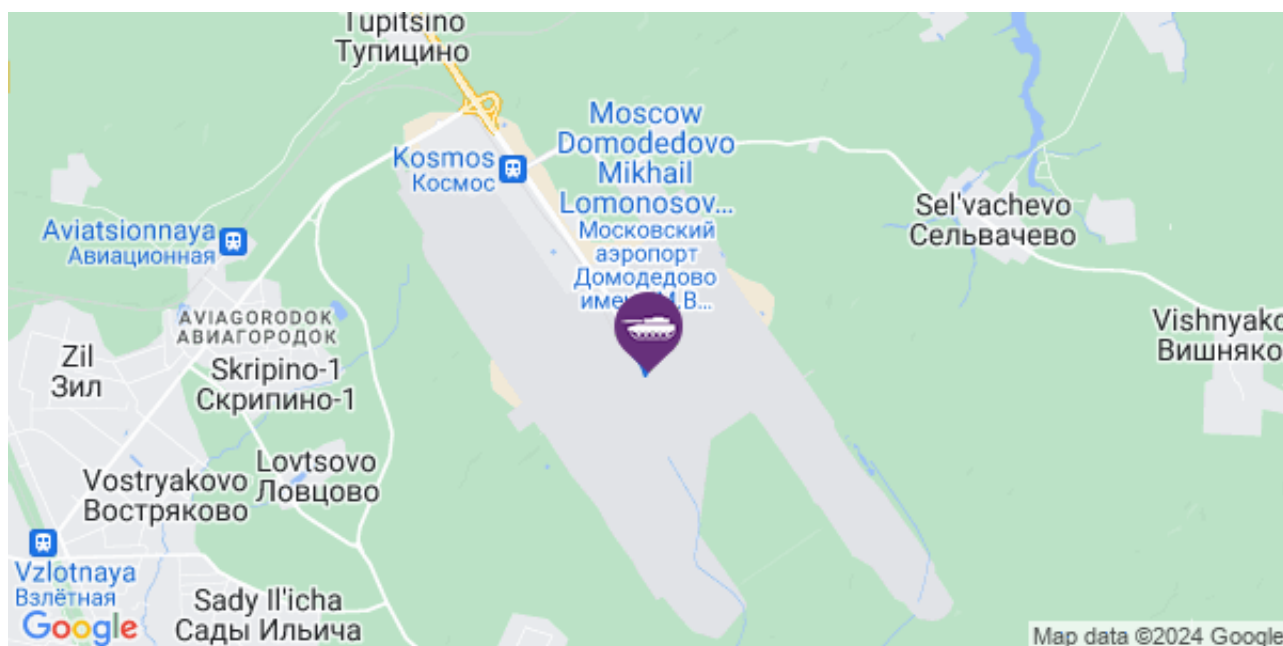


## Armed Conflict



17

MAR

11:29 UTC

**Russia & Ukraine Alert: Moscow claims to shoot down 35 UAVs, air strikes recorded in Odesa on March 16-17; elevated threat of airstrikes in immediate term**

## Current Situation

### Russia

- Russia reported that it was targeted by multiple unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) during the overnight hours (local time) of March 16-17, with President Vladimir Putin accusing Kyiv of trying to disrupt the elections.
- Air defenses in eight Russian regions, including in Moscow, shot down 35 UAVs during the overnight hours. Debris reportedly led to a fire at an oil refinery at Slavyansk in the southern Krasnodar region. One person died of a heart attack.
- **Moscow** Mayor Sergei Sobyenin wrote on Telegram that five UAVs were downed in various areas of Moscow during the early morning hours on March 17. No casualties were reported. Flight restrictions were temporarily enforced at Moscow's Domodedovo (DME), Vnukovo (VKO), and Zhukovsky (ZIA) airports.
- In **Belgorod**, shops and schools have been ordered to close on March 18-19 due to Ukrainian air strikes on the city. On March 16, Belgorod Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov said that at least two people had been killed, adding that air defense systems shot down eight Ukrainian missiles. Electricity and gas supply lines were damaged in the village of Oktyabrsky, according to Gladkov.
- Also on March 16, Governor of **Samara** Dmitry Azarov claimed that Ukrainian unmanned aerial

vehicle (UAV) attacks hit two oil refineries, with one refinery set on fire. The Security Services of Ukraine (SBU) said Kyiv struck three refineries in Syzran, Novokuibyshevsk, and Kuibyshevsk.

- On March 16, Russian media quoted Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov, who said Putin had received military reports on attempted attacks by saboteurs in the border regions of **Belgorod** and **Kursk**, including incursion attempts. The Kremlin has said all attempts were thwarted. Kyrylo Budanov, head of Ukraine's military intelligence directorate, said the attacks were carried out by the Freedom of Russia Legion, the Siberian Battalion, and the Russian Volunteer Corps, who were "becoming a force" with unified principles.
- Separately, Russia's governing party, United Russia, said it had suspended non-essential services due to an ongoing denial of service **cyberattack** (DDoS). Officials claim the attacks are carried out by Ukraine and Western countries.
- Additionally, on March 16, residents of Moscow received spam messages accusing them of supporting "extremist ideas," and urging them to vote regardless.
- Moreover, the [Russian opposition called for nationwide protests at polling stations at 12:00 on March 17](#). This follows multiple protest actions, including pouring dye into ballot boxes and alleged arson attacks at polling stations since March 15. Russian authorities have proposed eight-year prison sentences for those involved.

## Russian-controlled areas of Ukraine

- On March 16, Russia accused Ukraine of carrying out a UAV attack on a polling station in Russian-controlled areas of **Zaporizhzhia**. No casualties were reported.
- Separately, media reports indicate that Ukrainians in Russia-controlled areas are being coerced to vote at gunpoint.

## Southern Ukraine

- In **Odesa**, southern Ukraine, multiple air strikes were reported during the early morning hours of March 17. No casualties were reported, however, the attacks caused fires at two agricultural sites and damaged buildings. Ukraine's southern defense forces said 13 Shaheed UAVs were shot down. This followed a double missile strike that killed at least 21 and injured 70 people on March 15.
- A UAV was also shot down in the **Mykolaiv** region on March 17. No casualties were reported.

## Assessments & Forecast

1. The uptick in UAV attacks during the Presidential Elections was largely expected, especially given a general increase in Ukrainian attacks in recent months. While border regions remain at elevated risk of air strikes, evidenced by the attacks in Belgorod and Kursk, as well as the former's decision to close schools and shops, the attacks on Moscow highlight the growing threat of attacks on regions far from the border. While such attacks are more likely to be thwarted by Russian air defenses, they are highly disruptive, evidenced by the flight restrictions at Moscow airports on March 17.
2. Further, the targeting of oil refineries is in line with Kyiv's targeting of Russian energy infrastructure to disrupt supply chains and limit energy exports, reducing revenue for the conflict. Considering that such attacks also divert resources from operations within Ukraine, these will likely increase in frequency and intensity. **FORECAST:** The potential for Ukrainian air strikes deep in Russian territory is especially elevated on March 17 and in the coming days, given the elections. Air strikes are also likely to target Moscow and St. Petersburg, although successful attacks are still most likely within the border regions. As discussed, critical infrastructure, particularly energy infrastructure, is expected to be targeted.
3. **FORECAST:** With Putin vowing to retaliate against Ukraine, stating "enemy strikes will not remain unpunished" at a meeting with Russia's Security Council, Russian air strikes are likely in the immediate term. Indeed, evidenced by the recent attacks on Odesa, Moscow is likely to target

- civilian areas – both in the South, East, and Center. Based on precedent, such strikes are likely to be carried out by barrages of missiles and UAVs, aimed at overwhelming Ukraine’s air defenses.
4. Moreover, the attacks within Russian territory are likely to increase public dissent, given the growing impact of the war on civilians, especially in the border regions. This is likely to increase concerns among Russian officials regarding activities by Russian saboteur groups – as supported by the reported incursion attempts by pro-Ukrainian Russian paramilitary groups, including the Free Russia Legion. **FORECAST:** As domestic dissent against the ongoing conflict in Ukraine grows, the risk of sabotage, including attempted incursions, is likely to become more prevalent, posing additional challenges to Russia’s domestic security landscape.
  5. While unconfirmed by foreign media sources, the DDoS attacks targeting the United Russia party are likely to have been carried out by Ukraine or pro-Ukraine actors. The scale of the attack, with disruptions ongoing as of writing, suggests those involved likely had backing from state actors. Regardless, Russia’s accusations against Kyiv and Western countries provide a base for retaliatory attacks, with Moscow’s hybrid cyberwarfare continuing to target perceived “unfriendly countries.” **FORECAST:** Given this, cyberattacks on both Ukraine and countries assisting Kyiv are likely to intensify in the coming days and weeks, with pro-Russia actors likely to carry out DDoS and ransomware attacks targeting the public and private sectors. This includes websites of government institutions, hospitals, public transportation, and telecom companies.
  6. Further, with opposition-led protests expected on March 17, authorities will crack down on any demonstrations with harsh measures – including mass detentions. Further, with former President Dmitry Medvedev decrying protesters as “traitors,” raids targeting individuals who engaged in arson and ballot vandalism are highly likely in the weeks following the elections, as Moscow continues to quiet dissent.

## Recommendations

### Russia

1. Avoid nonessential travel to Russia due to potential instability in the coming days, the underlying threat of military mobilization, arbitrary detention, and increased risk of spillover violence in regions bordering Ukraine.
2. Remain cognizant of authorities’ updates regarding travel prohibitions on individuals deemed eligible for military conscription.
3. Foreign companies operating in Russia are advised to remain cognizant of government regulations and decrees that pose risks to business continuity and operations.
4. It is recommended to have emergency plans in place in case of further deterioration in the security landscape.
5. Foreign citizens in Moscow and other areas in western Russia are advised to review evacuation plans in case of emergencies.
6. Avoid all travel in the vicinity of government and military facilities, as well as possible political gatherings or lone picket protests, in the coming days. Remain cognizant of restrictions enacted at a regional and local level.
7. Avoid discussions concerning the political, economic, and military situation, even with friends and family.
8. Avoid meeting strangers, discussing the political situation, or using any anti-Russia rhetoric in public.
9. Those intending to travel between Russia and its neighboring European countries are advised to remain cognizant of authorities’ updates regarding land border restrictions. Review options for departing Russia, including air, rail, and land routes, with the understanding that certain options may become unavailable with short notice.

### Ukraine

1. Avoid all travel to Ukraine due to the ongoing hostilities.
2. Those operating in the East, South, and Center of Ukraine are advised to minimize outdoor travel and avoid inter-city travel due to the increase in artillery fire and airstrikes.
3. Avoid all travel to Crimea due to the ongoing conflict and the potential for sporadic attacks on civilian and critical infrastructure facilities.
4. Those continuing to operate in the North and West of Ukraine are advised to adhere to air raid sirens over the coming days due to the heightened threat of missile and UAV attacks by Russian forces.
5. Identify the nearest shelter, which may be a Metro station, and proceed towards it when air sirens are sounded. Prepare emergency kits of food, water, medicine, and clothing in case needed.
6. Considering the heightened risk of unpredictable power outages, take mitigatory measures, such as confirming that business locations have working generators, sufficient access to fuel for longer periods, and access to several flashlights. Keep necessary electronics constantly charged.
7. Those operating ships through the Black Sea are advised to maintain heightened vigilance and take necessary precautions to prevent the high risk of explosions due to the presence of sea mines.
8. For more information on the security situation and assistance please contact [intel@max-security.com](mailto:intel@max-security.com)