

Senior Defense Official Holds an Off-Camera Press Briefing

MARCH 10, 2022

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Good afternoon. (omitted) We have a guest briefer with us that will talk to you about the Russian charges of some sort of bioweapons capability that the United States is assisting Ukraine with. Again, as you heard the Pentagon spokesman say yesterday, it's absurd and laughable and untrue. (omitted) We thought it would be useful to get an expert who understands what we are doing to help Ukraine in terms of bio research to talk to you credibly about what that looks like.

(omitted) from (omitted), to brief you on what that program looks like and where it stands right now. (omitted) A Senior Defense Official. I would note that this individual has vast expertise and experience in the analysis of chemical and biological weapons. And that is what makes (omitted) so valuable to today's discussion. The senior defensive official has some opening remarks to kind of lay things flat for you. We've got (omitted) about 30 minutes (omitted).

So, with that, I'll turn it over to our senior defense official.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (2): Thank you, sir. So, what I'm going to do is provide an overview of the Biological Weapons Convention and some information regarding the United States, Russia, and Ukraine.

So, the Biological Weapons Convention effectively prohibits the development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling, and use of biological and toxin weapons. It was the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. There are 183 state parties and four signatory states. The United States signed in 1972 and ratified in 1975. Russia signed in 1972 and ratified in 1975. And Ukraine also signed in 1972 and ratified in 1975.

There are five biological research laboratories in Kyiv that Ukraine has declared as part of the BWC Confidence Building Measures. Their work focuses on diagnostics, therapeutics, treatments, prevention, vaccines, beneficial efforts. The five that we're discussing is the center of public health of the Ukraine Ministry of Health, the Institute of Epidemiology and Infectious Diseases, the Institute of Veterinary Medicine, the State Scientific Control Institute for Biotechnology and Strains of Microorganisms, and the Laboratory Diagnostic and Veterinary Findings Scientific Research Institute. So, I mentioned the Confidence Building Measures. It's through these we understand Ukraine's biological program. They're looking at pathogens that infect humans and animals with an emphasis on those that are endemic to Ukraine, Anthrax, tularemia, tuberculosis, botulism, classic

swine fever, Crimean hemorrhagic fever, avian flu, those types of things.

A few comments on Confidence Building Measures more broadly, there have been 20 years of Confidence Building Measures for all countries that are involved in the BWC. The U.S. has submitted 35 Confidence Building Measures that are publicly posted. Ukraine has submitted 27 Confidence Building Measures that are publicly posted. Russia has submitted 35 Confidence Building Measures that are not publicly posted. And the BWC compliance reports from 2020 through the Department of State Russia was noted -- for Russia; it was noted available information does not allow the United States to conclude that the Russian Federation has fulfilled its Article Two obligation to destroy or to divert to peaceful purposes BW items specified under Article One of its past BW programs. And though the assessments have changed over time, as noted in the 2005 report, the United States assesses that Russia maintained an offensive BW program in violation of Article One of the convention. The United States continues to have concerns about Russian activities. For Ukraine, no issues or concerns have been noted. And the United States continues to be in compliance with all of its obligations.

A few key points about the Department of Defense's Cooperative Threat Reduction Program Biological Threat Reduction Program activities in Ukraine this is part of the Department of Defense's Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. Through that program, we have invested approximately \$200 million in Ukraine since 2005, supporting 46 Ukrainian labs, health facilities, and diagnostic sites. DOD's CTR program began its biological work with Ukraine to eliminate the remnants of the Soviet Union's illegal biological weapons program left in the Soviet successor states after the USSR fell. There are no DOD bioweapon labs in Ukraine or anywhere else in the world.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): OK, thank you very much for that. We'll start with some questions.

So, we'll start. Bob, you have a question?

Q: I do, thank you. Does the U.S. have a physical presence at any of those, I think you said, five labs? And also, is there a written agreement between Ukraine and the United States that is publicly available to that describes exactly what the arrangements are?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (2): That would be information I could try to get back to you on.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): My understanding is we don't have U.S. personnel at any of these labs. So, let me just lay that flat, Bob. There's no U.S. personnel at these labs.

And then we are getting you, all of you, a fact sheet on this program. We're finalizing it right now. Hopefully, we'll be able to get it to you before the end of our call. But if not shortly thereafter. That will lay out the facts; I think in more detail about what you're looking for.

Q: And this dates to 2005, by the way?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (2): Yes. The investment through the threat reduction program began in 2005 on bio.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): All right, Jack Detsch, Foreign Policy?

Q: Yeah, I'm just curious if you were anticipating the Russians sort of bringing up these false claims in -- in the days before the invasion.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (2): Due to the program that Russia has continued to have, that's something that we are always concerned about.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): OK. Let's see. Matt Seiler, ABC?

OK, nothing heard from that.

Q: Hey, it's Luis, actually. Matt has a question for the next round. But I have one for this one.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): All right.

Q: In terms of I think, in line with some of the stuff that we've heard before, some of this false flag imagery that has been making its way out; are you seeing any false flag imagery related to this whole notion of the -- of the, you know, the work in tandem on this biological chemical front?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): I think we can take that, Luis. We don't know of any imagery. But as we've said, we have picked up indications that the Russians could be making these claims, these false claims about U.S. and Ukrainian work in biodefense, as a way of creating a pretext of their own to perhaps use these kinds of agents in an attack. We've got indications of that. But we are not aware of any imagery that exists in that regard.

Q: And if I could follow up really quick.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah, go ahead.

Q: I mean, it's really interesting to see united front from the State Department from the White House on the record talking about this. I mean, is this because you're seeing actual movement of some of these materials into Ukraine, or some -- or some equipment that would indicate that, yes, their potential use is on the horizon?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah, I would just right now, Luis, I have to leave it with you with indications. And I'm not going to be at liberty to go in more detail than that today.

Joe Gould?

Q: I don't have a question for this round. Thanks.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): OK.

Tara Copp?

Q: Thank you. I wanted to kind of follow up on Luis's line of questions. Can you just talk about the importance of coming out with this now? I guess it is somewhat tied to the potential of it being a false flag. But just how concerned are you and what prompted really talking about this lab with us today to get more of those facts out there?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Tara, we're doing this because the Russians and the Chinese felt it somehow important for them to put out a bunch of lies. They just flat-out lied. And they decided to go public, both countries, with this ridiculous notion that we are helping Ukraine develop bioweapons to be used. Again, we believe that this is potentially some sort of pre-textual argument that they are creating. We have indications of that. But the reason we're talking about it, the reason we talked about it yesterday, and the reason we're talking about it today is because they decided to lie about it.

Idrees?

Q: Two quick questions. Firstly, the indications that you talked about, about them perhaps potentially using chem weapons, has that been picked up in the past 24 to 48 hours or further behind? And then you start talking about how Russia had used chemical and biological weapons as part of its battlefield doctrine.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): I'll defer to our guests briefer on the second question. On the first one, I would just say, again, we have - have indications that part of the narrative they are trying to create could be context -- false flag context to be used as some sort of a pretext for them. Even including the possibility of them using these kinds of agents. I won't get into how long we've had these indications or what the sources are. I think you can understand that. But we believe their public narrative could be used, being used as a way to create that that pretext. And I'll defer to the second question to our guest briefer.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (2): So, the world is aware of Russia's willingness to use chemical

agents such as when they did in the Dubrovka theater and with the (scribbles ?). So, just a couple of examples of their willingness to use chemical agents.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Barbara Starr?

Q: ... for the next round (omitted) thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL(1): Dan Lamothe- ?

Q: I'm set for now. Thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1) : OK, Mike Glenn?

Q: I'm good (omitted). Thanks much.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Ron Bowman?

Q: Yeah. You talked about eliminating remnants of the USSR program. Could you get more specific on what are the remnants?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (2) : So, one of the things that the United States was interested in, as were other allies interested in, was ensuring that the individuals that worked in the programs during the Soviet era had something productive to do that was in a positive direction. So, it would be that type of thing in addition to the facilities; having a positive use for those facilities, those types of things.

Q: All right, thanks.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Jenn Griffin?

Q: I'm sorry (omitted). My questions for later.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): David Martin?

Q: Let me try the indications question one more time. Do you have indications of what, that it's a false flag operation, or that they are making some sort of preparations to use chemical or biological agents?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): At this point, David, we have indications that they are -- that there could be -- that this public narrative of theirs, that that public narrative could be setting the conditions for a false flag event of some kind. What (omitted) we said publicly is that could be, could be the actual use of some sort of agents, to, again to -- that they would blame on the Ukrainians and by association, perhaps even the United States to create, again, an excuse for potentially more aggressive military action or some other way of -- of advancing their military interest in Ukraine; could. Well -- that's -- that's about as far as we can go right now.

But the larger point is that the narrative they're putting out there, assisted by the Chinese, is false. It's just not true, as our defense intelligence official laid out for you. Again, we'll -- we'll provide you a fact sheet that -- that lays out the facts about this program, and what it's doing, and just as critical, where it's not doing.

OK...

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (2): I can also add a few relevant facts about China in the Biological Weapons Convention. They are also a state party they acceded in 1984. They have submitted 33 Confidence Building Measures that are not publicly posted. And they have been assessed to be engaged in biological activities with potential dual-use applications, some of which raise concerns regarding its compliance with Article One of the BWC.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): All right, Courtney?

Q: Just one more on this, the indications; is there any sense that they would even potentially use this against their own people against the Russian military? Any potential false flag?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): We -- we couldn't speculate on that right now, Court.

Q: Thank you. And I have one for the second round as well. Thank you for doing this.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): OK. (omitted) We really appreciate our (omitted) senior defense official coming in. And again, you'll see the factsheet coming out soon on this. (omitted).

(omitted) Let me start by what we think has changed. Probably the easiest way to dive into this. We assess that northwest of Kyiv, Russian forces have been able to move forward. They're still basically in the vicinity of the Hostomel Airport, but they have moved closer to Kyiv. Rough estimate is about five kilometers closer, rough estimate. East of Kyiv, we see Russian forces continue to advance their troops. They're really along sort of two parallel lines there, and we assess that the -- the northernmost of those two lines, the closest line is reached about 40 kilometers east of Kyiv.

We now assess the Chernihiv is isolated. On the -- the two lines -- I said that there's two lines going to Kyiv from the east, the -- the one that's to the south of the two which kind of emanated out of Sumy. We also assess that some of them may have reached approximately 40 kilometers from -- from Kyiv, but it also appears to us that a portion of these forces may be repositioning themselves back towards Sumy. It is not clear how many, it is not clear how fast they are moving back, and it is not clear why they are doing that.

We continue to have reports of internet outages, particularly around Mariupol' and Kherson. And as of today, day 15, our count is more than 775 missile launches. Again, all stripes, all different varieties. And if you guys need the breakdown, I can give you the breakdown if anybody cares.

But those are the changes from yesterday. So, we'll go right to questions. Bob?

Q: Thank you. Regarding security assistance deliveries in the way of an update, can you say whether the U.S. has -- has still continued to deliver, transfer arms, and so forth in the last couple of days? And has there been any new sign or any sign of Russian efforts to interfere with that? And if not, any thoughts on why they have not yet done that? And whether that window of opportunity will close?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Bob, yes, security assistance continues to flow. I don't have a specific shipment to speak to today. But it has continued to flow over the last couple of days. Various different avenues through which that's going, as we've talked about. There has been no interference of those avenues by Russian forces yet. And I would be loath to try to speculate why that might be. But what we've said is we're going to continue to flow stuff to the Ukrainians, as much and as fast as we can for as long as we can. And that effort continues.

I would remind that it's not just the United States that many other nations are also doing it as well. We are helping coordinate that effort, of course, but it's not just U.S. stuff that's going in.

Q: Thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Hang on just a second.

OK, I just was looking at a chart here. There has been stuff in the last 24 hours, which -- which has been sent in, and there will be in the next 24 hours another shipment as well.

OK, Jack Detsch?

Q: Hey, (omitted), sorry, took a second to find the mute button. I'm curious. So, is the -- the advanced 25 miles outside is that the North-Eastern line of advanced you were referring to, sorry, earlier this

week that they had passed around Sumy?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): That's the -- no, no, that -- that's the Northwest route into Kyiv, around the Hostomel Airport that is to the northwest of the city. Those are the guys that we were saying for a while we're, you know, 30 and then 25, and then, you know, 20, and -- and -- so we estimate that they, you know, are -- could be as close to the city as perhaps in elements, perhaps as close as 15 kilometers. But they're basically still -- so, you know, there has been movement, I cannot deny that, but it hasn't been a lot. And they still -- we assess they're still in the vicinity of that -- that airport. That's the Northwest leg going down from the south into Kyiv. It is the westernmost of the Northern approaches that -- that there have been -- they been taken. Did that answer your question?

Q: Yeah, that's -- that's helpful. And do you -- do you have a ballpark at all for how long it might take the Russians to -- to surround and circle the city since it seems like that -- that continues to be their intention?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): No, we don't. The Ukrainians are, as you guys have all seen, fighting back very, very well around Kyiv. We don't assess that major elements are in the city. And it'd be very difficult to predict with any certainty how long it's going to take the Russians to move closer to the city and eventually to get in there. The Ukrainians are putting up, as we've said, a very stiff resistance.

Matt Seiler?

Q: Hi, (omitted), thanks. We talked a lot about the aircrafts yesterday and -- and the arguments for why the U.S. doesn't think that's the best bang for the buck way to support the Ukrainians. I'm curious if you can speak at all to what the Ukrainians are telling the U.S. and others; why are they appealing to get these jets if it -- if it runs counter to their interests?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Well, I would let the Ukrainians speak for themselves. I'm not going to put words in their mouth. And to a degree, they have spoken for themselves and -- and their interests.

I want to stress a couple of things, Matt. if -- if another nation-state wants to work out with Ukraine, the delivery of aircraft, nation to nation, that is a sovereign decision that they can make. You know, there seems to be a notion building out there that -- that the United States is sort of putting the brakes on all of this. It is up to individual nation-states to make that decision.

What we have said, what I would -- I'd point you to what the -- what -- what was briefed yesterday is that we do not support a proposal whereby jets would be transferred through our custody, then to be brought into Ukraine. And that's -- that's what -- that's what we have opposed. We -- we have also said that for our part, for our measure, we can only speak for the United States, that we are going to

continue to provide them the kinds of security assistance that -- that we know they need most, and that they are using most effectively. And -- and we have seen what those systems are. And those shipments that I talked about with Bob we're -- we're going to continue to provide them. And we're going to continue to work with other allies and partners on additional capabilities that maybe we don't have that other people do that we believe that the Ukrainians can and will use effectively.

And I think I'd -- well, the only thing I'd add, you know, is, again, they still have the vast majority of their aircraft inventory fighter wing -- I'm sorry, fixed-wing fighter aircraft available to them. They are marshaling those resources, as you might expect a nation would when so much of the airspace is covered by Russian surface-to-air missile systems. So, they are not flying their fixed-wing aircraft very much on a daily basis. That's not -- we're not making a judgment here. It's just a fact.

What they are using very effectively to slow the Russian advanced, particularly in the north, are -- are their own surface to air missile systems, and MANPADS as well as, quite frankly, anti-armor munitions. And they have used them with great effect. And so, again, we're going to stay focused; we would've lashed up with Ukraine talking to them routinely. And we're going to continue to look for ways to support them in the -- in the ways that -- that we and they both know. They -- that they -- that they can use most effectively.

Joe Gould?

Q: (omitted). Thank you. I was -- on that same topic, I was wondering if you could fill in a little bit more what you're seeing as far as Russian surface to air missile systems. Can you fill in a little bit more what that picture looks like? Where those systems are being seen? How they're being used? Thanks.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah, I -- I'm not going to layout in a public setting the Russian Order of Battle. I would tell you that in terms of their inventory of surface to air missile launchers and missiles, I mean, they -- they have combined more than 90 percent of their -- of their systems available for them. And they have them arrayed inside Ukraine and outside Ukraine. They have them arrayed in such a way that, as I said the other day, there's very little territory of Ukraine that is not covered in some way or in some fashion by Russian surface-to-air missile systems. And they have the vast, vast majority, as I said, more than 90 percent of their capability available to them. I'd rather not get into the whole numbers or where physically they are. But I hope that gives you a bit of a picture.

Q: Yeah, thanks. I just -- and one follow-up is, you know, the -- the push is to get the Ukrainians what they can use quickly; you know, what's available, what they can use quickly. (omitted), but there's some talk about the avionics, you know, NATO-related avionics that is inside of those MiGs. Did you have a sense of what it would take to get those out? What the timeframe is? How involved that process might be?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): No, no, we don't. I mean, again, we -- we do not support the proposal whereby these jets would be transferred to our custody. So, we didn't have a lengthy discussion or debate here about avionics.

Q: All right, thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Tara Copp?

Q: Thanks for doing this. I know you -- you mentioned what has kind of changed in the last 24 hours or so in the directions that the Russians are advancing. But have you noticed any changes in tactics given some of the delays that the convoys have faced? And then, secondly, would there be any discussion at all of providing Ukraine a patriot battery? And if not, is it just because it would not be as helpful? Like the range would be too close? Just -- just wondering about your thoughts on that. Thanks.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): There's no discussion about putting a patriot battery in Ukraine. In order to do that, you'd have to put U.S. troops with it to operate it. It is not a system that the Ukrainians are familiar with. And as we have made very clear, there will be no U.S. troops fighting in Ukraine. So, there's no discussion about putting patriot batteries in Ukraine.

I'm sorry. What was your first question?

Q: If you've noticed any change in tactics by the Russians in like the last 24 to 48 hours, given some of the delays that they've had with their convoys?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah, I mean, I think we've talked about this before; we certainly have seen an increase in what we call long-range fires, bombardment missile launches, both from aircraft as well as from mobile launchers on the ground. And as well as they get closer to places, such as Chernihiv, the use of artillery as well. And you can see it for yourself, I mean, just looking at the -- the imagery, they are clearly hitting populated areas and causing a lot of damage. So, we definitely have seen and independently can verify an uptick in -- in the increase of long-range fires, as they -- as they have struggled to overcome the challenges in momentum that they suffered in the first couple of weeks. As we said, back then, we expected them to adapt and to try to overcome these challenges. And you're starting to see a little bit of that happening in just the last 24 as they begin to creep a little closer towards Kyiv from the northwest as they begin -- or as they continue to try to make progress to the east of Kyiv on those two prongs we talked about. And certainly, you know, even around Mariupol' which they have not taken and we don't insist that they're in Mariupol', but they have encircled Mariupol' and they are -- and they are inching closer and closer. So, that was not unexpected and -- and it remains to be seen whether -- whether and to what degree these long-range fires have -- have contributed to this -- this ability for them to -- to achieve a sense of momentum in

certain places.

But -- but to your question, yes, we -- we would assess that -- that these -- that this heavier reliance on -- on bombardment and long-range fires is -- is a result of the -- of the lack of momentum that they were achieving on the ground.

Idees?

Q: (omitted). Two quick questions; firstly, yesterday, the British defense ministry put out something saying the Russians had said that they'd used a thermobaric weapon. Have you today, as of now, seen them use any thermobaric weapons? And secondly, just going back to the chem biological weapons stuff, have you seen any movement of chemical or biological agents inside or close to Ukraine by Russia?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): I think I'm just gonna leave on the second question. Just leave that, you know, we've -- we've seen indications that they could be using these -- these accusations as a potential pretext. And that's -- that's as far as I'm gonna go today.

On the thermobarics, I mean, we cannot independently confirm and verify the use of thermobaric weapons inside Ukraine. And I know the follow-up question is going to be well; can you independently verify the existence of them? And the answer right now is no. What we have said, and what we can still say today, is we -- we know that they have the launching systems in there because these launchers can -- can also fire other projectiles. But -- but we don't have anything independently to -- that -- that could verify those accounts. And we looked, having seen the British Post that you're talking about. I mean, we -- we looked. And I am in anticipation of getting this question today, and we're just not able to independently verify it.

Heather from USNI?

Q: Thank you so much. I was wondering if you have any additional maritime updates, including reports that a Russian patrol boat sunk in the Black Sea yesterday. And then on the biological weapons discussion from earlier; has the United States had a history of sending scientists from places like the IRF -- or, I'm sorry, integrated research facility, to Ukraine to help them with their biological safety in BSL-3 and BSL-4 labs?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): I don't have anything on that second question, Heather; I think our expert, I thought, had handled that. I mean, we're not -- I mean, are you asking are we sending people in?

Q: No, just in the past; has the United States ever sent people to help them with like training and --

on their biological safety measures?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): I don't know the answer to that in terms of -- I'm sure -- I'm sure at some point because we've been working for them so -- so long. (omitted)-- I'm not an expert on the program. We'll take the question and see if there's something to be said. I know, we certainly have contributed funds, but whether we -- whether we've had people in Ukraine physically over the past few years to -- to help with their management, I don't know. So, I don't want to guess.

On the -- on the maritime activity, again, nothing -- nothing significant to -- to speak to. We have noticed that some Russian navy vessels, a couple of LSTs, and some small surface combatants; we did note that they -- that they returned to Sevastopol. Again, not clear exactly why or for how long. But -- but nothing of note other -- you know, and that's not really that much of note, but -- but no -- but no significant maritime activity to speak to.

Q: And just a follow-up. Were you able to confirm whether the Russian patrol boat did sink in the Black Sea?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): No, we have not been able to independently confirm that.

Q: Thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah.

Dan Lamont?

Q: (omitted). I wanted to ask if you've seen any signs of additional Russian forces heading toward Ukraine from elsewhere in the country; some outside analysts that are sort of assessing this seem to catch your comments on this earlier this week and seem to disagree. So, I wondered if maybe they hadn't caught up and there was some change on your side?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL: No change on our side on that, Dan. I mean, we don't have -- we have not seen indications that they're moving anybody from elsewhere in Russia to -- to the west. And we try to look at that every day. But we don't have any indications that that's -- that that's happening.

Q: Would you still assess their overall combat power at about 90 percent, or has that changed?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): No, we would still assess they are about where they were yesterday, about 90 percent.

Q: Thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): In terms of what's available to them, yeah.

Mike Glenn, Washington Times?

Q: (omitted). I was wondering if the Pentagon has any indication of whether Russia has had any success at coordinating their aviation assets, particularly rotary wing with the ground movement on -- with the ground movement?

(CROSSTALK)

Q: What's their combined arms...

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): I'm sorry. Have you -- are you saying -- are we -- have we seen them do that well? Is that what you're asking?

Q: Or -- yeah, have you had any success at this sort of combined arm, aviation ground -- you know, with ground movement?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah, without getting into each and every line of advanced and down at the tactical level, because we don't see it, we don't see that kind of detail on a daily basis. Overall, we would still assess that they have not perfected or improved their air-to-ground coordination. Yeah, I -- I'm -- very comfortable saying that, it -- writ large, that they have not perfected or improved air-to-ground coordination.

Q: OK. Thanks, (inaudible).

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah -- yeah. Tom Bowman?

Q: (omitted), you mentioned additional capabilities for Ukraine "we don't have but others do." Are you talking both air and ground? And with air, again, are we talking S-300s?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): I would say yes, air and ground, and I'm not going to get into individual systems.

Q: How about this -- can you say mobile air defense systems?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): I would just say air defense systems are included.

Q: But more sophisticated, obviously, than MANPADS, correct?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Correct.

Q: OK. Thanks.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah.

Jen Griffin?

Q: (omitted), can you say what kinds of weapons were used to take out that tank column that was in Brovary, that we've seen the drone footage of?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): I -- I cannot give you the exact munition, no. I'm sorry.

Q: Can you rule out that armed drones were used, or from the video, can you -- can you tell if any Javelins were used?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Jen, I don't have that level of detail today. We do know that -- that the Ukrainians have used armed drones and they have used them with effect but I -- I can't -- I mean, I've seen the video, same as you, but we haven't done, like, an analysis of it to determine exactly how those attacks were propagated.

Q: Thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Barbara Starr?

Q: Two quick questions.

The bombing of the maternity hospital in Mariupol -- now that you've had time -- you and your folks have had time to see the video of the damage, the crater, of everything that happened around the hospital, have you been able to discern or learn anything about what type of weapons you believe the Russians used? Is it possible they were precision-guided? Was this a target -- does it tell you anything about how determined they were to strike this target? If there's anything you've been able to learn about the weapons?

And my second quick question is -- it kind of goes back to what you had mentioned about an air defense umbrella almost everywhere. Do you and think -- do you interpret that to mean that the Russians and -- are they somehow beginning to lay a groundwork for moving west? Thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Barb, on the maternity hospital, yeah, you're right, we have definitely seen the same imagery that you have. We cannot discern from the imagery and the crater, the damage, what exactly the munitions or munition was that caused that damage.

Clearly, it was devastating and had a devastating effect, there's no doubt about that. We noted that the -- the Kremlin actually acknowledged the hit and -- and that they were going to seek answers from the military, which we found to be an interesting term.

But -- but no, we -- we don't have a -- a clear sense about what exactly they used -- and it's -- it's entirely possible, Barb, that we -- we will never know that -- but -- but we certainly -- we certainly are -- are not at all disputing the -- the terrible effect -- that whatever they sent in, the effect that it had on that -- on that hospital.

And on your second question, again, I -- I want to be careful to limit my comments to what we're seeing now and not get too predictive. We are not seeing any significant strike activity to -- in the western part of the country. There's been some onesie, twosie kinds of things over the last several days but -- but -- it -- it's isolated and -- and it's not -- it has no -- has had no significant effect, and that's been -- frankly, that's been the case since almost the beginning. There just hasn't been any significant strike activity in the west of Ukraine.

It's difficult to discern, you know, why that is, except to say that, you know, again, it -- if you just draw a line from Kyiv down to Odesa, everything to the east of that line, that's where the activity is, that their main lines of effort, the ones we've been talking about now for two weeks, are all in the eastern part of the country. And that remains -- that absolutely remains their focus area, is that part of Ukraine. They just haven't done much in the west.

And again, I -- we can't say for sure why -- why that necessarily is, except that perhaps the main population centers that they want are in the east, and certainly, we know Kyiv is a -- is still an objective for them. And we couldn't say what -- what future plans they might -- they might have west of that line. It's just -- it's just unclear to us.

David Martin?

Q: (omitted), you said at the beginning that you now assess Chernihiv to be isolated. Does that mean -- mean that they are now advancing from Chernihiv down toward Kyiv, on that access -- and on that axis?

And I'm trying to reconcile what you're saying with a -- a British intelligence map that they have published. And they show basically three lines of approach from -- from the east, one from Chernihiv, one from Sumy, (omitted), one in between from a place called Konotop. Can you reconcile that? Just -- cause you -- you were describing two axes of advance.

(CROSS-TALK)

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah, I don't think there's that much difference between them and us on this.

Q: Well ...

(CROSSTALK)

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah, I don't think there's a whole lot of difference between -- and maybe it's just because -- maybe I'm not as descriptive as they are. But let me go back to Chernihiv. We -- do assess that Chernihiv is now isolated. We do not assess or show that they have moved past Chernihiv.

Chernihiv, there's still a lot of heavy fighting, the Ukrainians are resisting very strongly, and we do not assess that along that -- if -- if you were to assume that they were going to advance on Kyiv from the direction of Chernihiv, we have not seen that movement coming out of Chernihiv towards Kyiv. They have just now, as I -- as I -- as I said, isolated Chernihiv, and -- and again, lots of fighting.

Then, if you were -- if you -- if you looked at the map and you had Chernihiv as -- as a -- as 12 on the clock ...

Q: Yeah.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): ... if -- if you were to go clockwise, to say about 2:00, that's a -- we -- we see two advances coming out of the northeast, what -- what we refer to as the northeastern group -- we sort of -- two lines of advance. And again, I haven't seen the British map but -- but I suspect that we're -- we're both talking about the same thing.

At about 2:00 position, there's a line of advance. I don't have the city you're talking about on my map -- but it's not Sumy, it's north of Sumy that -- that they have -- that they have approached on. And we believe that that line of advance is near Brovary. This would explain the images you guys are seeing out of Brovary. The question that Jenn asked, we believe that's this line of advance and they are about, you know, 40 kilometers or so away from Kyiv.

Then if you were to take in the clock analogy going down to not quite the three, but -- but somewhere, you know, between the two and three o'clock, you'll see another line of advance. And this line of advance we assess came from Sumy and explains the fighting that you guys have all been reporting around Sumy. That line has gotten almost as far as the one at the two o'clock position. But as I said in my opening statement, we have also assessed that a portion of them, we don't know exactly how many, but some of them have turned around and started heading back towards the east. And it's not clear why they are doing that, whether that's just repositioning them for another advance maybe on Sumy or something else. And we just don't know.

But I -- but I think that probably gets at your question with respect to the British map. I'll stop there.

Q: Yes, it does. Thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): All right. Courtney, last question.

Q: Last but I know best in everyone's hearts. A couple of quick ones. When you talk about 15 kilometers from the city, in Kyiv specifically, the northwest approach, I just want to be clear, are you saying from the city or is that -- are you -- is that city center?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): From city center. When I give these ranges, guys, that's -- I thought I made that clear a few days ago, but it's from city center, which, as you may realize, you know, we have some sprawling cities so you can think you could see some, quote-unquote, "city fighting" still a ways away from city center.

Q: OK. I thought you had, I just wanted to be 100 percent clear.

Then two other things. Is there any concern about the south Ukraine nuclear power plant, which is sort of northwest of Mykolaiv. Are there any indications that they -- that the Russian military might be trying to move on that or move towards it?

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): We don't have -- we have not seen that. They -- we -- on Mykolaiv, we still assess that they are to the northeast of Mykolaiv. They haven't taken Mykolaiv. There's fighting in Mykolaiv. There's striking in Mykolaiv. We have not assessed that it has been taken. And we haven't seen movement out of Mykolaiv towards that -- that plant. I think I'm going to butcher the pronunciation of this, but I think what you talk about is (Kostyantynivka ?), Kostyantynivka plant, which does lie just to the northwest of Mykolaiv. But we don't assess that they are moving on that right now.

Q: OK, great. And then the last one, I just wanted to be clear about one of the questions earlier, I think this it was someone from USNI, about a potential amphibious assault, because there has been

some reports of missile -- cruise missile launches from the north Black Sea. You're -- are you seeing any early indications of any kind of an amphibious assault? Is it targeting Odessa? I just want to make sure I understand that. And thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): No, no, nothing. Nothing to speak to. I said yesterday and I think the day before, we have been a grand total of six cruise missile launches from the Black Sea. That remains the case today. There has been no additional cruise missile launches from the Black Sea.

Q: Hey, (omitted) do you have a...

(CROSSTALK)

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Hey, everybody, hang on. Hang on.

(CROSSTALK)

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Courtney, are you -- are you done?

Q: I am, thank you.

Q: No, I -- I just wanted to know if you have time for one more question? (omitted).

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1) (omitted) Sure, go ahead, Fadi ?

Q: I thank you, (omitted). And so on that -- on that -- I understand, like, you -- this is, like, approximate distances you're talking about. On the northwest of five kilometers that you said the Russians made some advance there, did they flank Ukrainian positions or they actually went through positions that the Ukrainians held before and where there was some resistance? Thank you.

SENIOR DEFENSE OFFICIAL (1): Yeah, we don't -- I -- I don't have that level of detail. And I want to be careful here -- it's approximately five. Like, I mean, we don't have it down to a (inaudible) the -- the detail here but approximately five kilometers of advance over the last 24 hours.

So yes, momentum, but you've got to keep it in perspective -- it wasn't a lot. Again, Kyiv is being well defended and -- and the Ukrainians are putting a lot of energy, as you might expect, into protecting their capital city.

So again, I would go back to what we talked about several days ago, probably last week, that at Kharkiv and Chernihiv, Mariupol, we -- we are seeing these efforts to encircle and surround. We --

we talked about this, as you remember.

And -- and so we are beginning to see -- actually, more than beginning -- we have seen those same sorts of efforts towards Kyiv, only Kyiv is a much bigger city, it's more populous, it's being heavily defended, it's the capital.

And so what we're seeing are these sort of multiple lines of advance towards Kyiv. And we had talked about, again, this -- this being the potential outcome here. So we still have the northwest line. That's the one that you've been asking about, Fadi?. We've got the northeast line that would come from the direction of Chernihiv, but they haven't gotten past Chernihiv. And then we've got this, (omitted), you know, east-by-northeast approach, further around the clock, of this -- of these two prongs that I talked about with David.

So -- so multiple lines of advance towards Kyiv, again, we would assess with the goal of encircling Kyiv, surrounding Kyiv and putting pressure on Kyiv. But again, there are -- they just -- they haven't made the same amount of progress towards the capital city as they have made on Chernihiv, which now is isolated, on Mariupol, which is now isolated, and even around Kharkiv.

Now, they're on the outskirts of Kharkiv, heavy, heavy fighting there, but you can see them approaching Kharkiv also from multiple -- multiple directions. So it -- it -- it seems to be of a pattern.

OK, I think I got to everybody. Again, I apologize for the -- for the lateness of the hour. It was just that kind of a day. And we'll -- we'll pick it up again tomorrow. Out here.

[Eds. Note: Due to the established on-background attribution rules for this briefing, identifying information of the Senior Defense Officials has been omitted.]
