

In December, Putin said Russia was seeking guarantees "that would exclude any further NATO moves eastward and the deployment of weapons systems that threaten us in close vicinity to Russian territory".

Many of these ultimatums have been slammed as non-starters by the West.

Putin, who denied for months that he was planning an invasion, has also called Ukraine an artificial creation carved from Russia by enemies, a characterisation Ukrainians call shocking and false.

Samir Puri, a senior fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, had told Al Jazeera in January that Russia's aim would likely be to "defeat the Ukrainian armed forces in the field, inflict a crushing military defeat that humiliates the Ukrainians and by extension create concern that the backing Ukraine has from its allies in the West, the US and UK, is insufficient".

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What happens next?

The full scope of the Russian military operation was not immediately clear.

Zelenskyy called on all citizens who are ready to defend the country from Russian forces to come forward, saying Kyiv would issue weapons to everyone who wants them.

The US has predicted that a Russian attack to take Kyiv may cause up to 50,000 civilian casualties, along with that of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian soldiers. European countries have been preparing for the likelihood of hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians fleeing an assault.

President Biden, who has ruled out putting US troops on the ground in Ukraine, said Putin had chosen a premeditated war that would bring a "catastrophic loss of life and human suffering". He said he would speak to G7 leaders and promised Russia would be held "accountable".

EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell also promised the toughest financial sanctions the bloc had ever imposed.

Washington and London have previously spoken of personal sanctions targeting the Russian president in the event of a major escalation in military action.