

Moscow's ultimatum: Ukraine fulfils its proposals or Russian army will decide

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The Daily Morning Voice Online Desk: Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov gave Ukraine an ultimatum on Monday to fulfil Moscow's proposals, including surrendering territory Russia controls, or its army would decide the issue, a day after President Vladimir Putin said he was open to talks. Kyiv and its Western allies have dismissed Putin's offer to talk, with his forces battering Ukrainian towns with missiles and rockets and Moscow continuing to demand that Kyiv recognise its conquest of a fifth of the country.

Kyiv says it will fight until Russia withdraws, reports Reuters. "Our proposals for the demilitarization and denazification of the territories controlled by the regime, the elimination of threats to Russia's security emanating from there, including our new lands, are well known to the enemy," state news agency TASS quoted Lavrov as saying late on Monday. "The point is simple: Fulfil them for your own good. Otherwise, the issue will be decided by the Russian army."

Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, calling it a "special operation" to "denazify" and demilitarise Ukraine, which he said was a threat to Russia. Kyiv and the West say Putin's invasion was merely an imperialist land grab. As the war entered its 11th month, Russian forces were engaged in fierce fighting in the east and south of Ukraine, after embarrassing battlefield setbacks. On Monday, a drone believed to be Ukrainian penetrated hundreds of kilometres through Russian airspace, causing a deadly explosion at the main base for Moscow's strategic bombers in the latest attack to expose gaps in its air defences. A suspected drone struck the same base on Dec. 5.

Moscow on Monday said it had shot the drone down causing it to crash at the Engels air base, where three service members were killed. Ukraine did not comment, under its usual policy on incidents inside Russia. The base, the main airfield for the bombers that Kyiv says Moscow has used to attack Ukrainian civilian infrastructure, is hundreds of miles from the Ukrainian frontier. The same planes are also designed to launch nuclear-capable missiles as part of Russia's long-term strategic deterrent. The Russian defence ministry said in a statement no planes were damaged, but Russian and Ukrainian social media accounts said several had been destroyed. Reuters was not able to independently verify the reports.

Putin hosted leaders of other former Soviet states in St Petersburg on Monday for a summit of the Commonwealth of Independent States group, which Ukraine has long since quit. In televised remarks, Putin made no direct reference to the war, while saying threats to the security and stability of the Eurasian region were increasing. "Unfortunately challenges and threats in this area, especially from the outside, are only growing each year," he said. "We also have to acknowledge unfortunately that disagreements also arise between member states of the commonwealth." The invasion of Ukraine has been a test of Russia's longstanding authority among other ex-Soviet states. Fighting has surged in recent months between CIS members Armenia and Azerbaijan in a conflict where Russia has sent peacekeepers, while a border dispute has flared between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Putin said such disagreements should be resolved through "comradely help and mediating action".

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address on Monday that the situation at the front in the Donbas region was "difficult and painful" and required all of the country's "strength and concentration". He said that as a result of Russia's targeting of Ukraine's energy infrastructure nearly nine million people were without electricity. That figure amounts to about a quarter of Ukraine's population. Since the invasion, Ukraine has driven Russian forces from the north, defeated them on the outskirts of the capital Kyiv and forced Russian retreats in the east and south. But Moscow still controls swathes of eastern

and southern land Putin claims to have annexed. Tens of thousands of Ukrainian civilians have died in cities Russia razed to the ground, and thousands of troops on both sides have been killed, forcing Putin to call up hundreds of thousands of reservists for the first time since World War Two.