



## **JEWISH FEDERATIONS AND THE CRISIS IN UKRAINE**

*Updated March 1, 2022*

**In the sixth day of fighting, Russian forces continue to advance, but have failed, so far, to conquer any major Ukrainian city. Meanwhile an Israeli man was killed while trying to flee the country, and Jewish Federation partners work hard across multiple international borders to assist the thousands of Jews attempting to leave Ukraine.**

(For background on the crisis, as well as updated information on the Jewish community in Ukraine, see [here](#)).

### **CONFLICT**

As fighting continues, Russian troops are pushing hard to win additional territory. Latest reports indicate that a 40-mile long Russian convoy is currently heading towards the Ukrainian capital Kyiv. Ukrainian forces have so far prevented the fall of the capital, or other major cities, and British military sources say that the bulk of Russian ground forces are still more than more than 19 miles north of Kyiv.

According to Ukrainian defense officials, Ukrainian soldiers were successfully repelling Russian attacks, “forcing the enemy to abandon the offensive.” The officials claim that artillery fire from one of the Ukrainian brigades had destroyed more than five Russian convoys, and added that “the enemy is demoralized and sustaining heavy losses... and frequent cases of (Russian) desertion and disobedience have been noted.” Nonetheless, Russia has the second most powerful army on earth and boasts significant supremacy over the much smaller Ukrainian armed forces (see [here](#) for more).

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has accused Russia of committing war crimes for bombing the city of Kharkiv. He said that in five days, 56 missile strikes and 113 cruise missiles were launched in Ukraine by Russian forces.

The United Nations says that at least 406 civilians have been injured or killed since the invasion, including at least 102 killed within the past few days. More than half a million refugees have fled Ukraine.

Five hours of negotiations between Ukrainian and Russian officials took place yesterday (Monday) at a site on the border between Ukraine and Belarus. Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky said that he was examining the results, but did not think that anything substantial was achieved by the talks.

Meanwhile Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Russia's nuclear arsenal onto their highest state of alert due to what he said were NATO leaders making "aggressive comments about our country."

In response, US White House press secretary Jen Psaki said the move was part of a wider pattern of unprovoked escalation and "manufactured threats" from the Kremlin.

## ESCAPING UKRAINE

With hundreds of thousands trying to leave the country, at many border crossings from Ukraine waiting times now exceed thirty hours. However for many, the journey to the border is too perilous and most citizens have chosen to “shelter in place.” Ukrainian males aged 16-60 are generally not allowed to leave, and can be forcibly conscripted.

Tragically, an Israeli father of two was killed when his car was shot at by Ukrainian forces who thought he was part of a Chechen military unit. The 37-year old Israeli was actually part of a convoy trying to flee from Kyiv to the border with Moldova. Israel’s Prime Minister Naftali Bennett commented, “I was saddened to receive the bitter news about the death of Roman Brodsky, an Israeli citizen, in Ukraine. On behalf of all citizens of Israel, I want to send my condolences to his wife, children, and family in Israel and in Ukraine. We are continuing to do everything to help Israelis return home.”

Israel’s Ambassador to Ukraine, Michael Brodsky, said yesterday that close to 2,000 Israelis crossed the border from Ukraine to Poland over the previous three days, and that there are about 6,000 Israelis still left in the country, but it is unclear how many of them want to stay. Israeli diplomatic personnel are staffing the crossings 24 hours a day.

Israel’s government estimates that around 10,000 Ukrainians will immigrate to Israel in the coming weeks. In a particularly moving incident, Israel sent diplomats to the border to assist a group of 150 Ukrainian Jewish orphans without official documents, traveling with a group of 250 other Jews out of Odessa. The assistance was provided by a team led by Israel’s Ambassador to Romania, David Saranga, who drove for eight hours on Friday to the Romanian border town of Siret, where he has been working with a team of four others to assist Israeli and Jewish evacuees. Saranga, speaking on KAN Israel Radio, recalled how last week Israel’s embassy in Romania marked the 80th anniversary of the Struma disaster, where 767 Romanian Jews fleeing the Nazis set sail in December 1941, for mandatory Palestine, but were refused entry. The ship was torpedoed the next day by a Soviet submarine and all but one of the passengers perished. Now, Saranga said, there is a state of Israel that can help its citizens and all those who “belong to the Jewish community. This is our moral duty.”

In a separate incident, according to Israel’s Foreign Ministry, the Jewish state helped citizens of Arab states with which it does not have diplomatic relations reach Ukraine’s borders in recent days. About 100 Israeli Arabs studying in Kharkiv successfully arrived at the border with Moldova following a 24-hour drive. The group was met there by Israeli diplomats. Some of the Israeli Arab students in the group asked to bring their friends, including citizens of Lebanon and Syria, as well as Egyptians, all of whom were offered assistance.

## ISRAELI RESPONSE

Israel’s Prime Minister Naftali Bennett spoke to Russian President Putin by phone on Sunday, and offered to mediate between Russia and Ukraine. While it is not expected that Jerusalem will be involved in negotiations, at the request of Ukraine, Russian-Israeli billionaire Roman Abramovich (owner of the Chelsea Football Club) is in Belarus assisting with talks. The Ukrainian ambassador to Israel Yevgen Korniychuk said yesterday that Ukraine expects Israel to play a greater role in brokering negotiations, due to its close relationships with both sides. “As an ambassador of a country with a Jewish president, I can say (President) Zelensky has higher expectations from Israel than Israel can deliver.” He added that, “Our president believes that Jerusalem could probably be one of the best venues for negotiations.”

Israel has continued to express its support for the Ukrainian nation, but until yesterday had minimized language that could upset Russia. Israel’s Foreign Minister Yair Lapid had explained that Israel needs to remain more neutral than many other nations due to two factors: The sizeable Jewish communities in both countries; as well as Israel’s need for freedom of military action against the Iranian presence in Syria, where Russian forces are the dominant party. (For more on Israel’s concerns, see [here](#)). Nonetheless, Lapid said yesterday that Israel would co-sponsor a United-States resolution in the UN General Assembly that would condemn Russia for its invasion of Ukraine. Lapid clarified that “Israel has been, and will be on the right side of history. Those are our values.”

Despite Israel’s cautious, but increasingly critical stance towards Russia, reports suggest that military coordination between the two nations in Syria is continuing. See [here](#) for more.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Bennett announced that Israel plans to send 100 tons of equipment to help Ukrainian civilians. The shipment includes 17 tons of medical equipment and medicine (donated by Israel's Ministry of Health), Israeli systems for water purification and an emergency kit for water supply, as well as thousands of tents, blankets, sleeping bags and coats. The humanitarian aid will be shipped today (Tuesday) to Warsaw from where it will be transferred to Ukraine. Prime Minister Bennett commented, "In the name of all citizens of Israel, I express hope that this conflict will be resolved before the war develops even more, and there will be much worse humanitarian ramifications than we can imagine. We are praying for the citizens of Ukraine and hope that additional bloodshed will be prevented."

At the same time, Israel's Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked extended the tourist visas of Ukrainians in Israel for an additional 60 days, without any need to go to a government office for permission to lengthen their stay.

## INTERNATIONAL REACTIONS

In increasingly harsh reactions, numerous countries across the globe have announced stricter sanctions and measures against Russia, with a strong focus on boycotting the Russian economy and its banks. Additionally, the European Union announced that it is shutting down Russian access to EU airspace — meaning that no Russian-owned, registered and controlled aircraft will be able to land in, take off or fly over any territory of the EU.

CNN has reported that Russia scrambled to prevent financial meltdown on Monday as its economy was slammed by Western sanctions imposed over the weekend. Putin held crisis talks with his top economic advisers after the ruble crashed to a record low against the US dollar.

Also today, the presidents of Estonia, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia published an open letter urging the EU to immediately grant Ukraine "candidate country status" and begin negotiations on its formal acceptance into the bloc.

## FEDERATIONS AND PARTNERS ON THE GROUND

Federations are planning to allocate millions of dollars to partner agencies on the ground, in support of relief efforts for the Ukrainian Jewish community. Immediate and short term needs total about \$20 million, and in just one day, more than \$4 million has already been raised. See [here](#) for details, and [here](#) for a Jewish Federations' video.

For information on the emergency work of Federation partners on the Ukraine crisis, see [here](#) for The Jewish Agency for Israel and [here](#) for The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC).

Israel's Ministry of Diaspora Affairs has allocated over \$3 million for relief efforts for Ukraine's Jewish community. Details can be seen [here](#).

**Jewish Federations have activated our emergency protocols and are working closely with the Government of Israel and our partners to do everything in our power to support efforts that ensure the safety and well-being of the entire Jewish community in Ukraine.**

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