Civilian Casualties Mount as Russian Forces Continue Their Assault on Multiple Cities in Ukraine

The war in Ukraine rages on as civilian casualties continue to mount. Multiple major population centers have been attacked, including the capital city of Kyiv. Some of the most ferocious and concerning fighting is taking place in Mariupol and Chernihiv, where accounts have emerged of Russian forces bombarding civilian targets such as a theater that was being used as a shelter. Observers have been especially alarmed over the fact that "children" was spelled out in Russian on the pavement around the theater, according to images released by the Maxar space technology company. Journalists have reported that at least 130 survivors had been pulled from the wreckage of the theater in the aftermath of the attack. Meanwhile, Russian officials have continued to deny the bombing of any civilian targets in Mariupol despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary. As a result of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, the refugee crisis continues to worsen as well, both in regards to the number of civilians that have fled the country and those that have been internally displaced.

Troubling information about the extent of the damage highlights that 90% of Mariupol appears to be in ruins and that there have been thousands of casualties. On a positive note, approximately 20,000 people were able to be evacuated from the city this week. Another city that has been hit particularly hard is Chernihiv, where officials have detailed the toll that the Russian assault has had on the civilian population. Most disturbing are the accounts of civilian fatalities of those who have either sought shelter from the fighting or fallen victim to indiscriminate Russian missile and air assaults.

Due to the aforementioned factors, opposition to the invasion is widespread as countries around the world continue to enact harsh sanctions on Russia. Many are seizing the property of Russian oligarchs who are close to Russian President Vladimir Putin and are also stepping up their military aid to Ukraine – supplying more and better equipment. Ukrainian President Volodomyr Zelensky has urged for support from the democratic world. He spoke before a joint session of the United States Congress, where he asked for the United States to implement a no-fly zone over Ukraine. Protests against the Russian invasion have also become commonplace, with many demonstrating in solidarity with Ukraine and pushing for their respective governments to provide more aid to the besieged country. Anti-war demonstrations have also taken place in Russia, and one of the most notable moments included a Russian TV journalist for a state-sponsored news agency who interrupted the live broadcast holding an anti-war sign.

The refugee crisis stemming from the Russian invasion continues to worsen as well. More than 3 million Ukrainians have fled the conflict so far, with millions more also internally displaced. The number of refugees has far exceeded the number anticipated by many countries who are taking them in, putting strain on the local governments and relief agencies that are working to help them. The long-term fate of many refugees remains in limbo as many only have short-term accommodations. The European Union has allotted 500 million Euros for humanitarian aid, but this falls far short of the projected 50 billion Euros that will be needed in 2022 alone. The crisis also has the potential to cause political instability. This could be Putin's goal and the reason why Russian forces are attacking civilian areas. The method of using refugees to instigate political instability is alarming, and analysts have noted that it will be important to counter any potential false, negative stories about Ukrainian refugees that could mirror those about asylum seekers from the Middle East during the 2015 refugee crisis.