

General Debate on Ukraine, Monday 20 February 2023

Briefing for Members of the House of Commons prepared by Protection Approaches

After a year of violence, Russia's brutal political and military strategy in Ukraine continues to be implemented through deliberate, widespread, and systematic perpetration of mass atrocity crimes. In the past year, the names of towns and cities where evidence of mass atrocity crimes has been documented have become well-known: Irpin, Izyum, Bucha, Kherson, Kharkiv, and Mariupol, among too many others. **As Putin and his forces become more desperate, they also become more dangerous; amid a new offensive the likelihood of new and different forms of Russian atrocity crimes being committed against Ukrainian civilians and combatants have once again increased. Threats of nuclear tactics – and tactics of making nuclear threats – will likely escalate.**

The mass atrocity crimes being committed by Russian and pro-Russian forces in Ukraine are not a by-product of Russian state objectives; they are the means by which the Russian political and military command structures are pursuing their objectives of a) destroying Ukraine as it currently exists and b) unpicking global rights and freedoms. The egregiousness of the crimes – the shock factor of Russia's violence – are first designed to terrorise and dismantle the state of Ukraine and second to trigger further unravelling of the already frayed civic and community fabric that holds the international system – indeed the very processes of democracy – tenuously together. Understanding the motivations, nature, and pathology of Russian violence in Ukraine is integral to formulating effective sustainable responses.

In many ways, the United Kingdom has led the way in supporting the Ukrainian people, as demonstrated by President Zelenskyy's visit to the UK earlier this month. However, the UK remains inconsistent in its commitment to confront Russia's web of violence and influence.

A year after the invasion and the UK Government is falling short of its own big promises to use 'every lever':

- The profits of Russian violence, corruption and serious organised crime continue to be washed in London; sanctions are being used to condemn the most prominent but not to leverage those whose behaviours, transactions or relationships can be influenced; the mapping, tracking and targeting of the Wagner Group and other pro-Russian armed groups remains very limited.
- Despite significant and welcome progress on the development of the FCDO's new Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub, **the UK is still not adequately equipped to identify or respond to the metastasising dynamics of Russian atrocity violence nor respond effectively to varied points of leverage.** Moreover, UK Embassy teams in Ukraine and across the wider region continue to lack atrocity prevention expertise and resources.
- **To prevent violence in Ukraine from becoming more protracted; to confront deliberate and systematic perpetration of war crimes and crimes against humanity; and to address the already manifesting consequences across the wider region, the UK needs to urgently implement a comprehensive protection and prevention strategy, tying together both domestic as well as international levers.**
- The recent report from the International Development Committee [*From Srebrenica to a safer tomorrow: Preventing future mass atrocities around the world*](#), provides a clear pathway of how to do this. The government's positive response to the report demonstrates new commitment on the part of HMG to more seriously and effectively confront mass atrocity crimes. However, **we remain concerned that even with respect to Ukraine, where UK resources and political attention are considerable, HMG's Russia policy remains reactive, inconsistent and misses key opportunities to influence – and crucially, it lacks the knowledge and know-how when it comes to the distinct pathology and impacts of mass atrocity crimes.**

One year on, priority must be given to taking apart Russia's minacious web of violence and influence:

- The Russian architecture of violence is transnational, enabled by global and regional illicit financial flows, underpinned by organised crime and kleptocratic networks, supported by a spectrum of non-state and pseudo-non-state armed actors, and promoted by coordinated disinformation structures. **When properly mapped out, this architecture holds considerable opportunity for sanction, leverage, and influence. This is not, however, currently being done by the UK.**
- **HMG should immediately undertake comprehensive analysis of the Russian architecture of violence** to properly identify the complex networks that perpetuate, fund, enable, and legitimise violence. Such a system would **spotlight the full spectrum of malign actors including armed groups, supply chains, human trafficking networks, organised crime, and media outlets and would enable the UK to properly target those weak spots** – be they financial flows, communication systems, or other forms of enablement.
- **Such intelligence should be driving the UK's sanctions regime but also enabling a far more comprehensive and strategic approach to the UK's Ukraine and Russia policy more broadly.** Network analysis tools would enable smarter sanctions that are targeted at securing behaviour change, rather than being purely punitive measures where assets are held indefinitely.
- **The UK cannot remain a safe haven for the profits of mass atrocity.** Driving dirty money out of the UK and overseas territories should be a national security priority - particularly but not only regarding Russia. People in Ukraine can see – and often point to – this persisting inconsistency in UK solidarity.
- **HMG sanctions capabilities should be rapidly boosted.** Both the Foreign Affairs and International Development Committees have urged HMG to provide the sanctions unit with additional resources for the duration of the crisis, including the capacity to gather necessary intelligence to support designations. **HMG needs to properly resource the UK's sanctions regime with the network analysis tools and expertise to implement a smarter sanctions strategy.** These tools will encourage a more creative and evidenced focus upon how malign Russian and pro-Russian networks can be disrupted or dismantled.

From Russia to China, mass atrocity crimes and how the UK responds are matters of national security and national interest:

- The motivations driving, means implementing and opportunities enabling Russia's Ukraine strategy have serious immediate and long-term implications for UK national security, European stability, and the international system. Risks of intensified violence in Ukraine cannot only be addressed through military means while complex risks in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and across East and South-East Europe cannot be ignored.
- **HMG does not yet have policy on the distinct challenges posed by mass atrocity crimes**, whether in Ukraine or elsewhere; it does not have the means of monitoring atrocity risks; it has no system for mapping architectures of atrocity violence, including where those malign structures reach into the UK.
- **This gap in systems, expertise and policy has left the UK ill-prepared for the rapid, violent escalation of Russian strategy in Ukraine. Likewise, this gap has led to contradictory and ineffective decisions related to China**, most recently in the invitation by FCDO to Xinjiang top official, Erkin Tuniyaz, but also on issues relating to CCP influence, money and surveillance here in the UK.
- **Atrocity prevention has been a core national security interest for the United States since 2011: the UK should do the same.**¹ Elevating mass atrocity crimes to the National Security Council would ensure UK contributions to the prevention of and response to mass atrocity crimes in Ukraine, and elsewhere, are buttressed by proper resource, intelligence, coordination, and political oversight.
- **HMG should urgently appoint a senior atrocity prevention advisor** to the Cabinet Office to connect and coordinate efforts by the National Security Council, Number 10, intelligence, the Mass Atrocity Prevention Hub, wider FCDO and other departments.

For more information contact Kate.Ferguson@protectionapproaches.org | 07715475357

¹ The White House, Presidential Study Directive on Mass Atrocities, PRESIDENTIAL STUDY DIRECTIVE/PSD-10, 4 August 2011