



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

Russia has not attempted to assassinate foreign leaders during their visits to Ukraine. Yet.



Just a few hours before three European prime ministers arrived in Kyiv, loud explosions from a Russian artillery attack were heard from the city.

Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala, Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki and Slovenian Prime Minister Janez Jansa were the first European leaders to visit Ukraine and President Volodymyr Zelensky on March 15, 2022, just three weeks after the start of the Russian aggression.

It was a very risky journey, prepared for in days in secret for security reasons. It took a long time to reach their destination, by train from Poland. At least four civilians were killed in the Russian artillery attack on the capital of Ukraine that day.

After those visits, dozens of officials travelled to Kyiv to support Ukraine's struggle as a personal gesture of solidarity.

Each of them faced the same security risks during their visits to Ukraine as the three European prime ministers did almost a year ago.

Moscow is furious about visits to Ukraine

The danger of being killed by Russia, in wartime conditions, is real for any foreign leader who dares to travel to Kyiv or another Ukrainian city in the future.

Former UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson was also in danger, when he visited Kyiv and met President Zelensky last Sunday. But he was also one of the few Western leaders who, while in office, could hear what a direct threat from Putin personally looked like.

"He [Putin] sort of threatened me at one point and said, 'Boris, I don't want to hurt you, but with a missile, it would only take a minute', or something like that", Johnson said in a documentary for BBC Two.

The head of German diplomacy, Annalena Baerbock, visited Ukraine on January 10. She stayed in Kharkiv, a city of millions in the east of the country, only about 30 kilometres from the Russian occupation forces.

Her visit angered Russian State Duma deputy Aleksey Zhuravlyov, a far left supporter of Vladimir Putin's policies.

"I don't understand it: Baerbock is walking around Kharkiv. Don't we know where she is? Don't we have such high-precision weapons?" Zhuravlyov commented on state Russian TV.

Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen must have caused the same anger in Moscow, when she visited the destroyed Mykolaiv on Monday, several tens of kilometres from Russian artillery.

International conventions do not exist for Russia

The fact that Russia has not attacked any foreign official visiting Ukraine does not mean that such a possibility is excluded as long as its aggression continues.

On the contrary, such an option is realistic until the very last day of the war. During its aggression against Ukraine, Russia has demonstrated that it does not pay any attention to international obligations regarding the protection of civilians in wartime.

Why would Russia respect the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Crimes against Internationally Protected Persons (New York Convention) from 1973, although it signed it a year later and ratified it in 1976?

Conversely, Putin's Russia has shown many times that the murder of political figures, particularly renegade oligarchs, is, and has been, its modus operandi.

Foreign leaders were not its targets until the

attack on Ukraine, but in war conditions, this could change, particularly if it could contribute to the achievement of the war aims.

Whether Russia will do so or not depends only on its assessment of how much such an act would help its conquest efforts in Ukraine. No other obstacles exist.

Assassinations on Russia's doorstep

The sudden death of Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei on November 26, just two days before his meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, remains suspicious.

The late Makei advocated that Belarus improve its relations with the West and distance itself from Russia, but with the start of the invasion of Ukraine, he suddenly changed his views and provided full support to the Kremlin.

It was the mysterious death of this Belarusian diplomat that fuelled unofficial reports that the real target was actually the president of Belarus, Alexander Lukashenko.

With the assassination attempt on him, and the death of his most senior diplomat, Lukashenko will have been under severe pressure to order his troops finally to join the Russian army in the invasion of Ukraine.

Volodymyr Zelensky, according to the reports of the Ukrainian security services, was also target of Russian plans for murder.

Oleksiy Danilov, Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, spoke about one of these attempts, which was prevented, at the very beginning of the aggression, saying that the assassination would have been carried out by members of Chechen units under the command of Ramzan Kadyrov.

By abandoning many international agreements and fora that oblige it to respect human rights, including the recent withdrawal from the European Convention on Human Rights, Russia feels no legal and ethical obstacles to carry out an assassination attempt against any foreign statesman in wartime conditions.