

Erin Burnett (00:00:00)

Will Ripley begins our coverage Outfront live in Kyiv tonight. Will, there are a lot of things happening. You traveled north to Ukraine's border with Belarus, where Russia is once again assembling troops tonight. What did you find?

Will Ripley (00:00:17)

You know, to say there are a lot of things happening is such an accurate reflection when we had the air raid sirens going off here in Kyiv yet again today, when you have Russia suffering a series of losses on frontlines both in the east and the south. And now, to the north there is joint combat training happening between Russian soldiers and Belarusian soldiers. Remember, Belarus allowed Russia to basically drive right across their border and start this war more than nine months ago. And tonight there is growing concern here in Kyiv that Belarus may actually join the fight with their own soldiers.

Will Ripley (00:01:45)

We've just arrived at a Ukrainian military forward operating base near the Belarusian border where they're going to show us the fortifications that they put in place to protect against the potential Russian ground invasion. A few miles away in neighboring Belarus, an ominous show of force. Russian and Belarusian troops holding joint combat drills like they did earlier this year just before the invasion. Are you concerned about the troop buildup on the Belarusian border?

Oleksii Reznikov (00:01:55)

We have to be concerned because we have not-friendly neighbor. But we have 2,500 kilometers not-friendly borders, Belarus, Russia, and temporarily occupied territories. We have to be ready here.

Will Ripley (00:01:55)

Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov tells CNN Ukraine is preparing in case the Russians invade from Belarus again. He says they urgently need more weapons, anti-tank systems, more advanced missile defense. "We are not afraid of them," says the Captain Dimitri. "We don't expect them to come here, but if they do, we'll be ready." These soldiers are constantly rehearsing, ready at a moment's notice. Do you think the Russians are going to try to come again? "Let them try," says Igor. Before the war, he repaired sewing machines. Now, he drives this. How quickly can you get guys to the trenches if you need to? "It will be very fast," he says. They started building these trenches in early April, reinforcing them ever since, getting ready for the Russians. They

overpowered Ukrainian defenses at the start of the war. Six weeks and thousands of deaths nationwide later, soldiers from this battalion helped force them out. Was there ever a point where it was overwhelming, where you thought, we can't do this, we can't fight them off? "I never felt like that," says Serhiy, "Because I know there is no way back. We have families at home, we have children." He says that 2,500 Russian vehicles actually passed right down this road. Now, we are driving down the same road to a bridge near the border, well within Russian artillery range. When the Russians invaded more than nine months ago, they just drove down this road, right over this bridge. But now, the bridge has been rigged with explosives. And these swamplands, which are frozen over, are full of mines. When the first convoy of an estimated 30,000 Russians came in February, the Ukrainians were unprepared and outnumbered, 6:1. Now, like soldiers from a century ago, they hunker down in the trenches, waiting for whatever comes down the road.

Will Ripley (00:03:34)

And tonight, Erin, here in Kyiv, they are closely monitoring a flurry of Belarusian military activity just in the last week. Today, the nation announced a new foreign minister, a new air force chief. Last week, it was counterterrorism exercises along with those joint combat drills with the Russians. Not to mention, the snap military inspections, all of it raising alarm bells and crucially diverting resources potentially from the east, from the south, to the north. Is this an attempt by Russia to try to distract Ukraine while they focus on other areas? Or could this be yet another danger facing this democracy under siege?