

Conflict Update # 331

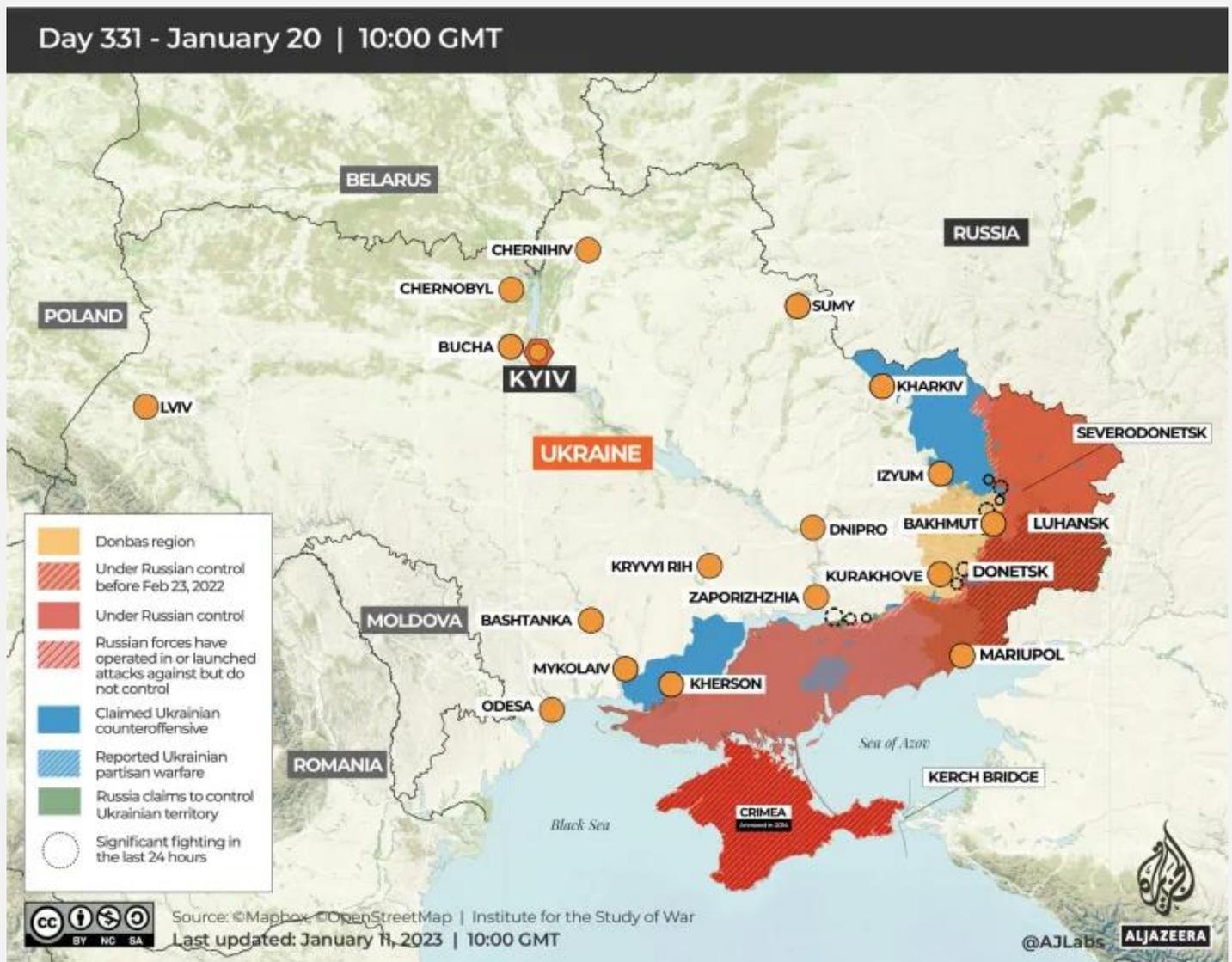
January 20th, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses¹ – 119,300 (770) soldiers killed, 3,139 (+3) enemy tanks, 6,241 (+6) armored combat vehicles, 2,129 (+7) artillery systems, 442 (+0) MLRS systems, 220 (+0) air defense systems, 287 (+0) warplanes, 277 (+0) helicopters, 1,886 (+4) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 749 (+0) cruise missiles, 17 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,903 (+7) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 190 (+0) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways

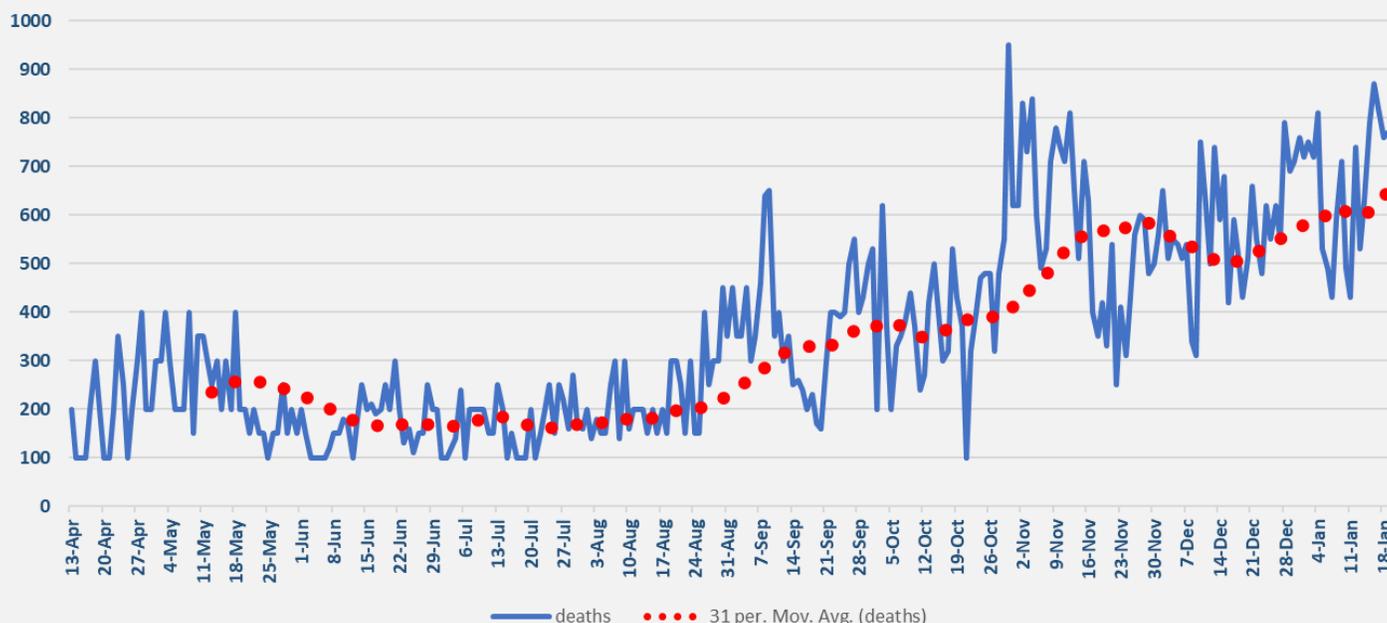


The Russian army launched a “local offensive” near Orikhiv² in southern Ukraine, a Russian-installed official said.

The Kremlin warned that any Ukrainian attacks on Crimea³ would be “extremely dangerous” after The New York Times reported that US officials were warning to the idea of helping Kyiv attack the Black Sea peninsula.

Kremlin also said the sooner Ukraine accepts Russia’s demands⁴, namely Moscow’s claims to Ukrainian territory in the country’s east and south, the sooner war can end.

Russian troop deaths by day



Russian troops launch 'local offensive' in southern Ukraine²⁰ - While Moscow occupies large swathes of the south of the Zaporizhzhia region, its main city, also called Zaporizhzhia, has not fallen to Russian forces.

The Russian army has launched a “local offensive” near the town of Orikhiv in southern Ukraine, where the front has been largely stagnant for months, a Russian-installed official said Thursday.

“Our troops have gone into a local offensive around Orikhiv,” the head of Moscow’s installed authorities in Ukraine’s Zaporizhzhia region, Vladimir Rogov said, according to Russian state media.

Rogov alleged the front had slightly shifted and that some Ukrainian troops had retreated.

Putin’s Next Big Mistake: Sending T-14 Armata Tanks To Ukraine²¹ - Ukrainian forces might soon begin to encounter new Russian T-14 Armata main battle tanks on the battlefield, according to the latest Western intelligence.

According to British Military Intelligence, the Russian military is considering deploying a small number of its latest T-14 Armata tanks in Ukraine.

Satellite imagery from late December showed a small number of T-14 Armata tanks in a training area in southern Russia that has been used by Russian units to prepare for deployment in Ukraine.

US designates Russia’s Wagner Group as ‘transnational criminal organization’²⁷ - The US government has designated the Russian private military contractor known as the Wagner Group as a “transnational criminal

organization,” giving the notorious mercenary outfit the same status as international drug cartels and human trafficking organisations under US law.

National Security Council Coordinator for Strategic Communications John Kirby on Friday said the move is the result of Wagner’s ongoing operations in Ukraine, which he described as “committing atrocities and human rights abuses.”

Mr Kirby also said American intelligence has assessed that Putin’s war effort is increasingly relying on Wagner, leading to tensions between Russian defence officials and the owner of Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin.

“Wagner is becoming a rival power center to the Russian military and other Russian ministries. Prigozhin and his fighters have criticized Russian generals and defense officials for their performance on the battlefield. Prigozhin is trying to advance his own interest in Ukraine and Wagner is making military decisions based largely on what ... they will generate for Prigozhin in terms of positive publicity,” he said.

The White House spokesman also unveiled satellite photographs showing Wagner has had to turn to North Korea as a supplier for munitions and materiel as a result of US sanctions on Russia.

“While we assess that the amount of material delivered to Wagner has not changed battlefield dynamics in Ukraine, we do expect that it will continue to receive North Korean weapons systems. We obviously condemn North Korea's actions and we urge them to cease these deliveries to Wagner immediately and we are going further by taking action against Wagner itself,” he said.

The designation of Wagner as a transnational criminal organization follows the Commerce Department’s decision last month to designate the mercenary group as a military end user, which makes it unlawful for the group to access any equipment containing US components or anything based on US technology.

“These actions recognize the transcontinental threat that Wagner poses including through its ongoing pattern of serious criminal activity,” he said. “Our message to any company that is considering providing support to Wagner is simply this: Wagner is a criminal organization that is committing widespread atrocities and human rights abuses. And we will work relentlessly to identify disrupt, expose and target those who are assisting.”

Putin

It’s Not Normal¹⁶ - After the U.S.S.R. fell apart in 1991, a sentiment often expressed by people in Russia and its other former republics was the desire to live in a “normal” country -- the hope that their country could soon shed both the debilitating legacy of the past seven-plus decades and the wrenching uncertainty that the collapse of Soviet Union brought into their lives.

One of the countless phenomena that contributed to the sense of abnormality was the way sections of shoddily built apartment blocks sometimes collapsed into rubble, usually as a result of household gas explosions or, in the case of Russia, bombings blamed by the state on separatists from Chechnya.

The blasts made for grimly absurd images, tearing away exterior walls and exposing whole rooms, more or less intact, to the open air and the floodlights shone by rescue workers in the night -- surreal remnants of lives blown to pieces.

It was hard not to recall those incidents on January 14, when a Russian missile struck a multistory apartment block in Dnipro, Ukraine, bringing down an entire section of the building and killing at least 45 people, several of them children.

‘Do I Even Exist?’ - Indelible images showed one of the survivors, Anastasia Shvets, 23, crouching near a bathtub in the ruins of her family’s apartment. Her parents were killed, though she did not know their fate when she wrote, in a social media post from the hospital a day after the attack, “I just want my parents. I’m in pain. Do I even exist?”

Another photo showed the largely intact yellow kitchen of an apartment that reports said belonged to the family of Mykhaylo Korenovskiy, a top regional boxing coach who was killed in the attack. His wife said she and their two young daughters were outside on a walk and Mykhaylo had planned to join them after stopping by the apartment to eat after a tournament, the media outlet Meduza said in a report on several of the victims.

The lives of many of the victims and survivors had already been upended -- or torn apart -- by Russia's aggression against Ukraine. Shvets's boyfriend was killed at the front a few months ago, and the father of a 19-year-old woman, Liana, who was killed along with her mother, Tetyana, is a captive of Russia.

Trying To Live - But images like those of Shvets and the Korenovskiy family's kitchen were stark testaments to Ukrainians living normal lives -- or trying to do so. The overarching aim of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, more than 30 years after the countries peacefully parted ways in the Soviet collapse, seems to be simply this: to deprive Ukrainians of the chance to live normal lives.

Putin has used many arguments in his attempts to justify the invasion, as well as Russia's aggression against Ukraine since 2014, when it seized Crimea and fomented war in the eastern Donbas region. Several of them boil down to the claim that the country posed a threat to Russia.

A more detailed and even less defensible version of that argument, which Putin and others have made repeatedly and without evidence, is that the West was seeking to use Ukraine as a staging ground to destroy Russia.

But many analysts suspect that what Putin really fears is the prospect of Russians looking at a thriving, democratic Ukraine -- a "normal" country -- and wondering what's stopping Russia from acquiring those attributes.

"A democratic, Westward-oriented Ukraine with [a] strong market economy would pose [a] nightmare for [the] Kremlin and [Russian Foreign Minister Sergei] Lavrov," Steven Pifer, a foreign policy analyst and former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine, wrote on Twitter on January 19, after a press conference at which Lavrov said -- among other things -- that there "must be no military infrastructure in Ukraine that poses a direct threat" to Russia.

"That Ukraine," Pifer wrote, "would cause people in Russia to question why they cannot have same political voice and democracy that Ukrainians have."

The large-scale invasion that Putin launched last February has had a devastating effect on Ukraine, killing tens of thousands of civilians and combatants and driving millions from their homes. It has also plunged Russia's future into uncertainty, prompting hundreds of thousands of citizens to flee as soldiers and mercenaries die at the front, often poorly prepared and ill-equipped, and Western sanctions and decreasing reliance on Russian energy exports add to burdens on the economy.

'Blatant Torture' - The prospects for a democratic Russia whose citizens have a political voice substantially eroded over Putin's first two decades in power and have been set back still further since January 17, 2021, when opposition leader Aleksei Navalny was arrested upon his return to the country following treatment for a near-fatal nerve-agent poisoning he blames on Putin.

Over the past two weeks, groups of Russian doctors and lawyers have urged the authorities to stop what the attorneys called the "blatant torture" of Navalny, who has been placed in solitary confinement and, according to his associates, putting his health and life at risk by denying him medicine.

More than 80 local and regional lawmakers across Russia -- a tiny fraction of a political system dominated by the Kremlin-controlled party -- voiced their support on January 18. They demanded Putin, the Prosecutor-General's Office, and the presidential Council For Human Rights immediately provide Navalny with medical assistance and stop placing him in punitive solitary confinement.

Navalny, meanwhile, marked two years behind bars with an Instagram post in which he vowed to continue doing everything in his power, limited as it is by his imprisonment, to oppose Putin's government.

Russia "needs to be saved," he wrote -- it has been "robbed, wounded, dragged into an aggressive war, and turned into a prison led by the most dishonest and deceitful villains."

He added an upbeat remark: "I believe the darkness will disappear."

Putin, Lavrov Set New Accents to Russia's Case for War in Ukraine¹⁹ - Putin spoke to several audiences (arms industry workers, war veterans and self-styled investigators of war crimes) during a one-day visit to St. Petersburg (Kremlin.ru, January 18), while Lavrov provided a foreign policy roundup for Russian and international media in Moscow on the same day (Mid.ru, January 18).

Their new accents include: **first**, introducing the term "war" alongside that of "special military operation"; **second**, casting Europe as a recidivist enemy of Russia and, correspondingly, the Russian people as the collective victim; and **third**, openly acknowledging that Russia fights not simply against Ukraine but for a new international order writ large, correspondingly calling for a package negotiation with the West.

Prompted by questions from the audience to characterize the ongoing "special military operation," Putin and Lavrov used the term "war" much to the surprise of Russian commentators. Putin's rationalization: "Our special military operation is an effort to stop the war (sic)." Lavrov's admission: "I do not shy away from pronouncing the word 'war.' This is our answer to the [West's] hybrid war against us."

These explanations hearken back to familiar Russian concepts: Putin's to that of "coercion to peace"; both Putin's and Lavrov's to that of "escalating to de-escalate" (in this case, answering hybrid war with full-scale war). If the use of the term "war" persists at the official level, it would signal intentions to move away from the current "partial" mobilization to a fuller military recruitment effort.

Consistent with the "war" theme, Putin and Lavrov drew parallels between Russia's past "Fatherland wars" and its current confrontation with the West. Both officials stipulated in almost identical words that Emperor Napoleon and Adolf Hitler each led the whole of continental Europe against Russia in 1812 and 1941–1945, respectively, in vain. Lavrov added that "just as Napoleon and Hitler ... so has the United States formed a coalition of practically all Europeans against our country." In Putin's set-piece dialogue with his audience, "at least 11 European countries allied with Germany" were said to have participated in the blockade of Leningrad.

The Kremlin hints at presenting "Europe" with genocide claims on Russia's behalf. According to Putin, "The [international] recognition of the genocide against the civilian population of the Soviet Union is an exceptionally important matter. At the Nuremberg Trials it was not possible to consider or even present the full evidence about this genocide. ... Citizens of very many European countries committed crimes. We never raised this matter [until now] because we did not want to spoil our relations with these many countries." Lavrov overbid, "The goal is the same: a final solution to the Russian question. Hitler wanted a final solution to the Jewish question." (Comment – Granted, there was exceptional violence against the Russian people and the perpetrators were mostly held responsible. But what transpired after 1945 when Stalin purged the Soviet Union of millions of innocent civilians should also be re-surfaced should Putin and Lavrov seek to dredge up history, as should how Stalin starved millions in the Ukrainian famine – what Ukraine calls "The Holodomor.")

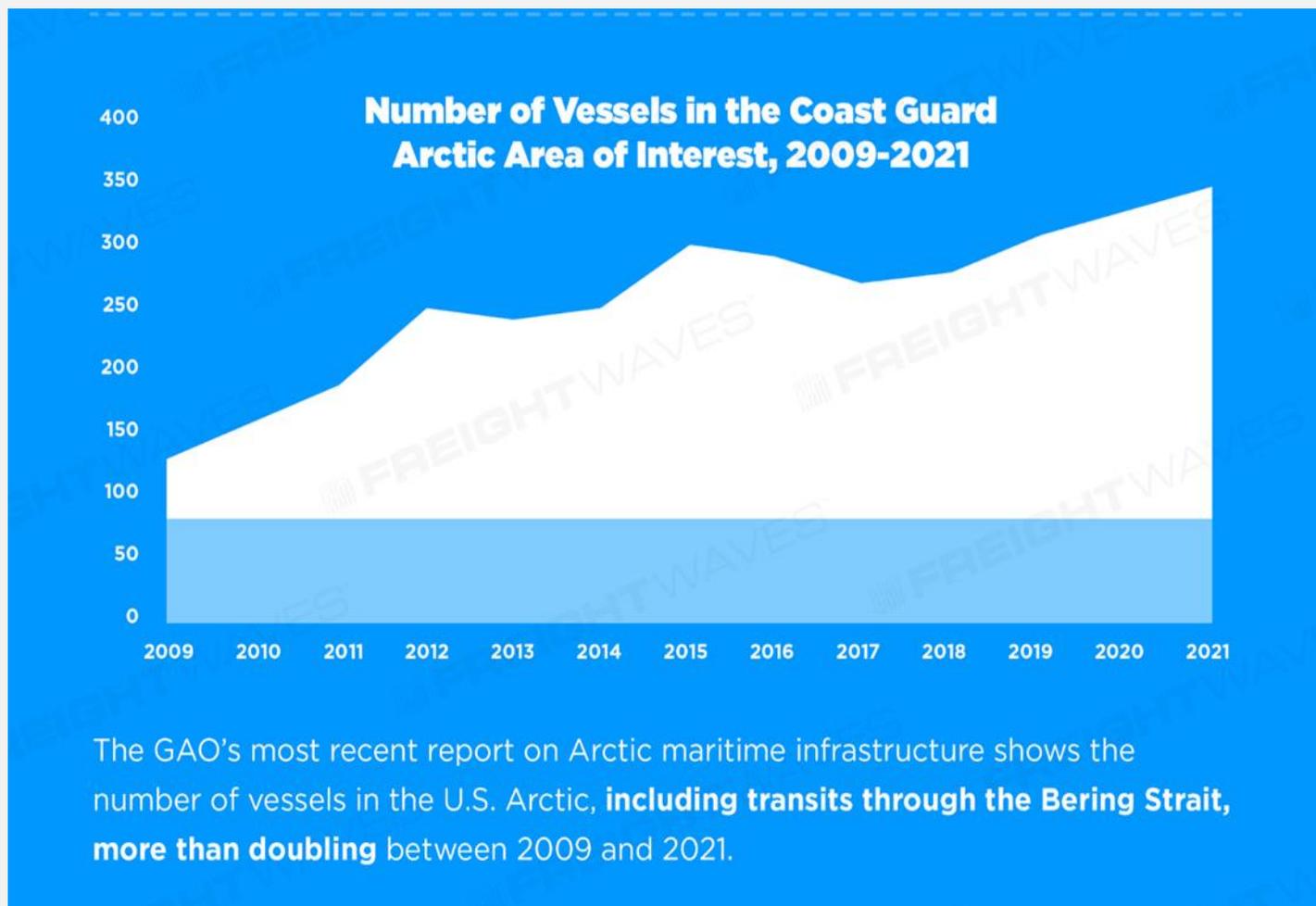
Portraying those two "Fatherland wars" as all-European wars against Russia is a novel interpretation. Analogies between the current situation and those wars (let alone "genocide" claims) are meant to define Russia in contradistinction with Europe and deepen the sense of victimhood and grievance officially inculcated to the Russian people. It all serves to intensify mobilization for the ongoing war.

Arctic

How Russia is leveraging its Arctic region for global influence¹⁸ - For the past decade, while the rest of us weren't looking, Russia has invested seriously in its Arctic region. Now, some 20% of the country's GDP and 30% of its exports come from these chilly lands. Climate change has softened the landscape where critical oil and gas reserves were stuck underground, while melting ice caps have allowed tanker ships to transport that fuel across Eurasia.

It's a fascinating trend that's set to get more critical in the coming decades. To learn more, we spoke with Malte Humpert, senior fellow and founder of the Arctic Institute. Our interview transcript was lightly condensed and edited for clarity.

We have to distinguish between the ice-covered Arctic and the non-ice-covered Arctic. There's always been shipping in the Arctic around the Norwegian coastline, Iceland and some shipping along Greenland in the summer, whenever there is no ice.



But what's really happened in the last 10, 12, 15 years is that we are shipping in an area that was previously just the domain of nuclear icebreakers along the Russian coastline, or through the Canadian Archipelago, along the Northwest Passage. So, that's really where the big change has been happening over the last 10, 12, 15 years.

Whenever they're talking about Arctic shipping or new trends or routes, it's really along the Russian coastline, which goes from Murmansk on the western side to Kamchatka in the far east. It is, in theory, a shortcut to connect markets in Europe and in Asia.

Arctic shipping routes mostly feature liquefied natural gas and oil tankers. No container ships yet!

In the '80s and '90s, and even in the 2000s, it was really just nuclear icebreakers providing supplies to local communities, to supply some military installations. Now, we are seeing a lot of destination shipping. Russia is using the Northern Sea Route to bring oil and gas resources, some coal, some iron ore, but mostly LNG and oil from the Arctic to markets in Europe and in Asia. That's the big volume, and that's where Russia has been investing a lot of money into new icebreakers, into new port infrastructures, into new ice-capable tankers, LNG and oil.

We are [also] seeing some branded shipping. There have been a couple hundred voyages now. It started really in 2009 with a German company called Beluga, which was the first one to send cargo ships through the Northern Sea Route. From then, we're seeing anywhere from a few dozen to now 70, 80, 90 voyages a year. This year we didn't really see any, because of Ukraine and sanctions.

A lot of companies that did some trial voyages the last few years decided not to do it anymore.

But the biggest one is Cosco of China. They've probably been the most adventurous and doing the most trial voyages to gain operational experience. And they've probably done 60, 70, 80 voyages in the last seven, eight years. They're sending easily boxed cargo, like large windmill parts, or windmill blades, or some iron ore from Asia to Europe to use those quick shortcuts.

[There's also] Maersk, which did one container ship in 2019. That was a big story, when they had a new ice-capable container ship that needed to go to the Baltics. Instead of going the traditional route through the Suez Canal, they just went through the Arctic. It generated a lot of headlines, but it was a one-off voyage.

By and large, it is Russia doing it. Russia is doing it to bring natural resources from the Arctic to Europe and Asia.

China and Russia are becoming closer than ever, thanks to the Arctic!

China is a big investor in Russian Arctic energy projects. They are the recipient of a lot of LNG that flows into China. This year, China is receiving about 25, 30% of the LNG produced at Yamal LNG.

They have a lot of long-term 20-year, 30-year projects. [China is] gobbling up all the LNG being produced anywhere around the world. The Arctic is no exception there and China is really focused on long-term energy security, and receiving all the LNG that they can. That's the same for the Russian Arctic.

A lot of people focus on the Northern Sea as a potential shipping, export, container shipping route for China. That's really theoretical. There's still too much ice. It's not reliable enough. For China, really, the benefit of the Northern Sea Route and its connection with Russia is the receipt of LNG and oil.

Russia is now the largest oil provider for China, ahead of Saudi Arabia. It's a lot closer to go from the Russian Arctic to China than it is to go from Saudi Arabia through the Strait of Malacca and Singapore and the South China Sea.

Russia isn't just investing into Arctic shipping. It's investing into an Arctic military.

Russia is investing large amounts of resources into revitalizing old military bases, building new ones, building runways, and building large radar installations. It saw explosions on the Nord Stream pipelines some months ago, and that is exactly the kind of thing that Russia wants to not have happen to its own investments in the Arctic.

That's why there is a ring of military bases, and forward-looking radar, and S300 and S400 missiles and aircraft — because they know that the Arctic is hugely important for economic development.

On Tuesday, they approved another billion dollars to build two more nuclear icebreakers. That's just something they do on a Tuesday. While in the U.S., it took 10 years to have the Coast Guard contract one conventional icebreaker that

won't be ready before the end of the decade, because it has to be built domestically, and the U.S. hasn't built an icebreaker in 35 years.

So, it's totally understandable why Russia is investing that much money and effort and political capital. Putin is there whenever they launch a new nuclear icebreaker or they open a new military base. Putin is there for the photo op. And it caters to an element of Russia, the Russian empire, Soviet Union, the Arctic, the Arctic frontier. In the U.S., you don't really have that psyche.

In Canada, 10, 15 years ago, Prime Minister Harper did that a little bit. He would become a little bit more nationalistic when he would talk about the Arctic, and how the Arctic is part of the Canadian heritage, and the Arctic is Canada, Canada is the Arctic, and so forth. But again, no one cared. Of course I'm exaggerating here, but you don't have 20% of your GDP being generated above the Arctic Circle.

Impacts

Eye in the sky: Agri satellites above Ukraine poised to avert crop disruptions and supply shortages¹⁷ - A satellite platform operating in the skies above Ukraine, currently monitoring the country's crucial crop outputs during wartime, is set to expand. It will offer collected data and analysis to other countries looking for help in rapidly assessing dynamic crop changes, potentially anticipating food chain disruption, shortages and famines.

NASA Harvest and Planet Labs, in partnership with the University of Maryland in the US and the University of Strasbourg in France, have been using satellite imaging to analyze crops from above, tracking their day-to-day changes.

The assessment system, currently monitoring crops in Ukraine, will be made widely available to governments, NGOs and interested parties, aiming to provide data to inform decisions made by key policymakers.

Since the joint platform debuted in 2022, Planet's fleet of satellites has been "monitoring frontline agricultural activity and the impact of war on crop production" as part of a team dedicated to building crop maps, estimating yield and similar analyses to track rapid crop changes.

"Perhaps the most surprising information gleaned from the satellite imagery over Ukraine is that there is more crop production in the Russian-occupied areas than was initially expected," he notes.

"Ukrainian farmers planted winter crops before the beginning of the war. Eventually, we saw crops being massively shelled then still being harvested a few weeks later, demonstrating the massive resilience capacity of the farmers facing the war. Currently, continuously dropping wheat prices indicate this mitigated impact of the Ukrainian conflict on grain market prices."

However, the platform spotted expected damages across the frontline.

"Additionally, spring crops were planted in occupied territories, despite the war. However, barren crops were much more frequent along the front line than those in occupied territories."

"Ukraine mobilized a big team on our side," notes Wagner.

Comments and Reports

'They guaranteed he was inside' Russia's Wagner mercenary group is reportedly sending empty coffins to its fighters' families²² - The Wagner Group is sending empty coffins to the families of its mercenaries in Ukraine, according to a new report.

Journalists from TV Rain spoke to a woman they referred to as Angelina (whose name was changed for security reasons) whose husband reportedly joined the Wagner Group from a Russian prison. Angelina said she learned about her husband's recruitment from the wife of another prisoner, but that she doubts he joined the group willingly, because he had a positive view of Ukraine.

In the fall, Angelina said, her husband stopped responding to her calls and messages, and in December, Wagner Group representatives contacted her and told her he had died on the battlefield near Bakhmut. Later, she was sent a sealed coffin, official Wagner Group medals, and a death certificate.

When Angelina inquired about whether she could be sure the body in the coffin belonged to her husband, she was told there could be no mistake: "They told us that there was no need to open the coffin, because before [soldiers'] departure [to the warzone], they take some kind of DNA, and when they find corpses, they compare [the DNA]. They told us they could guarantee one hundred percent that it was him," she told TV Rain.

Several weeks after the funeral, however, Angelina received a message from a stranger who claimed her husband was alive and was in Ukraine's Donetsk region. A few days later, she got a call from a man who said he was a Ukrainian Security Service employee. He, too, said her husband was alive, claiming he'd been captured by the Ukrainian military in late October. The caller even described the wound that Wagner officials had claimed caused Angelina's husband's death, saying he'd ultimately survived.

After that, according to TV Rain, Angelina contacted Russia's Federal Prison Service, but the agency said it couldn't provide any information about her husband due to confidentiality rules. The Ukrainian military, however, confirmed to her that her husband was listed among the wounded and is a POW.

TV Rain journalists have reportedly found several similar stories on social media and in Telegram groups.

If Turkey Blocks Sweden and Finland, Will NATO Boot Turkey?²³ Article by James Stavridis- We have reached one of the most important moments in the seven-decade history of the NATO: Sweden and Finland are set to join the alliance, just as the Russian war on Ukraine reaches its first anniversary. Yet Turkey — alone of all the members — is slowing this vital chance to bring Stockholm and Helsinki on board. It is time to stop this exercise in unilateral obstruction and simply say "yes." Turkish reticence, led by President Erdogan, is a gift to a heinous war criminal, Russian President Vladimir Putin.

In 2009, when I became supreme allied commander of NATO, the first capital I visited was not London, despite the UK being the strongest supporter of our collective efforts in Afghanistan other than the US. Nor did I choose to go to Paris, Berlin, Rome, Madrid — not even Athens, despite my Greek-American heritage. The first place I went to was Ankara, Turkey. I wanted to recognize everything the Turks had done for NATO before and after the fall of the Soviet Union.

The Turks had provided troops, aircraft and ships to every NATO mission for years — Afghanistan, peacekeeping in the Balkans, counterpiracy, cybersecurity and so on. Under my command, they provided combat capability to the 2011 intervention in Libya, something other major allies chose to avoid. Every time I asked for something, they stood and delivered.

I became good friends with Turkish defense chief Ilker Basbug and foreign minister (and later prime minister), Ahmet Davutoglu. I met with General Hulusi Akar, who is now Ankara's defense minister, and toured the many Turkish bases supporting NATO missions. And I met with Erdogan, who was then prime minister, several times. He struck me as a very hard-nosed individual, determined to pursue whatever course of action that he felt was the right one for his nation.

Turkey is taking this counterproductive stance over what it sees as the Nordic nations' support for terrorist groups among Turkey's Kurdish minority, in particular their refusal to extradite dozens of Kurds wanted by the government. I can understand that. The governments of all three nations should be in close consultation to make sure that nothing

any alliance member does is disruptive to the internal security of another member. But Sweden in particular has already given many, many concessions to Turkey during the expansion process.

The great challenge to the alliance isn't terrorism: It is the unconscionable invasion of Ukraine by Russia. Putin continues to shadowbox at NATO-member Estonia, which has a significant ethnic-Russian population. He repeatedly talks about his "nuclear options," seeking to frighten Europe in general and NATO in particular.

This is what has spurred the two famously neutral nations to apply for NATO membership. Both have fought against Russia over the long centuries. Both remained (at least technically) on the sidelines during the Cold War, when a brutal Soviet dictatorship threatened the free world. That they chose now to drop their neutrality should give some sense of how seriously they take the threat of Putin to the global order.

Sweden has a high-tech military and produces the fifth-generation Saab Gripen fighters, which I was thrilled to have in our operations over Libya. The Finns, a nation of only five million, can put hundreds of thousands of well-trained and fully equipped ground combat forces in the field in a matter of weeks. We want them on our team.

At some point soon, some NATO members are going to begin asking, "If it is a choice between Sweden/Finland and Turkey, maybe we should look at our options." That would be a mistake. Turkey boasts the second-largest army in NATO, has important facilities including Incirlik Air Base, and hosts NATO's overall land-warfare command in Izmir.

NATO needs Turkey to continue being an active and positive member. It also needs to add Finland and Sweden. No one wants to have to choose between them. It's up to Erdogan to ensure that doesn't have to happen.

Comment – This is not going to happen. Turkey on the southern front of a Russian geopolitical menace is an absolute necessity, as it has been for centuries in the "Great Game." Russia is paranoid about the Bosphorus and Balkans from where multiple invasions have arisen. It is one of the 9 gateways into Russia that haunt them.

Keep it that way. But they will need to figure out how to contain Erdogan because he has bigger ambitions and see's a demise in Russian geopolitical stature as an open invitation to expanding Turkish rule and roles to something similar to pre-WWI Ottoman days.

Iran is keenly watching Turkey as it too has ambitions in the Central Asian theater. The Mullahs harken back to the days of the Persian Empire just as much as Turkey harkens back to its historical glories.

Finland premier Sanna Marin warns against territorial concessions to Russia by Ukraine²⁴ - Russian gains

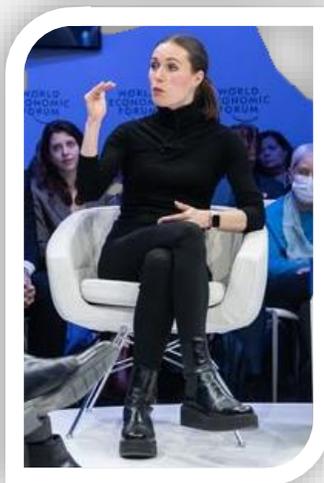
in Ukraine would show that invading land or natural resources, says Finnish

Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin the war in Ukraine, it would show that of land or natural resources.

She says Europe and other Western message that "we will support as long years, whatever it takes — we will

Speaking Tuesday at the World Switzerland, Marin added that "it's for ready to negotiate, when they are

She says "the story might have been acted stronger when Russia illegally



another country leads to the amassing of prime minister.

(pictured) says that if Russia were to win invading another country leads to gains

democracies should send Putin the as needed — five years, 10 years, 15 support Ukraine, and this will not stop."

Economic Forum meeting in Davos, Ukrainians to decide when they are ready to make some peace agreement."

very different" if Western is allies had annexed Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula in 2014.

Containment

Ukraine handed huge boost as 'world-beating' UK tanks tipped to decimate Russia²⁵ - Major Mark Lambert, of the King's Royal Hussars, said the fighting machines "excel" in firepower, manoeuvrability and survivability.

He said they "work really well" in wooded areas but can also hit targets two and a half miles away in open areas.

The British Army say the Challenger 2 prioritizes "firepower" and "protection", with its L30A1 120mm gun deadly accurate. It holds the record for the furthest distance to destroy another tank.

"It is a fantastic tank. Any tank is judged on firepower, manoeuvrability and survivability. The Challenger 2 excels in all of these." The Challenger 2 is slower than Leopard 2 tanks. Many armies in Europe use the Leopard 2 tanks.

It is fitted with Chobham Dorchester armour and the exact composition of it remains a secret.

Challenger 2 tanks being sent to the frontline of the Ukraine war have "world-beating" armour and can outgun enemy units, British troops have declared.US, Allies Push Armor and Rockets Into Ukraine¹⁵ -

The aid package comes amid worries about a Russian spring offensive.

Ninety Stryker armored vehicles, 59 more Bradley Fighting Vehicles, and a large number of rockets and artillery rounds will go to Ukraine in a new military aid package valued at \$2.5 billion, the Biden administration announced Thursday.

The announcement came a day ahead of a meeting of the Defense Contact Group, an assembly of nations that have pledged to support Kyiv as it fights off Russian invaders. It will take weeks to train Ukrainian troops on a previous group of Bradleys. Some observers expect Russia to launch a new offensive in the spring.

The new package also includes:

- More munitions for National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS);
- Eight Avenger air defense systems;
- 295,000 25mm rounds for the Bradley Fighting Vehicles
- 53 Mine Resistant Ambush Protected Vehicles (MRAPs);
- 350 High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles (HMMWVs);
- 20,000 155mm artillery rounds;
- About 600 precision-guided 155mm artillery rounds;
- 95,000 105mm artillery rounds;
- About 11,800 120mm mortar rounds;
- Additional ammunition for High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS);
- 12 ammunition support vehicles;
- Six command post vehicles;
- 22 tactical vehicles to tow weapons;
- High-speed Anti-radiation missiles (HARMs);
- About 2,000 anti-armor rockets;
- More than 3 million rounds of small arms ammunition;
- Demolition equipment for obstacle clearing;
- Claymore anti-personnel munitions;
- Night vision devices;
- Spare parts and other field equipment.

Air defenses remain a critical need for the Ukrainians, defense undersecretary for policy Colin Kahl told reporters at the Pentagon on Wednesday. This week alone, a Russian barrage on the city of Dnipro killed 45 civilians, including six children.

But they also need new and heavier forms of ground armor to push the Russians from their entrenched positions in the south and east of the country.

"We've really been focused on air defense in the in the last few months," Kahl said. "There is a sense that after, you know, the kind of remarkable success the Ukrainians had up in the north around Kharkiv, and then the success they had down in Kherson to push the Russians back to the east side of the river...that with the winter months, the fighting is not stopped but what has shifted and the Russians are really digging in. They're...digging trenches. They're bringing these Dragon's Teeth [concrete barriers], laying mines."

The White House said Russia's "most recent air attacks against Ukraine's critical infrastructure again demonstrate the devastating impact of Russia's brutal war in Ukraine. This package provides additional NASAMS munitions and Avenger air defense systems to help Ukraine counter a range of short and medium range threats and bolster Ukraine's layered air defense."

This package will add to other military gear and munitions from other countries. The United Kingdom this week said it will send a squadron of Challenger 2 tanks and another 100,000 artillery rounds. In a joint statement on Thursday, the governments of Estonia, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, the Czech Republic, the Netherlands, and Slovakia said they would send a variety of items including 155mm FH-70 and 122mm D-30 howitzers, (Estonia), two Mi-8 helicopters (Lithuania), and S-60 anti-aircraft guns with 70,000 pieces of ammunition (Poland).

But the list was missing some expected items, such as German Leopard 2 tanks. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has been reluctant to send the tanks, but has hinted that Bonn might reconsider mind if the United States sent M1 Abrams tanks.

Kahl said Wednesday the Abrams is too fuel-thirsty and complex to help Ukraine. Meanwhile, Poland said in the joint statement that it would be willing to send a company of Leopard 2 tanks from its own arsenal, but did not make a firm commitment.

"Pending this, a wider coalition of Leopard 2 tanks donors will be established," the statement said.

No Leopard tanks for Ukraine as NATO allies fail to agree⁵ - The failure to agree to provide German tanks to Ukraine may signal growing divisions within NATO over supplying heavy weapons amid Russian warnings.

NATO and defence leaders from about 50 countries met at the American Ramstein Air Base in Germany on Friday, the latest in a series of arms-pledging conferences since Russia invaded Ukraine 11 months ago.

European leaders at the meeting again pressed Germany to give the green light for the delivery of German-made Leopard 2 tanks to Ukraine to drive back Moscow's forces – although no decision was made.

Comment – Germany is blocking the supply by demanding that the US first supply Abrahams tanks after which it will green-light NATO supplying their German-built Leopard tanks. This is the current impasse which according to reports is irking the White House in no small way.

Germany's new defence minister⁶, Boris Pistorius, confirmed that Berlin will not take unilateral action when it comes to providing Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine.

Several countries will announce plans to send German-made Leopard 2 tanks⁷ to Ukraine on Friday at a meeting at the Ramstein Air Base in Germany, Lithuania's defence minister said.

Denmark will donate 19 French-made Caesar howitzer⁸ artillery systems to Ukraine, the country's defence minister said.

The United Kingdom will send 600 Brimstone missiles⁹ to Ukraine to support the country in its fight against Russia, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace said.

Senior NATO commander Christopher Cavoli warned¹⁰ that Western tanks will not be a "silver bullet" for Ukraine in its fight with Russia, despite Kyiv's new arsenal outperforming Moscow's weaponry.

Diplomacy

The European Parliament approved a non-binding resolution¹¹ backing the creation of a special court to judge Russia "for the crime of aggression against Ukraine."

Serbian and pro-Ukraine activists filed criminal complaints¹² against Russia's private military Wagner Group and its supporters, accusing it of recruiting Serbs to fight in Ukraine.

Ukrainian authorities said they were investigating the circumstances¹³ surrounding a helicopter crash that killed the country's interior minister and 13 others.

Xi Jinping rebuffs Zelenskyy's 'dialogue' request as China says it'll play 'constructive role' in its 'own way'¹⁴ - At a press briefing, the Chinese Foreign Ministry diplomat said, "On the issue of the Ukrainian crisis, China has always been committed to stimulating peace and advancing negotiations," reported Tass.

"The Chinese side will continue to play a constructive role in a peaceful resolution of the crisis in its own way," the diplomat added.

The comments come after Zelenskyy wrote a letter to Xi Jinping inviting him for talks. Zelenskyy's wife and the First Lady of Ukraine, Olena Zelenska, during a speech on Tuesday at the World Economic Forum in Davos, said she had a letter for Xi. "It was a gesture and invitation to dialogue and I hope very much that there will be a response to this invitation," she told reporters.

President Zelenskyy has repeatedly sought to make contact with China's paramount leader since the onset of the war in Ukraine last year in the hope that Beijing will use its bilateral influence over Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Comment – Ukraine forms no part of the new bi-polar world order sought by China and Russia, among others. So any statement as contained above is not about peace talks and any Chinese constructive engagement therein, but about swaying world events with minimal risk to China but not about peace.

This will continue until and if Russia uses nuclear technology in any form. It was reported that Xi had personally cautioned Putin in this regard.

Iran refuses to recognise Russia's annexation of Crimea and four other regions of Ukraine²⁶ - Tehran does not officially recognise the Russian annexation of Crimea and four eastern regions of Ukraine despite "a great relationship with Moscow," Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian told TRT World.

"We recognise the sovereignty and territorial integrity of countries in the framework of international law. Therefore, despite a great relationship between Tehran and Moscow, we do not recognise the secession of Crimea <...>, the Luhansk and Donetsk regions from Ukraine <...>. Because we insist on our consistent principle in foreign policy: the Ukraine conflict is not a solution and we believe in our position as a fundamental political principle," he said as quoted by RIA Novosti.

Credits

- ¹ <https://www.mil.gov.ua/en/news/2022/09/22/the-total-combat-losses>
- ^{2 - 13} <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/20/russia-ukraine-war-list-of-key-events-day-331>
- ¹⁴ <https://www.msn.com/en-ca/money/other/xi-jinping-rebuffs-zelenskyy>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.defenseone.com/>
- ¹⁶ Steve Gutterman, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty newsletters@rferl.org
- ¹⁷ <https://www.foodingredientsfirst.com/>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.freightwaves.com/news/stronghow-russia-is-leveraging-its-arctic-region-for-global-influencestrong>
- ¹⁹ The Jamestown Foundation pubs@jamestown.org
- ²⁰ <https://www.firstpost.com/>
- ²¹ <https://www.19fortyfive.com/>
- ²² <https://meduza.io/en/feature/2023/01/20/they-guaranteed-he-was-inside>
- ²³ <https://www.bing.com/news>
- ²⁴ <https://www.marketwatch.com/>
- ²⁵ <https://www.express.co.uk/>
- ²⁶ <https://novayagazeta.eu/>
- ²⁷ <https://ca.finance.yahoo.com/>