

# Conflict Update # 338

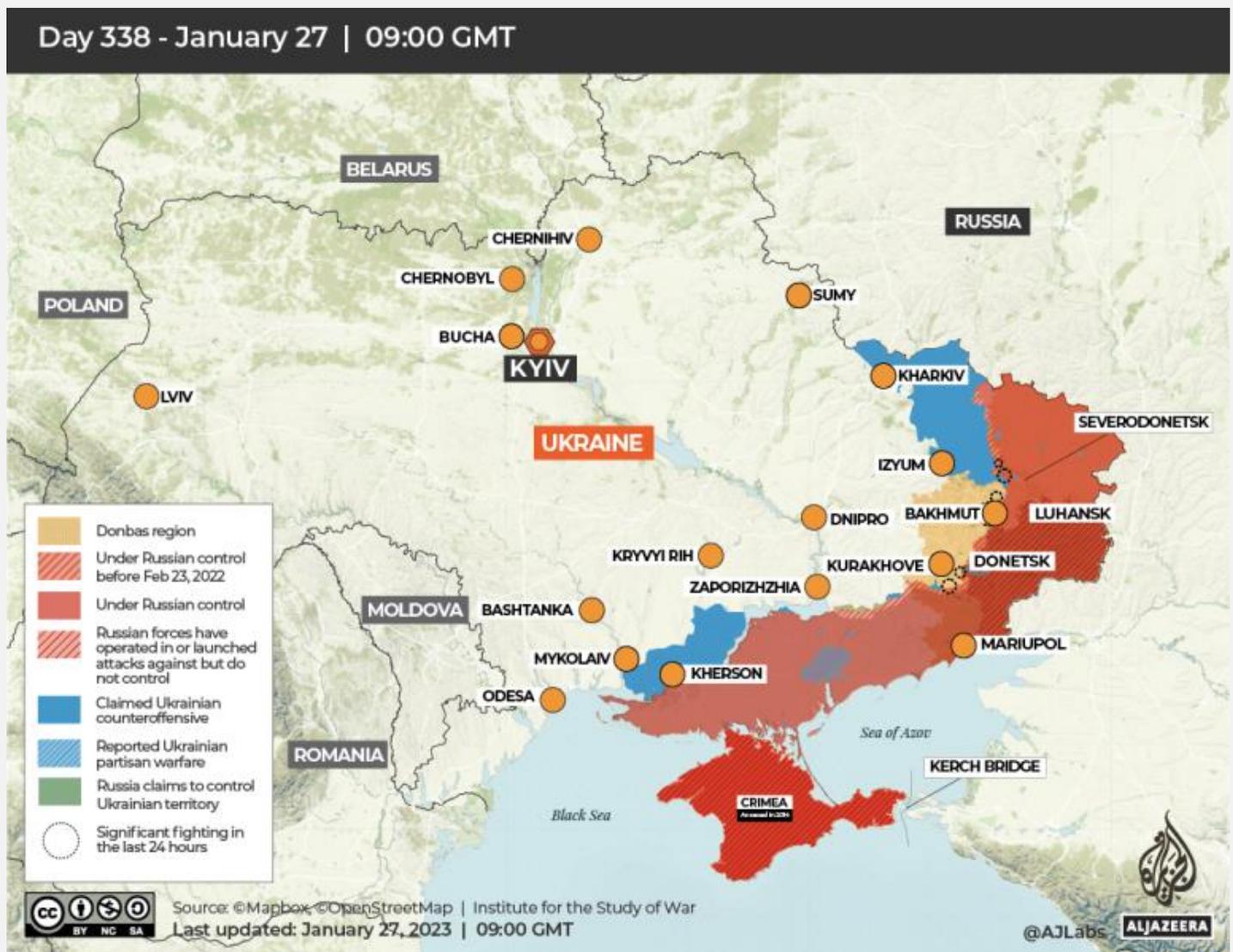
January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses<sup>1</sup>** – 124,710 (850) soldiers killed, 3,182 (+7) enemy tanks, 6,340 (+6) armored combat vehicles, 2,180 (+11) artillery systems, 452 (+0) MLRS systems, 221 (+1) air defense systems, 292 (+0) warplanes, 283 (+1) helicopters, 1,941 (+33) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 796 (+47) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,001 (+15) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 199 (+4) units of equipment.

## Key Takeaways



**By the numbers** – Another huge day of losses for Russian battalion soldiers.



**Wagner mercenaries shot for fleeing, says ex-commander<sup>7</sup>** - A former commander of Russia's Wagner group, who fled to Norway, witnessed comrades being shot as they tried to flee the frontline in Ukraine, according to his Norwegian lawyer.

Andrei Medvedev, who escaped Russia over the Russian-Norwegian border in January, said he fears for his life after witnessing the killing and mistreatment of Russian prisoners taken to fight for Wagner in Ukraine.

Speaking to Euronews in January, experts made similar accusations that Chechen troops have been used to execute deserting Russian soldiers.

Medvedev is living in a secret location in the Oslo area after he was released from detention on Wednesday following a "disagreement" with police about measures taken to ensure his safety.

**Russia using 'meat waves' to expose Ukraine's military positions<sup>10</sup>** - The Wagner Group and the Russian military have been using a tactic referred to a "meat waves" to expose the position of Ukrainian forces, according to a Ukrainian military official.

Captain Viktor Tregubov, a journalist/activist and a member of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU), described the strategy in an interview published Wednesday in the Kyiv Post.

"They [Russian forces] push prisoners forward and try to deplete our defense forces so that we run out of ammunition and they can see our firing positions," Tregubov said.

The Institute for the Study of War (ISW) reported Putin has been distancing himself from Wagner because of its clashes with his professional military leaders and government officials.

**Wagner Group leadership in disarray amid 'significant' war losses: ISW<sup>10</sup>** - The leader of the Wagner Group was locked in a spat with a nationalist rival as the Russian mercenary organization continued to suffer heavy losses in Ukraine, according to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

An ISW report published on Thursday states that Wagner Group financier Yevgeny Prigozhin (pictured below) had recently been in an "altercation" with former Russian army commander Igor Girkin, highlighting "competition among Russian nationalist groups for political influence in Russia."

Girkin accused Prigozhin of "deliberately mis- as an attack on the Wagner Group forces Prigozhin of diverting personnel to Africa and win the war in Ukraine."

The Wagner Group leader reportedly shot ambitions and claiming that "his team silence his criticism of Wagner forces."

"Prigozhin and Girkin—both critics of the war—are likely competing for influence and patronage among pro-war politicians disillusioned with the progress of the war," the ISW report states.

"Prigozhin and Girkin are likely competing for favor with the same pro-war nationalist patronage networks within the Kremlin that are represented by outspoken nationalist politicians," it continues.

Meanwhile, ISW said that Wagner Group mercenaries fighting in Eastern Ukraine had suffered "significant losses" in recent months. Thursday's report cited multiple media claims that over 1,000 Wagner Group personnel were recently laid to rest at two burial sites in Russia. (**Comment** – See yesterday's Update).

Many of those buried are believed to have died during fighting in the Bakhmut area, where bloody battles continue to rage between Ukrainian forces and Russia-aligned fighters, including Wagner Group mercenaries.

## Putin & Russia

**Putin's former speechwriter predicts military coup in Russia<sup>13</sup>** - A former Kremlin aide warns that as Moscow blindly pursues its bloody conquest in Ukraine, the situation at home is quietly heading towards a military coup.

Abbas Gallyamov, Vladimir Putin's former speechwriter, says the conditions are already there for a full revolt.

"The longer the war drags on, the clearer its pointlessness becomes," Gallyamov writes in a new column for opposition media outlet Mozhem Obyasnit.

The Russian public has largely begun to realize that the Kremlin's dream of toppling the Kyiv "regime" is not going to happen, Gallyamov notes, and the consolation prize of new "Russian" territories is not winning anybody over.

Discord is also growing in the military, he argues, where "[Wagner boss Yevgeny] Prigozhin has completely discredited the regime in the eyes of service members with his rhetoric, and anger at the authorities allowing a criminal to walk all over them is growing stronger."

Putin's cunning, "macho" image has also disintegrated, Gallyamov writes: "As problems pile up in the country and the army that the authorities are unable to solve, Putin is more steadily transforming in people's eyes from a great strategist to an ordinary, second-rate dictator."

After months of widespread reports on Russian troops rebelling against their commanders, going public with complaints about top military brass, or deserting the war altogether, Gallyamov notes that all it takes to light the fuse of a full military coup is a little more organization.



construing" criticism of his political ambitions fighting in Ukraine. Girkin also accused Syria "instead of deploying his mercenaries to

back by denying that he has any political attempted to bribe Girkin in an effort to

Russian President Vladimir Putin's conduct

of the war," the ISW report states.

“It must be understood that the vast majority of commanders in the army of an authoritarian nation are not staunch supporters of the authorities, but run-of-the-mill opportunists,” he argues.

So once a revolt begins and “yesterday’s loyalties” vanish, military commanders will fight for whoever seems most likely to win, according to Gallyamov. “If complaints against authorities seem convincing to [a commander], then he will most likely decide that that [regime] will not stand against a wave of public anger. And if that’s the case, there’s no reason not to join.”

In addition to the myriad reports about troops revolting against and in some cases even attacking their own commanders, thousands more Russian soldiers have voluntarily handed themselves over to Ukrainian authorities to avoid taking part in the war.

**Putin warned by top Russian academic it is 'too late' to save army from defeat in Ukraine<sup>13</sup>** - Putin cannot reverse the inevitable military defeat he faces in Ukraine, political scientist and Kremlin critic Boris Kagarlitsky tells Express.co.uk. The academic says the Russian military is a "mess" and warns Putin the situation cannot be salvaged.

He said: "Today's Russian army is a mess of unmotivated soldiers who are under the command of incompetent officers and controlled by corrupt generals who could steal everything that moved.

"Now they are trying to fix it, but it is already too late. This kind of reorganization would take a few years, and they just don't have that time."

**Putin's latest problem? His own military<sup>11</sup>** - Back in 2013, Russian Gen. Gerasimov succinctly stated the nightmare problem he now faces as the newly installed leader of Russia’s bungled war against Ukraine: “You cannot generate ideas on command.”

Gerasimov, the chief of staff of the Russian military, this month was given the thankless task of directing Russian forces in Ukraine. Since he helped plan the botched invasion last February, this might seem like doubling down on failure. But US analysts believe that Gerasimov promised his boss, Putin, he will regain the initiative.

His appointment comes as Ukraine, too, is moving to use new weapons and tactics to break out of what has become a bloody stalemate. For both sides, 2023 will see attempts to redraw largely static battle lines. A front line of WWI-style trenches might become a more fluid and unpredictable battlespace this year.

Gerasimov dreamed a decade ago of modernizing the Russian military to conduct this sort of modern battle. In a widely read 2013 article, he said that “the very ‘rules of war’ have changed.” Russia’s traditional brute force tactics were outmoded. “Frontal engagements of large formations of forces ... are gradually becoming a thing of the past.” Instead, he argued, Russia needed “speed, quick movements, the smart use of paratroops and encircling forces,” along with irregular “hybrid” forces to fight behind the lines.

It didn’t work out the way he and Putin hoped, to put it mildly. Russia tried its version of a lightning strike to capture Kyiv. But it hadn’t reckoned on Ukrainian valor or Russian incompetence. Since the failure of Putin’s plan to quickly seize the capital, Russian forces have repeatedly retrenched and retreated.

Putin, who sells himself as a decisive leader, has instead been reactive, with decisions forced on him by battlefield reversals. After Ukrainian forces retook Kharkiv in a bold September counteroffensive, Putin hastily “annexed” four regions where Russia’s hold was precarious. After Ukrainian special operations forces bombed the Kerch Strait bridge to Crimea in October, a desperate Putin launched a missile assault on Ukraine’s civilian infrastructure that continues to this day.

The appointment of Gerasimov is Putin's latest Hail Mary pass, and U.S. officials doubt it will succeed. The biggest problem is the chaotic command structure under him. Hastily trained conscripts are being rushed to the front as little more than cannon fodder. Meanwhile, the Wagner militia, led by catering oligarch Yevgeniy Prigozhin, has taken a lead role in the bitter but strategically meaningless battle for Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine.

**“Revolving Doors”** - On January 11, the Russian MoD again changed the command structure of its Ukrainian command by appointing Army General Gerasimov, former chief of the General Staff, replacing Surovikin, commander of the Russian Aerospace Forces. Surovikin had recently been appointed as the commander October 8, 2022, after several attempts by the Kremlin to establish a working command structure there.

The official reasons for the change included the necessity of increasing coordination between different branches of the armed forces, improving quality of logistics as well as overall command and control of military groupings.

That means, Moscow considers that the previous efforts under Surovikin in these key aspects were largely unsuccessful. Besides Gerasimov, Army General Salyukov, commander of ground forces, and Colonel General Kim, former deputy commander of ground forces, who recently became a deputy chief of the General Staff, were also appointed, along with Surovikin, as Gerasimov's deputies in his command position.

While Gerasimov's appointment is the latest re-shuffle for the Russian military, it is not the only change that has been made to top military brass over the past 11 months. Two airborne troop commanders have been dismissed: Colonel General Serdyukov, who commanded the troops from October 2016 to June 2022, and Colonel General Teplinsky, Serdyukov's successor until recently dismissed on January 23, 2023.

The same situation is present in Russia's military districts. In December last year Western Military District received its 4<sup>th</sup> commander since February 2022, Lieutenant General Nikiforov, former chief of staff of the Eastern Military District, replaced Colonel General Kuzovlev, who was then appointed commander of the Southern Military District, after spending only a couple of weeks as the Western Military District commander. Before Kuzovlev, Lieutenant General Berdnikov commanded the Western Military District from September to December 2022, when he replaced Colonel General Zhuravlev, district commander in 2018–2022. In the Southern Military District, Kuzovlev replaced Army General Dvornikov, favored by the Kremlin before he failed as grouping force commander from April to May 2022.

The commander of the Central Military District also changed when General Lapin was replaced by General Lin'kov, who became executive district commander while waiting for the new commander, possibly General Mordvichev of the 8th Guards Combined Arms Army, to be appointed. For his part, Lapin was then appointed chief of staff of ground forces after he had endured major public criticism and even verbal humiliations coming from Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov and Yevgeniy Prigozhin, head of the Wagner Group mercenaries.

The same process was undertaken in the Eastern Military District, with former district commander, General Chaiko, replacing General Zhidko last November, dismissed as early as July 2022. Zhidko once again became the district commander after only several months as the chief of the Armed Forces' main political-military directorate and the deputy minister of defense. In October 2022, he was finally replaced by General Muradov, ex-commander of peacekeeping forces in Karabakh in 2020–2021 and deputy commander of the Southern Military District in 2018–2022.

All these turbulent appointments demonstrate a Kremlin distrust in its own military generals and, therefore, tries to delegate responsibility for disastrous decisions in Ukraine directly to them. Meanwhile, this command chaos also demonstrates how the last generation of Soviet officers appeared unprepared for modern conventional warfare.

Being mostly young lieutenants and captains, these officials decided to stay in military service during the 1990s and suffered from the lack of training, temporary absence of salaries, low standards of living and fought in the bloody Chechen wars, as their colleagues started new careers.

Their education is mostly limited to experience in Afghanistan and their own professional development. And besides the five-day war against Georgia in 2008, their tactical expertise is limited to the asymmetric campaigns in Chechnya, Ukraine (2014–2015) and Syria.

Thus, their ability to “survive” more than two decades of President Vladimir Putin’s governance means they prioritize total personal political loyalty, indoctrination and even resentment toward Soviet practices, rather than developing real professional competences.

**Russia's communists take to the streets demanding Putin be ousted<sup>10</sup>** - Russian Communists took to Moscow's Red Square over the weekend, demanding that President Vladimir Putin be removed from power over the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

Independent Russian outlet SOTA spoke with a member of Russia's Communist Party in the capital as he and others marked the 99th anniversary of the death of former Soviet military and political leader Vladimir Lenin on January 21.

According to photos from local media reports, at least 100 people, some with flags, were present at the Red Square.

**NATO war involvement ‘growing’ with arms to Ukraine<sup>2</sup>** - Former adviser to Putin says NATO’s weapons deliveries could result in military retaliation against nations supplying them.

Russia says the delivery of NATO battle tanks to Ukraine is evidence of “direct and growing” US and European involvement in the war, with one analyst suggesting supplying nations could become potential targets.

The comments come after the United States and Germany on Wednesday said they would arm Ukraine with dozens of heavy tanks in its fight against Russian forces.

“There are constant statements from European capitals and Washington that the sending of various weapons systems to Ukraine, including tanks, in no way signifies the involvement of these countries or the alliance in hostilities in Ukraine,” Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said on Thursday.

“We categorically disagree with this and, in Moscow, everything the alliance and the capitals I mentioned are doing is seen as direct involvement in the conflict. We see that this is growing.”

Kyiv seeks hundreds of modern tanks to give its troops the firepower to break Russian defensive lines and reclaim occupied territory in Ukraine’s south and east. Ukraine and Russia have been relying primarily on Soviet-era T-72 tanks. (**Comment** – Precisely – to “reclaim territory” which evidences who the aggressor is, lest we forget).

Russia, which launched the war by invading Ukraine on February 24 last year, has increasingly portrayed the conflict as a confrontation with NATO.

Sergey Karaganov, a former adviser to Russian President Vladimir Putin, said NATO’s weapons deliveries could result in possible military retaliation against the nations supplying them.

“By sending tanks, the NATO countries are becoming more openly involved in the war and that makes them potential targets,” he told Al Jazeera.

## Sanctions

**US lawmakers call for China to be sanctioned over Ukraine<sup>7</sup>** - US lawmakers on Thursday urged the US to take a tougher stance on China, accusing Chinese organisations of providing support to Russia's war in Ukraine.

“We need to be much more robust” against China, said Democratic Senator Bob Menendez, citing “evidence that Chinese companies are providing dual-use technology including semi-conductors”, which can be used to guide missiles.

"It seems to me that we shouldn't give up the potential for sanctions against China if they provide crucial assistance and they shouldn't be able to hide behind companies," he said.

His Republican colleague James Risch felt China was acting "with impunity" and that the US needed to "strengthen the sanctions" on the country.

**Japan bans exports of robots, semiconductor parts to Russia in new sanctions<sup>5</sup>** - Japan today announced additional sanctions in response to Moscow's latest actions in Ukraine, banning exports to Russia of key strategic goods and freezing assets of dozen individuals.

Japan will prohibit Russia-bound shipments of goods that can be used to enhance military capability, including semiconductor equipment and components, robots, power generators, explosives and vaccines, according to the trade ministry.

The new export ban will take effect on Feb. 3, it said.

Japan also froze assets of an additional three entities and 22 individuals in Russia and 14 pro-Moscow individuals related to the "annexation" of the southeastern Ukraine region.

## Food

**Ukraine grain harvest will nosedive - prediction<sup>7</sup>** - Ukrainian production of grain and other essential foodstuffs is expected to fall even further next year, according to new estimates.

Sown areas of grain and oilseed harvest are expected to drop to "53 million tonnes" in 2023, half of what they were in 2021, according to estimates by the Ukrainian Grain Association (UGA).

"We are at war," said Nikolay Gorbachov, UGA President, on Thursday. "We continue to produce grain but the harvests will drop. For farmers, it is no longer profitable to produce grain."

In 2021, 106 million tonnes of grain were harvested, a historic record, this fell to around 65 million tonnes for 2022, while "53 million tonnes" is predicted for 2023, he outlined.

## Comments, Developments & Reports

**'A Great Sin'<sup>3</sup>** - Amid relentless attacks on Ukraine, which received pledges of U.S. and German battle tanks, the Russian state ramped up its campaign against civil society at home yet again, with a court ordering the closure of a revered rights group and authorities tightening the vise on the Sakharov Center, a vital Moscow institution dedicated to promoting historical truth, basic freedoms, and civil society.

**Russia takes war to 'different stage' - EU official<sup>6</sup>** - Moscow has ratcheted up its invasion of Ukraine by making indiscriminate attacks on civilians and framing the conflict as a struggle against the West, according to a senior EU official.

Stefano Sannino, Secretary General of the European Union's European External Action Service, said on Friday Russia has taken the war to "a different stage," while defending Germany and the US's decision to send tanks to Kyiv.

He criticized Russian President Vladimir Putin for waging a war on NATO and the West, saying this had triggered this week's move to supply Ukraine with heavy battle tanks.

Speaking at a news conference in Tokyo, Sannino said Putin had "moved from a concept of special operation to a concept now of a war against NATO and the West."

## Containment

**Western allies contemplating jet fighter exports to Ukraine<sup>12</sup>** - Ukraine's Western allies are engaged in discussion about potential supplies of new-generation jet fighters to Kyiv, Politico reports, citing military official and diplomatic sources.

"The next natural step would be fighters," a European diplomat said following the announcement that Ukraine was getting tanks.

Politico was told that many potential escalation of the instance. He earlier ruled out any military escalation

European officials could back the jet fighter initiative if they did not fear a conflict. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz is one of them, for fighter exports, saying that any further should be avoided.

Washington position. A US diplomat supplies of these jets is a "no-  
"There's a red line there — but last the HIMARS [multiple rocket launchers], and that that's moving," he added.



advocates a similar earlier said that the go, for the moment." summer we had a red line on moved. Then it was battle tanks, and

A senior European diplomat, in turn, says it is premature to talk about the jet fighter handovers, but countries can revisit the issue in a few weeks' time. Some officials suggest that at the next Ramstein air base meeting politicians will draft an urgent action plan in case the fighters will need to be quickly sent to Ukraine.

Earlier, Dutch Foreign Minister Wopke Hoekstra said that Amsterdam would look into exporting F-16 jets if Kyiv requests them. "We are open-minded, there are no taboos," he said.

Another source believes that the fighter jet supply is "only a matter of when."

**Ukraine's American-made M-1A2 tanks are hunter-killers—with two sets of eyes<sup>4</sup>** - The 31 M-1 Abrams tanks the United States has pledged to Ukraine will be high-end A2 variants rather than older M-1A1s, Paul McLeary, Lara Seligman and Lee Hudson reported for Politico.

The 70-ton M-1A2, versions of which are the U.S. Army's main tank, features several major improvements over older Abrams, including better armor, fire-control and communications.

But one particular enhancement stands out. The M-1A2 was, in the early 1990s, the first tank to introduce what's called a "commander's independent thermal viewer."

A CITV is a set of swiveling optics, mounted on top of a tank's turret, that complements the vehicle's main optics. With a CITV, a four-person tank crew has two separate ways of looking around while the crew is buttoned up inside the armored turret.

It's not the traditional way of doing things. On older tanks, the commander and gunner—each gazing through linked optics—see the same thing at the same time. That limits the pace at which a crew can acquire and engage targets.

Think of a tank with a CITV having four eyes instead of two, as well as all the advantages that should confer. Imagine a predator tracking one prey while searching for another.

“The commander's independent thermal viewer gives him a 360-degree, all-weather, day-night, target-surveillance system that allows the commander and gunner to act as a ‘hunter-killer’ team,” Wes Glasgow, David Latson and Christopher Cardine wrote in a 1996 issue of *Armor*, the U.S. Army’s official journal for tankers.

“The commander searches for targets while the gunner engages a completely separate target,” Glasgow, Latson and Cardine explained. “When the gunner fires the weapon, the commander can then ‘hand-off’ a new target to the gunner with the push of a button. This capability greatly enhances the potential lethality of the system and measurably improves the engagement speed of the tank, getting multiple, accurate rounds down-range.”

“This is often the most critical factor in tank survivability on the battlefield,” Glasgow, Latson and Cardine added.

Faster target-acquisition arguably was the driving requirement as the U.S. Army and General Dynamics developed the M-1A2 starting in the late 1980s. The new tank’s CITV works so well that other tank-makers have rushed to copy it. Today the latest French Leclercs, Russian T-90Ms and other new tank models also feature CITVs.

**France, Italy close to supplying ‘Mamba’ air defence system to Ukraine<sup>9</sup>** - France and Italy are close to finalizing the technical details to supply an SAMP/T air defence system to Ukraine, two diplomatic sources said yesterday, although it was unclear how quickly a final decision would come.

Russia sent Ukrainian civilians racing  
killing at least one person, the day  
battlefield tanks to try to push

Kyiv has asked its Western allies  
requested the SAMP/T, known

The system, a joint Franco-  
targets and intercept 10 at once  
that can intercept ballistic

“A political decision was made.  
technical details because it’s a  
second diplomat, adding that  
President Emmanuel Macron  
Giorgia Meloni would make  
official said technical talks

Paris has previously  
supplied



for cover with a rush-hour missile barrage on Thursday,  
after Kyiv secured Western pledges of dozens of modern  
back the Russian invasion.

for more air defence systems and specifically  
as Mamba, in November.

Italian consortium can track dozens of  
and is the only European-made system  
missiles.

It’s now just finalizing the  
complicated system,” said a  
the expectation was that French  
and Italian Prime Minister  
the decision official. A third  
were ongoing.

Mistral shoulder-launched anti-aircraft missiles to Ukraine and the Crotales short-range anti-air missiles, which are used to intercept low-flying missiles and aircraft.

**Tanks to Ukraine mark change in Moroccan foreign policy<sup>8</sup>** - According to media reports, Morocco has become the first African country to send tanks to Ukraine. But it's not just doing so because it believes in the Ukrainian cause.

This week Morocco made a move that seemed to indicate increasing warmth toward Europe.

According to media reports, it became the first African country to send heavy weapons to Ukraine with delivery of 20 renovated T-72B main battle tanks to the eastern European country.

The move is a significant change from Morocco's previously neutral stance on the Russia invasion of Ukraine as well as a clear turn towards Europe and the US. In the March 2022 vote at the United Nations that rejected Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Morocco and other African nations abstained.

## Holocaust remembered.

Auschwitz-Birkenau survivors and other mourners today commemorated the 78th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camp, some expressing horror that war has again shattered peace in Europe.



**Comment** – During my extensive travels around the globe, I always try and visit Holocaust memorials when close by.

One of my most trying visits was to the new museum in Warsaw and into the cells where pregnant Jewish women were subjected to experiments and torture by Gestapo thugs. I have seen many and varied horrific things throughout my life, but this visit left a lasting impression on me.

We must never forget what happened during the other times of antisemitism nor must we ever allow it to



Holocaust and in be forgotten.

## Sources

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidaxe/2023/01/26/ukraines-american-made-m-1a2-tanks-are-fast-searching-hunter-killers>

<sup>5</sup> <https://wtvbam.com/2023/01/26/japan-bans-exports-of-robots-semiconductor-parts-to-russia-in-new-sanctions/>

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.newsweek.com/wagner-group-leadership-disarray-amid-significant-war-losses-isw>

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<sup>12</sup> <https://novayagazeta.eu/>

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<sup>14</sup>