

Conflict Update # 345

February 3rd, 2023

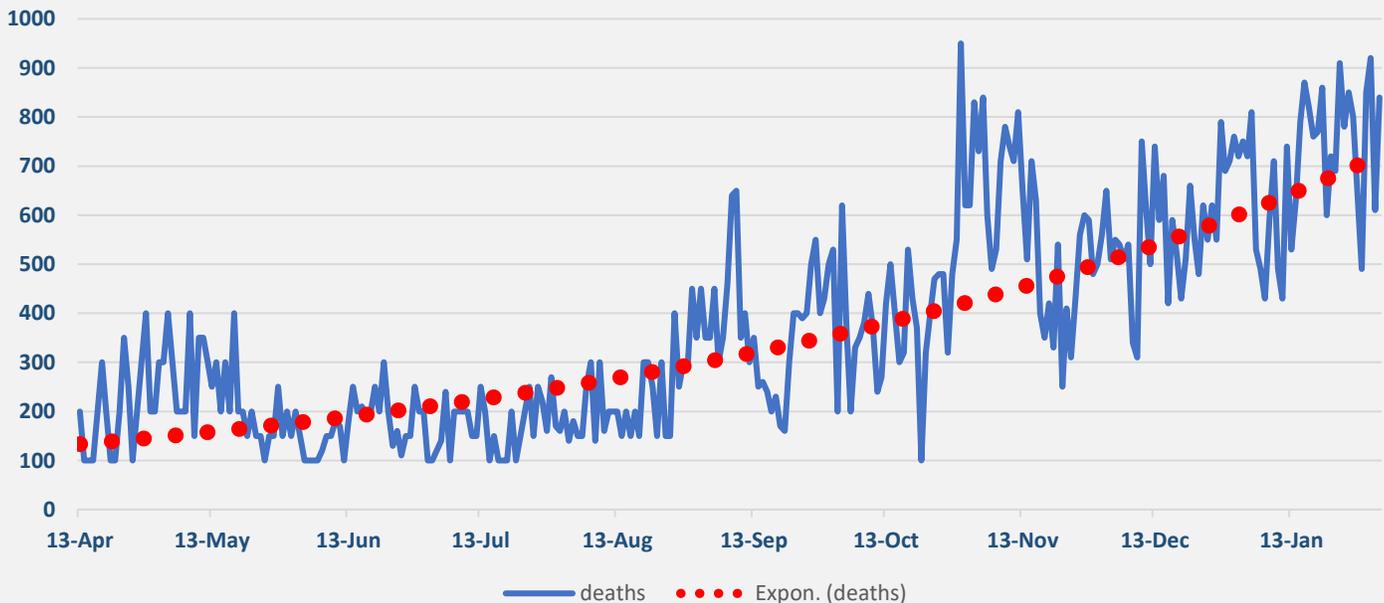
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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses¹ – 129,870 (840) soldiers killed, 3,215 (+4) enemy tanks, 6,388 (+6) armored combat vehicles, 2,215 (+3) artillery systems, 458 (+0) MLRS systems, 222 (+0) air defense systems, 294 (+1) warplanes, 284 (+0) helicopters, 1,952 (+1) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 796 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,068 (+4) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 202 (+2) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways

Russian troop deaths by day



“Meat Grinder”- Russia continues to feed untrained and ill-equipped recently-mobilized troops into the fray, losing them by the thousands, but this is the Russian way.

However, there is a method to their madness. They are slowing down any further Ukrainian assaults and offensive plans, in order to re-group and prepare for another offensive, this time I believe from multiple points around Ukraine, including Belarus to the north.

The first anniversary of the ill-prepared and executed illegal February 2022 invasion looms and Putin will want to show Russian Main Street that he is not only serious but also victorious. The first we know full well but the latter is treated with huge and warranted skepticism by western military experts.

It is thought he will launch this new offensive in the next few weeks hoping, in the very least, to recover all of the Donbas, the official and much-promulgated reason and rationale of withdrawing from the initial northern and north-western theaters of invasion mid-2022. He has replaced most of his front-line commanding officers and completed

what he and Lukashenko call military training exercises in Belarus, coupled with thousands of troops and equipment in and around Ukraine's northern border.

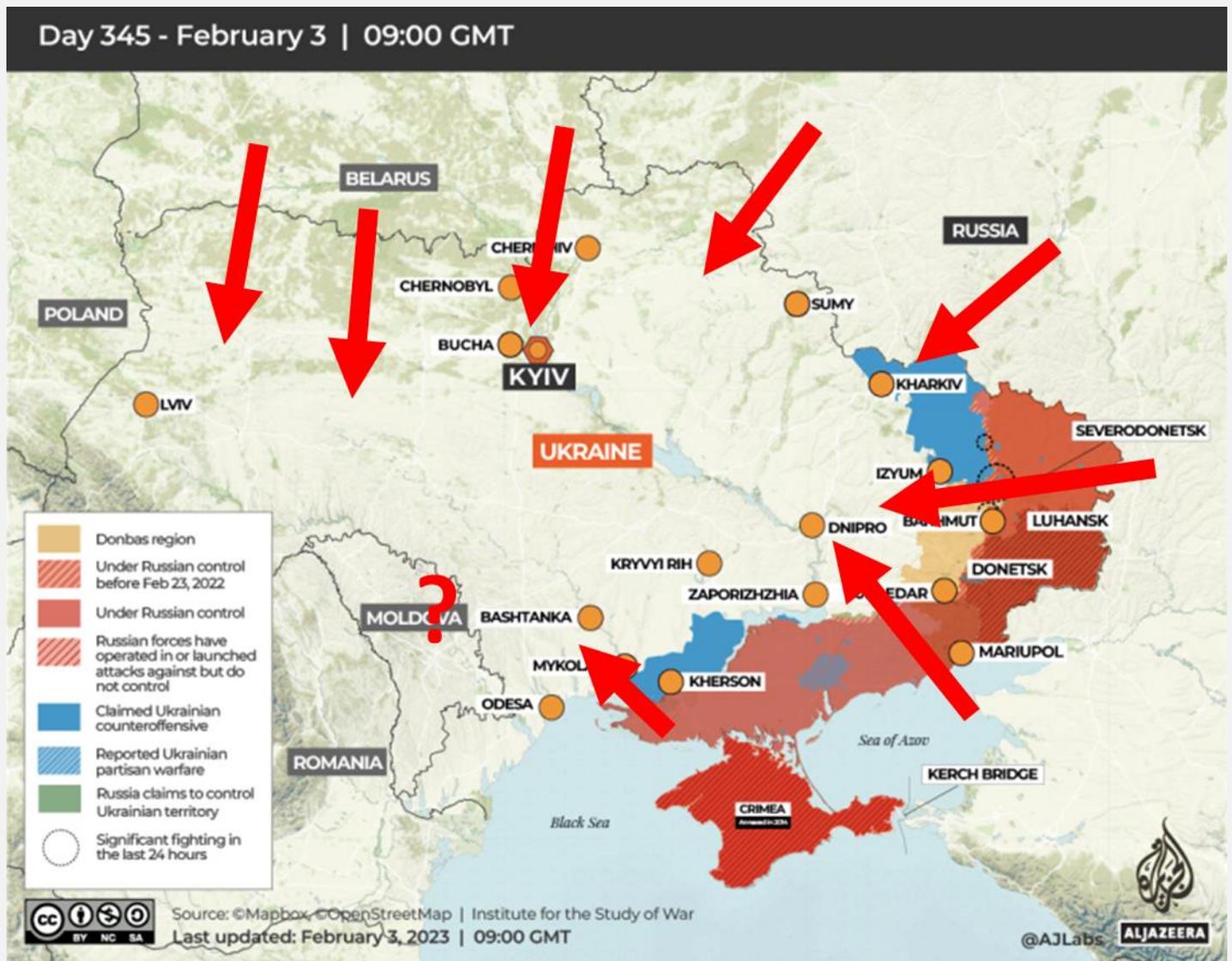
On Wednesday, a senior Ukrainian official warned that hundreds of thousands of Russian troops were massing on the border ahead of an expected offensive. These numbers could reach 500,000, Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said.

"We do not underestimate our enemy," he said on French television. "Officially they announced 300,000, but when we see the troops at the borders, according to our assessments it is much more."

if Russian forces are defeated, or continue to suffer humiliating defeats, Putin's position will be more precarious back home, Andrei Fedorov, former deputy foreign minister of Russia, told NBC News last week.

"Things might be [a] little different if Russia will not be successful. The absence of a victory will call into question the legitimacy of Russia's 2024 elections," he said.

This will more than likely be the final Kremlin push failing which they may well head to the negotiation table. We can expect severe and huge losses on both sides.



Bakhmut - Russian forces are pushing from both the north and south to encircle Bakhmut, using superior troop numbers to try to cut it off from resupply and force the Ukrainians out, Ukrainian military analyst Yevhen Dikiy said.

But in watching geolocational footage late last evening, it was clear that Ukrainian forces had lulled Russian attacks into a killing zone and repelled them back to where they started from. Skirmishes continue along this entire front, leading to reinforcement of the opinion above about Russia attempting to prod open fronts along the line through which they plan to inject thousands of mobilized troops.

Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov said Russian forces would respond to the delivery of longer-range Western weapons to Kyiv by trying to push Ukrainian forces further away from its borders to create a safe buffer zone.

Comment – “Try” to push – telling phrase.

Putin has 'overestimated' Russia's ability to capture Donetsk by March: ISW - Putin has "overestimated" his military's ability to quickly capture all of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions, according to the Institute for the Study of War (ISW).

An assessment of the offensive, released Thursday by ISW, a U.S.-based think tank, maintains there is no evidence Russia has "sufficient combat power" to capture the more than 42 percent of Donetsk that remains under Ukrainian control in time to meet a Putin-imposed deadline of March.

Andriy Chernyak, representative for the Main Intelligence Directorate of the Ukrainian Defense Ministry, told The Kyiv Post on Wednesday that military intelligence indicates that "Putin gave the order to seize territories of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions by March."

The ISW report suggests that the Russian president could be making demands that his troops will not be able to fulfill, possibly paving the way for a Ukrainian counteroffensive that would be timed to coincide with the delivery of tanks supplied by the U.S. and other Western nations.

"Putin may have overestimated the Russian military's own capabilities again," the report states. "ISW has not observed any evidence that Russian forces have restored sufficient combat power to defeat Ukraine's forces in eastern Ukraine and capture over 11,300 square kilometers of unoccupied Donetsk Oblast (over 42 percent of Donetsk Oblast's total area) before March."

"A major Russian offensive before April 2023 would likely prematurely culminate during the April spring rain season," it continues. "Russian forces' culmination could then generate favorable conditions for Ukrainian forces to exploit in their own late spring or summer 2023 counteroffensive after incorporating Western tank deliveries."

Comments, Developments and Reports

Ukraine says new tanks will serve as 'iron fist' in counteroffensive - Ukraine's defense minister said on Friday that new tanks supplied by NATO countries would serve as an "iron fist" in a counteroffensive by Kyiv to break through Russian defensive lines.

The official, Oleksii Reznikov, told a news briefing with his Polish counterpart that Western supplies of 155-mm artillery were vital for Ukraine to weather Russia's own attacks in the south and in the east.

"The new tank coalition with the main tanks of NATO countries - we need this for the counteroffensive, we will use it like an iron fist to break through their defensive lines," he said.

Polish Defence Minister Mariusz Blaszczak, in Kyiv on Friday for talks with Reznikov, said Warsaw was helping to train Ukrainian soldiers to use Western tanks and that completing the training was a question of "weeks not days or months."

US turns up the heat on Middle East allies in bid to stop Russia's war machine - As the Ukraine war approaches the one-year mark, the United States is ramping up efforts to choke off Russia's economy and it has set its sight on the Middle East.

A top US Treasury official arrived in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on Monday to warn the regional business hub that helping Moscow evade sanctions wouldn't be without consequences.

Under Secretary of the Treasury for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, Brian E. Nelson, met with senior government officials from several UAE ministries, where he discussed "rooting out evasion of US sanctions, particularly on Russia and Iran," as well as the US' "commitment to take additional actions against those evading or facilitating the evasion of sanctions," according to a statement.

Russian pharmacies short of medication, customers blame sanctions - Parents with sick children asking in vain for Nurofen are an increasingly common sight in Russia, where pharmacies are turning customers away. Pharmacists say they no longer have the medicines they usually stock. Sanctions over Russia's unprovoked war on Ukraine have now caused shortages throughout the sector, according to Russian patients.

EU agrees on price caps on Russian refined oil products - European Union countries agreed to set price caps on Russian refined oil products to limit Moscow's funds for its invasion of Ukraine, the EU said on February 3. EU diplomats said the price caps are \$100 per barrel on products that trade at a premium to crude, principally diesel, and \$45 per barrel for products that trade at a discount, such as fuel oil. Ambassadors for the 27 EU countries agreed on the European Commission proposal, which will apply from February 5. The price caps follow a \$60 per barrel cap on Russian crude that the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations imposed on December 5.

Putin & Russia

Putin ally explodes in TV rant on West arming Ukraine: 'Not enough anger!' – A well-known Russian state television propagandist has raged against Western supplies of weapons to Ukraine, saying Moscow's enemies should be dealt with "harshly and clearly."

State television host Vladimir Solovyov told his audience that Russia's "enemies will deliver everything, they'll give [Ukraine] everything, until we deal with them harshly and clearly."

"And by 'them,' I don't mean Ukraine. By 'them,' I mean the West," Solovyov continued.

Russia's nuclear options dismissed by TV guest: 'It will mean our defeat' - Any use of nuclear weapons by Moscow in Ukraine would lead to a "final and irreversible defeat" for Russia, a state TV guest has said.

In a clip posted to Twitter on Monday by Julia Davis of Russian Media Monitor, Russian State Duma member Aleksey Zhuravlyov can be seen discussing what the other guests take to mean nuclear weapons, although he denies this without offering an explanation.

Explaining that Russian forces were advancing slowly through Ukraine towards Kyiv, and sustaining heavy losses along the way, Aleksey Zhuravlyov said Moscow's troops should have been at the Ukrainian capital "a long time ago."

Lavrov afraid of Western long-range weapons hitting Russia: he says it is necessary to "push back" Ukrainian army - Lavrov has said it is necessary to "push" Ukrainian troops away so that long-range weapons supplied by the West do not reach the territory of Russia.

Quote from Lavrov: "If we want to move the artillery of the Ukrainian Armed Forces to such a distance that [it] will not pose a threat to our territories now... then the more long-range weapons are supplied to the Kyiv regime, the further away we need to push them back from the territories that are our country."

Details At the same time, the head of the Russian Foreign Ministry complained that no one "pulled" President Zelenskyy when he stated that he did not understand who made decisions in Russia and who he should talk to.

Lavrov concluded that the president of Ukraine looked like a "non-independent" figure, like someone who is "manipulated".

In addition, the Russian Foreign Minister has denied the statement that Russia refused to negotiate.

Lavrov has also said that the entire NATO bloc is fighting against Russia today. "Yes, we see how the whole of NATO is fighting against us, and then, some talks and incantations that "we are not fighting, but only arming" are ridiculous," he said.

Background:

- On 28 January, Zelenskyy once again called on partners to provide Ukraine with long-range missiles to protect the country against Russian attacks. According to him, Ukraine needs long-range missiles to remove this possibility of the occupier putting his rocket launchers somewhere far from the front line and destroying Ukrainian cities with them."
- On 1 February, The Wall Street Journal reported that a new package of US military assistance to Ukraine, which for the first time will contain projectiles of specific kind, can be announced as early as Friday, 3 February.

Top Russian official teases 'the next Ukraine' in new threat - Russia's top diplomat said the actions of Western nations could soon turn Moldova into the "next Ukraine," according to TASS.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused Moldovan President Maia Sandu of being "eager to join NATO." Sandu, Lavrov said, is "ready to unite with Romania and in fact, to do almost anything."

Romania is a member of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was created to provide collective security against Russia.

Lavrov's comments appeared to echo complaints Russian President Vladimir Putin made about Ukraine and NATO when announcing Russia's invasion into Ukraine last year. Putin cited the expansion of the alliance and Ukraine's interest in joining NATO as "fundamental threats" against Russia in his speech justifying invasion.

"Further expansion of the NATO infrastructure... are unacceptable for us," Putin said at the time.

Putin the longest-serving Russian premier in modern era – Putin is the longest serving premier of the Russian Federation in the post-Soviet-era. Due for re-election in 2024, it is thought he will run again, and once again eliminate all serious political opposition by outlawing, detaining or killing them.

After stamping out and, in the case of leading opposition leader Alexei Navalny, imprisoning viable opposition movements and figures, victory for Putin is pretty much guaranteed in 2024. But in order to achieve an indisputable victory in the polls, his military will have to achieve unquestioned success on the battlefields of Ukraine.

Shifting demographics will also prove a challenge, Federov added. With older Russians who make up the majority of Putin's power base naturally dying off, younger urbanites who have historically populated the ranks of the now-beleaguered opposition may become more influential.

"Remember that in the elections of 2024 there will already be ... fewer voters of the Soviet generation, and quite critical youth may vote," he said.



Containment

CIA Director William Burns said on Thursday the intelligence agency assesses that China's President Xi Jinping has been a little sobered by the war in Ukraine, but that it would be a mistake to underestimate Beijing and Moscow's commitment to partnership.

Burns, speaking at a foreign policy event at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C., also said Xi maintains serious ambitions over Taiwan and warned that conflict over the island nation would be “deeply unfortunate” for all involved.

Burns added that Russia and China’s friendship is not totally without limits. Speaking on Moscow’s invasion, Burns said the next six months will be “critical” for Ukraine, where Moscow has been making incremental gains in recent weeks.

New U.S. aid package for Ukraine includes rockets with longer striking range - A new package of U.S. military aid for Ukraine announced on February 3 includes rockets with a range twice the distance of the rockets Kyiv now has. The Ground Launched Small Diameter Bomb (GLSDB) is included in a \$2.2 billion U.S. military aid package announced by the Pentagon. GLSDBs has a range roughly double that of the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) already supplied. As part of the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI), the United States “will be providing a Ground Launched Small Diameter Bomb to Ukraine,” Brigadier General Patrick Ryder told a news briefing at the Pentagon.

The U.S. Military Expands in the Philippines - The United States and the Philippines announced plans on Thursday to expand America’s military presence in the Southeast Asian nation, with access to four more bases as they seek to deter China’s increasingly aggressive actions toward Taiwan and in the disputed South China Sea.

The agreement was reached as U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was in the country for talks about deploying U.S. forces and weapons in more Philippine military camps.

In a joint announcement by the Philippines and the U.S., the two said they had decided to accelerate the full implementation of their so-called Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, which aims to support combined training, exercises and interoperability.

Eastern Europe wants NATO to beef up defense spending - A handful of NATO countries are pushing to raise the alliance’s defense spending benchmark from 2 percent to 2.5 percent or even 3 percent of member countries’ GDP, according to six current and former European and U.S. officials familiar with the matter, a move that could amount to hundreds of billions of dollars in new defense spending if approved.

The initiative, pushed in diplomatic circles by Poland and Estonia, is a long shot and may face significant pushback from Western European powers already struggling to meet the existing NATO defense spending benchmark of 2 percent of GDP. But it reflects a mounting concern among NATO members on the alliance’s eastern flank that Europe is ill-equipped for a long-term military showdown with Russia in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine last year.

Diplomacy

High-level Kyiv visit aims to deepen EU-Ukraine ties - Senior members of the European Union’s executive branch traveled to Ukraine on Thursday looking to boost relations with the war-torn country and pave the way for it to join the bloc, but concerns over corruption and democratic deficiencies remain.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, pictured right, led a team of 15 policy commissioners who were to spend the day discussing Ukraine’s financial, business and energy needs, and how to bring the former Soviet state’s legislation into line with EU standards.

The highly symbolic visit is the first EU political mission of its kind to a country at war. Von der Leyen and European Council President



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Charles Michel, who chairs meetings of the bloc's heads of state and government, will hold a summit in Kyiv on Friday with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

"Ukraine's destiny is in Europe," Budget Commissioner Johannes Hahn, who didn't make the trip, told EU lawmakers in Brussels, noting that the country's application to join was submitted last June. "The commission will support Ukraine throughout the whole accession process."

Blinken postpones visit to China because of balloon over US - Official slams Chinese balloon in US airspace as 'unacceptable' but says top American diplomat still plans to visit China when conditions allow.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken has postponed a visit to China, the United States government has confirmed, calling the presence of an alleged Chinese surveillance balloon in American airspace as an "unacceptable" violation of its sovereignty.

A senior Department of State official said on Friday that "conditions are not right" for a visit that was to start on Sunday due to the "irresponsible" balloon flight.

The German government approved the delivery of Leopard 1 tanks to Ukraine from industrial stocks and is in talks over purchasing back 15 Gepard tanks from Qatar to send to Kyiv, Sueddeutsche Zeitung reported on Friday.

European Union leaders will meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv on Friday, bringing the promise of new sanctions against Russia but likely dashing Ukraine's hope for swift EU membership.

Senators want to block Turkey F-16 sale until NATO expansion succeeds - More than a quarter of the Senate sent a letter to President Joe Biden on Thursday threatening to tank a \$20 billion arms sale that includes 40 Lockheed Martin Block 70 F-16 fighter jets and upgrades to Turkey's current fleet so long as Ankara continues to block Sweden and Finland from joining NATO.

The letter comes days after another senator on the Foreign Relations Committee floated the prospect of sanctions on Turkey should it continue blocking the two Nordic countries from joining the alliance.

"Once the NATO accession protocols are ratified by Türkiye, Congress can consider the sale of F16 fighter jets," Sens. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., and Thom Tillis, R-N.C., wrote in the letter to Biden, signed by a bipartisan group of 25 other senators. "A failure to do so, however, would call into question this pending sale."