

# Conflict Update Day 375

March 5<sup>th</sup>, 2023

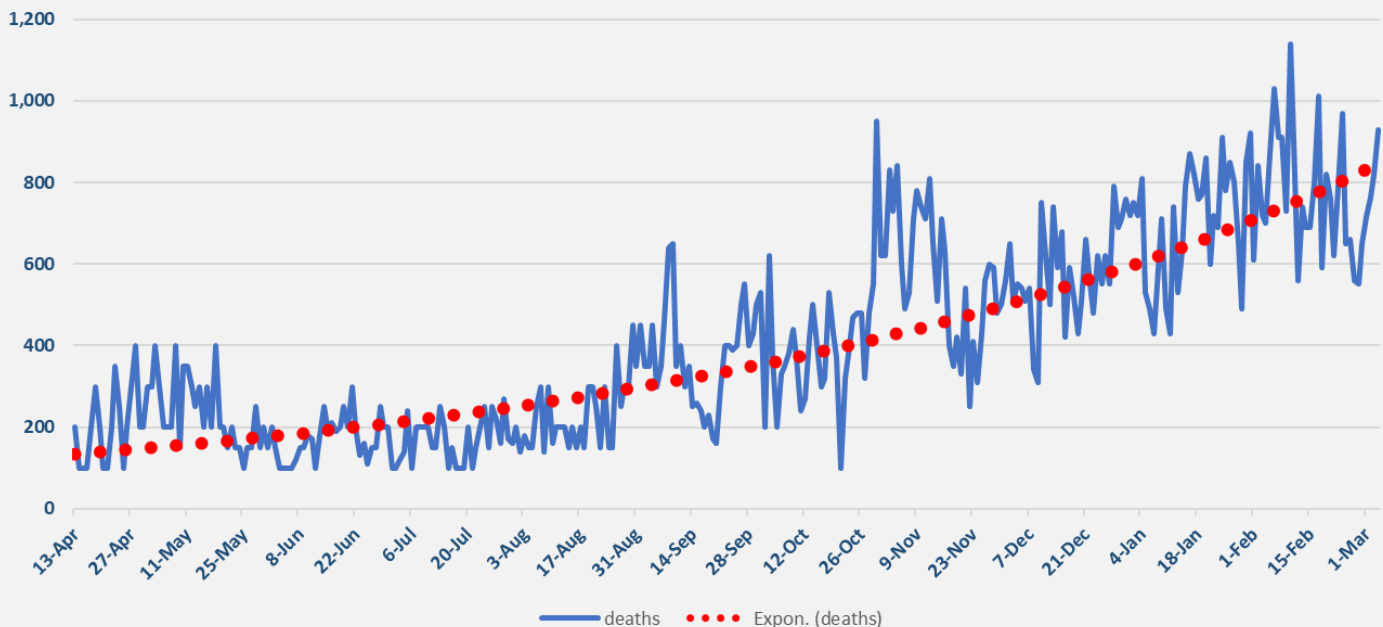
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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** – 153,120 (930) soldiers killed, 3,414 (+5) enemy tanks, 6,692 (+9) armored combat vehicles, 2,426 (+12) artillery systems, 488 (1) MLRS systems, 244 (+0) air defense systems, 302 (+0) warplanes, 289 (+0) helicopters, 2,071 (+5) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 873 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,299 (+10) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 232 (+2) units of equipment.

## Key Takeaways

Russian troop deaths by day



**'Hundreds' of Russian soldiers killed in Ukrainian strike on occupied Melitopol.** Exiled Mayor of Melitopol Ivan Fedorov said in an interview on TV on March 5 that two powerful explosions were heard in the northern part of the occupied city of Melitopol in Zaporizhzhia Oblast, possibly killing hundreds of Russian soldiers stationed in the city.

According to the mayor, Russian losses as a result of the strike "amount to hundreds of people, but the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine will provide more detailed information."

"Today is a weekend of hell for them, just like the whole last week of hell," Fedorov also said.

The city of Melitopol, with a pre-war population of 150,000 people, was occupied on Feb. 26 of last year, just two days after the start of Russia's full-scale invasion.

Since November last year, Russian soldiers arriving from recently liberated parts of Kherson Oblast and the city of Tokmak in Zaporizhzhia Oblast have turned Melitopol into a military base.

**Ukrainian forces destroy military watchtower in Russia** - Kraken, a Ukrainian special forces unit, reported on March 5 that it had destroyed a Russian military watchtower in Bryansk Oblast with a kamikaze drone.

The watchtower was used by Russian border guards to monitor part of the Ukrainian border.

A video published by Kraken shows the tower being destroyed on the second attempt.

It is unclear exactly when exactly the tower was destroyed.

**Russia attempting 'to encircle' Bakhmut** - Ukraine has vowed to defend "fortress Bakhmut" but it has faced Russian troops determined to take the city, which has become a political prize as the battle drags on.

Ukraine is reinforcing the Bakhmut area with elite units, while the regular Russian army and forces of the private military Wagner Group have made further advances into the city's northern suburbs.

Ukrainian general staff said "more than 130 enemy attacks" were repelled over the past day.

### **Bakhmut situation 'difficult but under control'**

Sergiy Cherevaty, a spokesman for Ukrainian forces, said on Saturday the Bakhmut situation was "difficult but under control" in the city he described as a "priority target for the enemy".

There is fighting in and around the city, the US-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW) said, warning that Ukrainian supply routes were narrowing.

"The Russians may have intended to encircle Ukrainian forces in Bakhmut, but the Ukrainian command has signalled that it will likely withdraw rather than risk an encirclement," ISW said on Saturday.

Ukraine and Russia have fiercely fought for the city, whose symbolic importance surpassed its military significance.

**Russia's vaunted second offensive is a damp squib** - Russia has also held back four brigades of naval infantry around Mariupol, in Donetsk province, and seven brigades of vdv airborne forces in Luhansk province, says Jack Watling of the Royal United Services Institute.... "That's not enough to do some massive offensive that breaks through and starts carving up everything." Mr Watling says he is optimistic about Ukraine's prospects. But he points to the risk that Russian assaults, if kept up for long enough, force Ukraine to commit these reserves merely to hold the line, which would result in a protracted conflict—one in which Russia could gradually rebuild and recapitalize its forces by turning to China and fixing its defence industrial base.

### **Russia's 'elite' units might not be so elite**

Acclaim for "elite" units also comes from when, where and how they operate, according to Ed Arnold, a research fellow for European security at the London-based Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) think tank. ..."Elite" units can provide morale boosts for friendly troops—or inspire fear in the opposing forces—and can often get access to better equipment or more training, Arnold told Newsweek. Because of this, they will also be selected for tasks in which they can be trusted to get the job done, he added. ...The "elite" units have "never actually been tested on the battlefield in the way that they are currently fighting at the moment, and I think that's exposed them," Arnold said. But it's not just about the regiments themselves, Arnold stressed, it's also about the planning and command decisions taken around the fighters that reflect poorly on the soldiers on the ground.

*Extracted from an article in RUSI dated March 3<sup>rd</sup>*

**'Close combat' likely due to Russia's shortage of munitions: UK** - The British intelligence says recent evidence suggests an increase in "close combat" in Ukraine, probably due to Russia's shortage of munitions.

It said Russian mobilised reservists were being ordered to assault a Ukrainian concrete strongpoint armed with only "firearms and shovels", likely entrenching tools employed for hand-to-hand combat.

**Ex-FSB officer fears Russia cannot hold Bakhmut after winter thaw** - Russian military blogger Igor Girkin has played down the significance of reports that Russian troops have encircled Bakhmut and expressed doubt that the Donetsk city can be held by Moscow.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the financier of the Wagner Group of mercenaries, has claimed that the city had been surrounded by Russian forces during the fierce battle in which his troops have been involved.

His comments followed an assessment by analysts that Ukraine's forces are preparing to withdraw from the city, pointing to how two bridges, one of which is a key supply route, had been destroyed.

But Girkin, who is a former FSB officer and ex-commander who led Russian-backed forces in the separatist Donetsk region in 2014, wrote a downbeat assessment of the purported Russian gains in the city fought over for seven months.

On his Telegram channel, Girkin wrote he did not "share such optimistic forecasts" as expressed by other military bloggers, about the Russian forces taking and holding Bakhmut. After the months of assault, he wrote, Wagner troops would have to take a break which could allow Ukraine to regroup and "exchange territory for time."

He said that this had been "the plan of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" who will then "make his move...probably after the end of the thaw," referring to the spring.

"We must prepare to repel their strike," added Girkin, who also goes by the name Strelkov, and has been highly critical of Putin's war effort and the actions of his commanders.

"Typical Girkin, isn't very optimistic about the prospects of taking Bakhmut, as this only means Ukrainians have won valuable time for a counter-strike," tweeted the account of War Translated.

Despite the reports of Russian gains, Serhiy Cherevatyi, a spokesman for the eastern grouping of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, told CNN that Moscow's forces have not taken Bakhmut and that fighting continues on the outskirts of the city.

**Budanov: Russia likely to run out of 'military tools' by end of spring.** Russia has "wasted huge amounts of human resources, armaments, and materials" during the war in Ukraine, and it will likely run out of offensive potential by late spring, Ukrainian military intelligence chief Kyrylo Budanov said in an interview with USA Today published on March 5.

**Scholz: West ready to give Ukraine security guarantees after war is over** - German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said in a March 5 interview with CNN that the West was ready to provide security guarantees for Ukraine after Russia's war is over.

Scholz made the statement after a meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden in Washington.

Russian dictator Putin must understand "that he will not succeed with his invasion and his imperialist aggression."

Scholz also said that the withdrawal of Russian troops from Ukraine must be the basis for any peace talks.

"We will continue to support Ukraine with financial and humanitarian aid but also with weapons," he said. Despite reports of rising anti-war sentiment among German right-wing parties, Berlin remains resolute in rallying support for Ukraine across the country,

## Containment

### Two Ukrainian pilots are in the U.S. for training assessment on attack aircraft, including F-16s - Two

Ukrainian pilots are in the U.S. undergoing an assessment to determine how long it could take to train them to fly attack aircraft, including F-16 fighter jets, according to two congressional officials and a senior U.S. official.

The Ukrainians' skills are being evaluated on simulators at a U.S. military base in Tucson, Arizona, the officials said, and they may soon be joined by more of their fellow pilots.

U.S. authorities have approved bringing up to 10 more Ukrainian pilots to the U.S. for further assessment as early as this month, the officials said.



Their arrival marks the first time Ukrainian pilots have traveled to the U.S. to have their skills evaluated by American military trainers. Officials said the effort has twin goals: to improve the pilots' skills and to evaluate how long a proper training program could take.

"The program is about assessing their abilities as pilots so we can better advise them on how to use capabilities they have and we have given them," an administration official said.

**Poland wants more US bases and weapons to fend off Russia** - A key transfer hub for war materiel to Ukraine, Poland now wants more weapons of its own in the event the war spills over its borders.

Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, neighboring Poland has become the key transfer point for western weapons to the battlefield; whether its U.S.-made HIMARS, howitzers, or Leopard tanks from Germany.

Now Poland wants more weapons of its own from its allies and the increased presence of permanent U.S. troops stationed on its soil, to position itself as a future military power in Europe.

"We know Russia well," Adrian Kubicki, a senior Polish diplomat and the Consul General in New York told VICE News. "It's been our enemy for centuries."

According to him, the country not only wants to replenish its weapon stocks should the war in Ukraine at some point pour over its own borders, but it wants more, permanent NATO bases and military personnel stationed inside Poland as a deterrent to President Vladimir Putin. Two American intelligence sources confirmed to VICE News the importance of Poland to U.S. interests in the region, praising the country for its reliable military and security agencies.

When Russian forces attacked Kyiv last February, the Polish government immediately began mobilizing its military and intelligence agencies to counter the age-old Kremlin threat. Tanks and soldiers were seen at major border crossings

across the entire east of the country as the Ukrainian refugee crisis exploded and Russian warplanes bombed targets mere miles from Polish airspace.

**Latvian prime minister: Delivery of Western fighter jets to Ukraine 'a matter of time'** - Latvian Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins told the Spiegel on March 4 that he was sure that combat aircraft would be delivered to Ukraine by Western countries, calling it “a matter of time” before the decision is made.

“If the Ukrainians need fighter jets, they should get them,” he said, adding that Ukrainians have repeatedly proven that they quickly learn to operate new equipment.

Delivering new fighter jets is seen as a significantly tougher logistical challenge compared to providing Western-built tanks because of the increased complexity and difficulty in training and maintenance involved.

Berlin has firmly rejected any possibility of doing the same with fighter jets after pledging dozens of Leopard tanks to Ukraine.

“The question of combat aircraft does not arise at all,” German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said on Jan. 29. Other countries have shown more openness to the idea. On Feb. 10, Ukraine officially requested F-16 multirole fighter jets from the Netherlands, which had earlier said the country was willing to look into the feasibility of such a delivery.

During President Zelensky’s Feb. 8 visit to London, U.K. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said that “nothing is off the table” when it comes to military aid for Ukraine.

Of all the available models, Ukraine has shown the most interest in the U.S.-built F-16, which has been in service since the 1970s and operated by over 20 nations.

Other models assessed as a good fit for Ukraine include French Rafale, Swedish Gripen, and Eurofighter Typhoon jets.

**Saudi Arabia sends US\$100 million in relief to Ukraine** - The Saudi aid has symbolic importance as Kyiv and its Western allies vie with Moscow for support in other regions of the world, including the Middle East

Andriy Yermak, head of Ukraine’s presidential office, said the aid includes 135 powerful generators, thermal blankets and hygiene materials

Two administration officials stressed that it wasn’t a training program and said that the Ukrainians would not be flying any aircraft during their time here.

These officials said the pilots would be using a simulator that can mimic flying various types of aircraft, and they emphasized that there had been no updates on the U.S. decision to provide F-16s to Ukraine beyond what the Pentagon’s top policy official said to Congress last week.

The official, Colin Kahl, told the House Armed Services Committee that the U.S. had not made the decision to provide F-16s and neither had U.S. allies and partners.

## Sanctions

**Sanctions leave Russia unable to produce vital radar plane** - Russia has been met with a roadblock - foreign suppliers of crucial aircraft are hesitant to provide for Russia amidst sanctions.

Russia is unable to further produce vital A-50 radar aircraft due to a defense industry crippled by foreign sanctions, the Ukrainian Intelligence Directorate said on Friday. Russia has 6 or 7 operational A-50s according to a UK Defense Ministry Tuesday intelligence update. **(Comment** – Reports vary as to the number of planes of this type that Russia has.)



"There were about 10 different variants of such [A-50] planes in total," said Ukraine MoD intelligence representative Andriy Yusov in a national telethon. "Another thing is not how many there are, but the ability to produce them. As of today, the degraded industry of the Russian Federation is producing new aircraft not capable of with similar purposes."

According to the UK A-50 MAINSTAY is a Russian warning and control platform. Its role recognized air picture and to provide adjoining fighter aircraft."



Defense Ministry, "The airborne early is to build a coordination to

## Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

**Moldova, rival Transnistria warn security risk intensifies over Ukraine war** - Amid growing concerns over the security situation in Moldova, both the pro-Western nation's ambassador to the United States and representatives of the Russia-aligned separatist government in Transnistria have told Newsweek that threats have intensified since the outbreak of war just across the border in Ukraine.

Fears of unrest have mounted in recent weeks as Moldova faced a series of overlapping issues, including soaring energy costs brought on by Western sanctions against Russia, whispers of an alleged Kremlin plot to destabilize the government of President Maia Sandu, and ongoing street protests against Sandu's administration.

On Tuesday, Hungarian carrier Wizz Air announced it was suspending flights to Moldova over airspace risks less than a month after a Russian missile was said to have flown over the country.

Now, one of Europe's poorest countries, landlocked between NATO member Romania and war-torn Ukraine, is on the defensive.

Speaking to Newsweek, Moldovan Ambassador to the U.S. Viorel Ursu said that "the Moldovan government, like any other responsible government, has been constantly assessing and addressing the full spectrum of threats to its population's security."

## Putin & Russia

**Russia puts conditions on grain deal renewal** - Russia has said it would only agree to extend the Black Sea grain deal if the interests of its own agricultural producers are taken into account.

Maria Zakharova, a spokeswoman for the Russian foreign ministry, reiterated Moscow's position.

"If this agreement is equal, then we have always fulfilled our part and are going to fulfil it in all the agreements," she said according to TASS news wire, adding that Russia would be against "goading and machinations."

Russia's agricultural exports have not been explicitly targeted by Western sanctions, but Moscow says restrictions on its payments, logistics and insurance industries are a "barrier" to it being able to export its own grains and fertilizers.

### Turkey says it is working to renew Black Sea grain deal

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu says Ankara is working hard to extend a UN-backed initiative that enabled Ukraine to export grain from ports blockaded by Russia following its invasion.

“We are working hard for the smooth implementation and further extension of the Black Sea grain deal,” Cavusoglu said in a speech at the UN Conference on Least Developed Countries being held in Doha, Qatar.

Cavusoglu also said he discussed the extension efforts with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative brokered by the UN and Turkey last July allowed grain to be exported from 3 Ukrainian ports. The agreement was extended in November and will expire on March 18 unless an extension is agreed upon.

**School of patriotism: Kremlin seeks to force parents to sit through propaganda lessons** - The Russian Education Ministry has unveiled plans to impose the “Important Conversations” lessons, which are meant to nurture patriotic sentiment, not just on schoolchildren and college students, but on parents and pedagogical university students as well. The minister said that the “format is being discussed now.”

**One parent commented** – *“My position is very simple: everything that starts with lies is unacceptable.”*

## A Chain of Wars, a Chain of Crimes, a Chain of Impunity

Russia’s massive invasion of Ukraine, launched on February 24, 2022, is an act of aggression unparalleled in European history since World War II. This war is criminal and terrible, and the widespread response to it is understandable.

However, this war was preceded by other armed conflicts with open Russian participation, albeit smaller in scale, but comparable in methods used. It is also important that at times these armed conflicts involved the same actors, the same military units and formations, and the same officers and generals. In a whole series of previous post-Soviet armed conflicts involving Russia, the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Chechen Wars as well as the armed conflict in Syria stand out.

The post-Soviet wars waged since the early 1990s have not been a chain of random events and coincidences. They should be seen as a chain of wars, a chain of crimes, a chain of impunity. **Impunity for past crimes generates new crimes and provokes new criminals.** (Comment – Precisely why Russia needs to be stopped in this war, because if they are not, they will continue down this path of military aggression). Surovikin, Strelkov, and other “heroes” of the war in Ukraine brought with them the experience of three decades of unpunished violence. The butchered city of Mariupol is a consequence of the destruction of Grozny. The impunity for the murderers of Samashki and Novye Aldy inevitably spawned Bucha. The “filtration camps,” through which Mariupol residents had to pass, inherited the “filtration system” that had existed in Chechnya. There can be no lasting peace without memory and justice.

After the collapse of the USSR in December 1991, the new democratic Russia seemingly disengaged itself from post-Soviet armed conflicts. Russia officially acted as a “peacekeeper” in the armed conflicts in Transnistria (June 1992) and South Ossetia (July 1992). However, a closer look reveals that in the “peaceful” 1992, Russia was in fact involved in five “hybrid wars” at once.

Those conflicts had been gradually “frozen” by the mid-1990s, but at that time the 1<sup>st</sup> Chechen War had already started. Eventually, having suffered a military defeat and brokered a ceasefire in August 1996, Russia withdrew its troops from the rebellious republic by early 1997.

In August 1999, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Chechen war started; it took the lives of 15,000 to 25,000 Chechens and 3,000 to 5,000 Chechens “disappeared”; the losses of security services was 6,000. As a result, the totalitarian regime of Ramzan Kadyrov, who managed to become “indispensable” to the Kremlin, was established in Chechnya.

In the mid-2000s, some of the conflicts seemingly resolved in the 1990s were “unfrozen”. As a result of the 2008 war in Georgia after Russia’s recognition of the independence of the rebel autonomies, up to 20% of Georgian territory was occupied. In that war, Russia, for the first time, openly stepped beyond its borders.

In February 2014, Russia occupied and then annexed Crimea, after which it launched a “hybrid war” in eastern Ukraine — in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. Apparently, the plans were broader than that. Destabilization was triggered throughout the south and southeast of the country, from Kharkov to Odessa. An army group was ready to conduct a large-scale offensive operation which was not launched at the time.

In September 2015, Russia openly joined the armed conflict in Syria on the side of Bashar al-Assad’s regime. The conflict there began in 2011, on the wave of the Arab Spring protest movement. The government’s brutal suppression of the secular democratic movement naturally led to its gradual radicalization and eventually contributed to the emergence of ISIS which controlled significant territories, used blatantly terrorist methods, and sought to create a “caliphate.” From the outset, Russia supported its longtime ally Assad despite the crimes committed by government forces and the enormous (by European standards) civilian casualties caused by the government-launched civil war. One of the goals expressed by Russian representatives was to wipe out fighters from the North Caucasus who had come to the ISIS-controlled area. Another goal openly stated by the Russian leadership was to test weapons systems and combat readiness of all branches of the armed forces. In fact, in Syria, the army was preparing for new wars, and most of the officer corps (specifically, all commanders of Russian troops in Ukraine had at different times held the post of Commander of the corps in Syria) and military pilots had gone through this war.

One of the results of the Syrian campaign was (deservedly or not) the reputation of the Russian army as “the second in the world.”

This is how the Russian Federation approached the year 2022, i.e. the start of a large-scale invasion of Ukraine. Looking back, we see the events of the last 35 years, the armed conflicts in Russia, in the former Soviet Union and then beyond not as a series of separate, unconnected episodes, not as a sequence of random coincidences — but as logically connected events. The

crimes committed in each of the conflicts have not been investigated. The perpetrators were not named, condemned and punished, and so they participated in new wars, reproducing and disseminating their experiences. It was a chain of wars, a chain of crimes, and a chain of impunity.

Given Russian impunity and self-proclaimed immunity from its aggressive and invasive actions, they followed up 2014 with a buildup (pictured to the right and above) and illegal invasion of its smaller neighbor Ukraine.

