

Conflict Update # 365

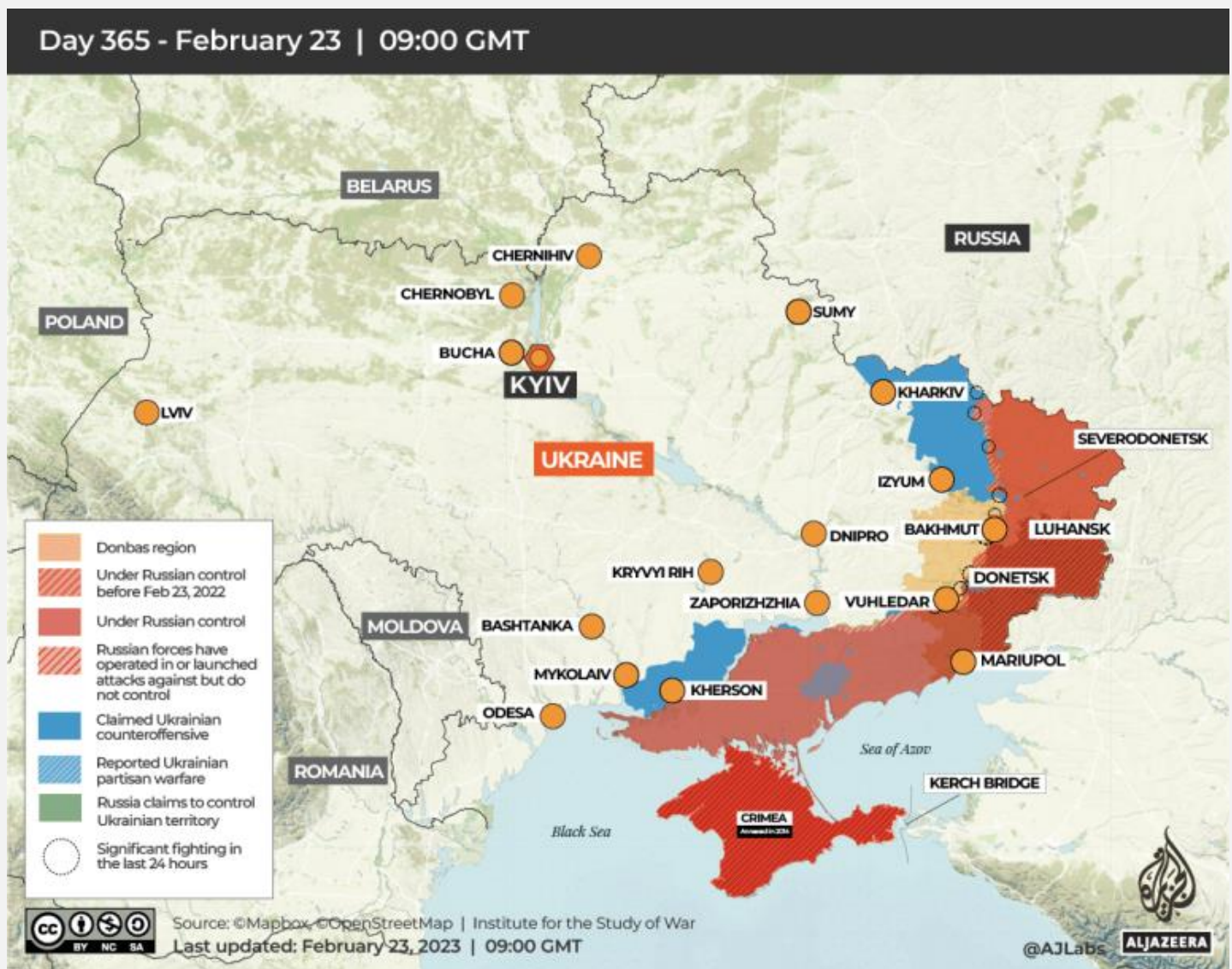
February 23rd, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 145,850 (700) soldiers killed, 3,350 (+16) enemy tanks, 6,593 (+24) armored combat vehicles, 2,352 (+14) artillery systems, 471 (+0) MLRS systems, 244 (+1) air defense systems, 299 (+0) warplanes, 287 (+0) helicopters, 2,029 (+3) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 873 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,215 (+3) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 228 (+2) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways



What to watch for – Chinese delegate to Moscow, Biden to Kyiv, B9 Ministers to Poland, EU meeting in Warsaw, Belarus threatens Ukraine, US naval vessels popping up everywhere, all telling signs something is brewing.

Russia loses 16 tanks, 24 armored vehicles and 3 drones in a day - Russia lost 16 tanks, 24 armored vehicles and three drones in the last 24 hours in Ukraine, according to the latest update from the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

The losses come at a time when their forces continue to conduct ground attacks throughout the Donetsk Oblast frontline, as reported by ISW. Russia is trying to secure marginal territorial gains around the eastern city of Bakhmut.

Russian forces have stepped up attacks along the eastern frontline of the war in Ukraine as Kyiv prepares to mark the somber first anniversary of the invasion. Amid fears that the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, intends to mark the anniversary with fresh attacks on key cities, Ukraine's general staff said it had repelled 90 assaults in the east and north-east in the past 24 hours. Russia has fired 5,000 missiles at Ukraine and carried out almost 3,500 airstrikes, according to Ukraine's general staff.

Ukraine is serious about taking back Crimea - In March 2022, Ukrainian President Zelenskyy was open to discussing "compromises" on Crimea - if that ended the war and saved his cities from destruction. This January, however, at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Zelenskyy said, "Crimea is our land, our territory," and asked the West for weapons to retake the strategic peninsula.

Successes on the battlefield have emboldened the Ukrainian president to seek military victories before any negotiated settlement. The fact that Russia has routinely used bases in Crimea to attack Ukrainian infrastructure has cemented the belief in Kyiv that regaining Crimea is essential to putting a decisive end to the threat posed by Russia.

One Ukrainian analyst told Foreign Policy there is credible talk among government officials in Kyiv about attempting to retake Crimea even before fully capturing the Donbas region, where most of the fighting is now taking place.

Retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, a former commander of U.S. Army Europe, has been among the most vocal advocates of the idea. "Crimea is the decisive terrain—that's what matters. If Ukraine liberates Crimea, which I believe is possible this year, then everything else will follow," he told Ukrainian media this month.

Border barricade – For 9 months prior to last year's illegal Russian invasion of Ukraine, Putin and the Kremlin conducted "military training exercises" along Ukraine's borders. They have just completed the same "exercises" in Belarus with reportedly 130,000 September-mobilized troops now trained.

They assembled masses of troops just outside the reach of Ukrainian artillery whilst naming these as military exercises. This is being repeated as we write.

Enemy forces have been stationed along Ukraine's north-eastern border and safely back from Ukrainian attack. Mobilized, trained and assembled – with camps located alongside a major rail link back into Belarus - easily re-deployable for action within three to four days.

The US and NATO monitor all Kremlin musters, movement and invasion preparation actions, and will be alert to incoming assemblage and movement of Russian and Belarussian troops and armor.

The Kremlin is positioning fighter jets and helicopters around Ukraine's borders, but some 200 kilometers back for protection. Kyiv has long-distance missiles remaining from its Soviet days with ranges of hundreds of kilometers, but hasn't used these, given NATO's (prior) sensitivity to any escalation of the conflict that will reach into Russian territory.

That will all change should Moscow launch a major offensive, as has NATO and US stated opinion with regard to Kyiv pursuing and striking targets within Russian-occupied Ukrainian territory. This will surely extend to any targets from where Moscow is launching its invasion and attacks.

Fixed wing aircraft require airfields, air defense systems, maintenance and refueling facilities – easily traceable and ideal targets for counter-attack.

Ukraine has been systematically targeting Russian anti-missile and air defense systems over the winter period.

Putin withdrew vital front line air defense systems for relocation to St. Petersburg and Moscow some months ago, due to a Kremlin belief that these two and other major western Russian cities were vulnerable to missile and drone attack.

Ukrainian preparation

Ukraine is keenly aware of any threat from its northern neighbor and has been gearing for this, although issuing statements indicating a limited threat from Lukashenko's armed forces.

The northern border between the two countries stretches for 450 kilometers and is covered by four Ukrainian BTGs – far too little to ward off a full-scale assault, translating into roughly 28 kilometers per Ukrainian defensive combat unit.

But there are other factors in favor of a home defense.



The border is covered by up to 180 kilometers deep of thick forest, saturated by rivers, rivulets, swamps and natural barriers - terrain not suited to armored equipment and troop carriers. Winter and wet weather are still ahead so any present invasion will encounter natural defensive obstacles as well as Ukrainian defenses with modern weapons.

Kyiv has also dug anti-tank trenches all along this stretch and has densely mined the entire border area. In addition to this they have constructed a solid border wall with reconnaissance towers the total length of the border.

There is the (past) surprise factor in that last year Ukraine was largely unprepared for the extent and intensity of invading forces, succumbing to initial Russian cross-border assaults quite rapidly.

This time it is very different. Ukraine has anti-aircraft and anti-tank weaponry in abundance across the entire border zone, will restrict invading forces to roadways quickly convertible into killing zones, with Russia still plagued by total dependence on a fixed rail supply chain.

As reported earlier this week, Ukrainian engineers have blown all road and rail bridges between the countries and will target interior Belarussian road and rail networks at the slightest sign of an invasion.

There are also a number of Belarussian pro-Ukrainian partisan groups that will rally to Kyiv's call, at the very least providing vital details of Russian and Belarussian forces' maneuvers and tactics.

Huge numbers of families straddle the border region and reportedly are keenly aware of Moscow's aggression and damage caused by their actions to Ukrainian cities and infrastructure.

Lukashenko will need to look intensely over his shoulder with long-standing, wide-scale elements of internal resistance to his rule and his close association with Putin and Russia in place. It is also reported many senior Belarussian command officers are dead set against any military action directed at their southern neighbor.

Belarus – and the Russian trained forces – still deploy outdated equipment, likely to be defeated by modern and updated Ukrainian western weaponry.

Kievan Command will likely direct invading forces on to and along identified roads for easy targeting, particularly with HIMARS and new plane-launched smart missiles.

Defending forces are extremely adept at hit-and-run tactics, deploying shoot-and-scoot electric motorcycle riders who operate as “lone wolves,” skirting around areas where no roads or routes exist, nimbly locating and attacking enemy formations, particularly leading and trailing tanks and fuel bowsers – “Lock them in and then knock them out.”

Russian objective in Belarus assault

Putin will seek to divert Ukrainian army divisions from the southeast to the north, hoping to weaken Kyiv's southern capabilities and resolve, and create a pathway for him to reclaim all of the Donbas by March.

Fearful of a planned Kievan counter-attack, he will be hoping to undermine offensive preparation by converting and diluting Ukrainian command strength and focus from a southern buildup to defense of the north.

Russia steps up hostilities to deplete Ukraine's forces - Russia is intensifying hostilities in Ukraine a year after its invasion in a deliberate attempt to deplete Ukrainian forces, the Ukrainian military said earlier today.

Brigadier General Oleksiy Gromov said Russia had set the goal of capturing all the territory it does not control in the two regions that make up the industrial Donbas area of eastern Ukraine by summer.

The fiercest fighting remained around the eastern city of Bakhmut, he told a military briefing on the eve of Friday's anniversary of the invasion on Feb. 24 last year.

"The enemy, having an advantage in the resource of human mobilisation, is deliberately intensifying hostilities in an effort to deplete the units of the armed forces of Ukraine," Gromov said.

Russia just lost another extremely rare weapons system in Ukraine - Ukrainian forces have destroyed a truly terrifying piece Russian equipment A recently released video revealed that Russian forces have lost another extremely rare, and very expensive, weapon somewhere along the frontlines in Donetsk.

It is being reported that they recovered one of Russia's most advanced hypersonic missiles.

Ukraine destroy Russia's deadly T-90M tank with artillery fire - A video shared on Twitter by Ukraine Weapons Tracker shows a Russian T-90M tank left completely destroyed, surrounded by battered Russian military vehicles and destroyed homes.

The video, which appears to have been recorded by a drone, shows the tank abandoned at the side of a road and engulfed in flames.

According to Ukraine Weapons Tracker, the strike occurred somewhere in Kharkiv Oblast and is the 12th known example of this particular kind of tank being destroyed or captured by Ukrainian forces.

'We kill them all': Russian soldiers in Ukraine call home - 2,000 intercepted phone calls from Russian soldiers in Ukraine obtained by AP offer an intimate new perspective on Putin's year-old war, seen through the eyes of Russian soldiers themselves.

AP identified calls made in March 2022 by soldiers in a military division that Ukrainian prosecutors say committed war crimes in Bucha, a town outside Kyiv that became an early symbol of Russian atrocities.

They show how deeply unprepared young soldiers — and their country — were for the war to come. Many joined the military because they needed money. They were told they'd be welcomed as heroes for liberating Ukraine from what Russian officials falsely claimed were Nazi oppressors, and their Western backers, and that Kyiv would fall without bloodshed within a week.

The intercepts show that as soldiers realized how much they'd been misled, they grew more and more afraid. Violence that once would have been unthinkable became normal. Looting and drinking offered moments of rare reprieve.

They told their mothers what this war actually looked like: About the teenage Ukrainian boy who got his ears cut off. How the scariest sound is not the whistle of a rocket flying past, but the silence that means it's coming directly for you. How modern weapons can obliterate the human body so there's nothing left to bring home.

One Russian mother said "This is absurd," she said. "Just don't try to make it look like my child killed innocent people."

Her son said "We shot from the tanks, machine guns and rifles. We had no losses. We destroyed their four tanks. There were dead bodies lying around and burning. So, we won." "They were lying there, just 18 or 19 years old. Am I different from them? No, I'm not."

As he speaks, he watches a town burn on the horizon.

"Such a beauty," he says.

Son: "Well ... civilians are lying around right on the street with their brains coming out."

Mother: "Oh God, you mean the locals?"

Son: "Yep. Well, like, yeah."

Mother: "Are they the ones you guys shot or the ones ... "

Son: "The ones killed by our army."

Son: "There was a prisoner. It was an 18-year-old guy. First, he was shot in his leg. Then his ears were cut off. After that, he admitted everything, and they killed him."

Mother: "Did he admit it?"

Son: "We don't imprison them. I mean, we kill them all."

Mother: "Mhm."

Russia drops ominous warning about attack on Moldova - Moldova dismissed claims made by Russia's Defense Ministry on Thursday that Ukraine "saboteurs" were prepping a false flag attack on a pro-Russian breakaway region in the country.

The warning, announced on the Russian Defense Ministry's Telegram account, suggested the troops involved would dress up as Russians. "As a pretext for the invasion, it is planned to stage an alleged offensive of Russian troops from the territory of Transnistria," the message warned, referring to the pro-Russian breakaway region of Moldova. "To do

this, the Ukrainian saboteurs participating in the staged invasion will be dressed in the uniform of the military personnel of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation.”

Political Leadership

After independence, Ukraine moved to shed its Russian imperial legacy and forge increasingly close ties with the West.

Over the past 30 years, Ukraine has been led by seven presidents. The country has had a rocky path towards democracy with two revolutions, first in 2005 and then in 2014. Both times, protesters rejected Russia’s supremacy and sought a path to join the European Union and NATO.

By comparison, Russia has been led by three presidents, Putin in office for 17 years. In 2021, Putin, the former agent of the Soviet Union’s KGB security services, signed a law that essentially enables him to stay in power until 2036.

He has repeatedly claimed that Russians and Ukrainians belong to “one people” and are part of the historical “Russian civilization” that also includes neighboring Belarus. Ukrainians reject his claims.

Comment – Kyiv was at one time the capital city of Russia – before it was called that – when its name was Kyiv-Rus. Both Russia and Belarus obtained their names from Kyiv-Rus. In historical times Kievan rulers moved the capital to what is today called Moscow because of invaders such as the Golden Horde and Mongols.

This is where Putin originates his claim of being “one people.”

Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

WH weighs release of intel on China's arms plan for Russia – The Biden administration is discussing whether it should release intelligence that it says shows China is deciding whether it should supply lethal weapons to Russia for its war against Ukraine, according to U.S. officials.

The disclosure discussions come after several closed-door appeals to China from NATO allies that ended in a formal warning that Western officials, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken, delivered last weekend in Munich to Wang Yi, China's senior foreign-policy officer, The Wall Street Journal reported.

The Biden administration has been working on declassifying the intelligence, but there has not been a final decision on when or if it will be released, the officials said.

Putin’s claims ‘absolutely delusional,’ says Portuguese FM - Putin had made absolutely delusional claims about the war in Ukraine in his speech on Tuesday when he announced Moscow’s suspension of the nuclear arms control agreement, Portuguese Foreign Minister João Gomes Cravinho said in an interview.

In an interview with Lusa on the first-year anniversary of Russia’s attack on Ukraine, Gomes Cravinho pointed to “a very big contrast” between the words of Putin and those of US President Joe Biden who had paid a surprise visit to Kyiv on Monday.

However, according to the Portuguese minister, there are times when a gesture, such as Biden’s visit, is worth much more than a long speech.

NATO secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, has said the alliance had seen signs that China was considering supplying arms to Russia and warned Beijing against taking any such step.

As weapons taboos shatter, Kyiv and the West become strong allies - Military aid has helped Ukraine leap into the Western fold – precisely the outcome Russia had sought to prevent.

Putin invaded Ukraine a year ago insisting that he was reclaiming a historic part of Russia. The war that ensued was, in his terms, a civil war among Russians.

It was also largely a civil war among Soviet-era systems.

In a war in which both sides relied on Russian ammunition and systems, Russia had the clear resupply advantage.

The West's determination to prop up Ukraine's arsenal meant that it had to transition Ukraine to Western systems.

European Council President Charles Michel recently described what an unprecedented decision this was for Europe.

"When [Ukrainian] President [Volodymyr] Zelenskyy called me on February 24th, he said, 'Charles, we need weapons. We need ammunition.' Three days later, we formally decided to provide – for the first time in EU history – lethal equipment to a third country," Michel told the Ukrainian parliament on January 19.

But that created a dilemma.

How far and how fast should the West go in opposing Russia in a proxy war – especially one few people at the outset felt Ukraine could win?

According to Russian principles on nuclear deterrence, Moscow may retaliate if it is targeted with a nuclear attack or may use nuclear arms if a conventional assault "threatens the very existence of the state".

"[Russian] doctrine is that it will use nuclear weapons to de-escalate when the war is escalating and not going well," said Colonel Dale Buckner, a former United States special forces commander with extensive intelligence experience who now runs Global Guardian, a multinational security consultancy.

"In order to de-escalate, [the Russians] will escalate using chemical or nuclear weapons," Buckner told Al Jazeera. "It's a written document. That is the Russian protocol, which then puts fear in everybody."

Russia's nuclear threat abated towards last autumn as India and China, its nuclear-armed allies, discouraged any nuclear reprisals.

But in the meantime, Russia played on Western fears.

An incremental build-up of confidence

The West moved slowly at first, providing only defensive weapons to Ukraine, but its inhibitions have evaporated due to a **series of turning points in the war**.

The **first** coincided with the defeat of Russia's original war aims soon after the war had begun.

Ukraine used US-made Javelin missiles to skewer a 65km (40-mile) column of Russian armour as it tried to reach Kyiv.

A month into the invasion, Putin withdrew his forces from the northern territories after suffering enormous losses to focus on the eastern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk.

NATO then sent anti-ship Neptune missiles, which Ukraine used to sink the Russian Black Sea flagship Moskva on April 24, pushing back other Russian ships 100km (62 miles) from Ukrainian shores.

The **second** turning point came in response to Russia's high-intensity warfare in Luhansk and Donetsk in the Donbas.

"Russian artillery were firing around 20,000 rounds per day, with their peak fire rate surpassing 32,000 rounds on some days," a report by the Royal United Services Institute said. "Ukrainian fires rarely exceeded 6,000 rounds a day, reflecting a shortage of both barrels and ammunition."

In April, allies for the first time provided armored personnel carriers, long-range howitzer artillery and Phoenix Ghost kamikaze drones. M113 armored personnel carriers and Mastiff heavily armored patrol vehicles were the first Western-designed-and-built armour to go to Ukraine.

Guided artillery rockets turn the war.

In one of the most consequential decisions of the war, US President Biden on May 30 approved sending High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems, or HIMARS, a GPS-guided multiple rocket launch system with three times the range of field artillery and an accuracy of two metres (2.2 yards) at 80km (50 miles).

HIMARS arrived in Ukraine on June 23, and two days later, Ukraine put it to devastating use, targeting Russian command posts and ammunition depots far behind the front lines in what Australian Brigadier General Mick Ryan called a “strategy of corrosion,” and the **third** turning point.

After the US decision, the UK and Germany readied European adaptations of HIMARS with twice the firepower. The M270 entered into service on July 15 and the MARS II on August 1.

By late July, Kherson administrative adviser Sergey Khlan said “a breakthrough has occurred in the course of hostilities. We see that the Armed Forces of Ukraine have begun counteroffensive actions in the Kherson region.”

By destroying Russian supply lines and warehouses, Ukraine neutralized the main Russian advantage – firepower. Moscow was forced to draw its depots back into Russia and turn to Belarus and North Korea for more ammunition.

In the first week of September, Ukrainian forces were able to launch counteroffensives in the southern region of Kherson and the northern region of Kharkiv almost simultaneously, winning back territory and the **fourth** turning point.

Moscow Calling, a Russian military reporter, called the effect of HIMARS and similar systems “colossal.”

“Russia goes into a defensive posture, and everyone starts to realise the Russians have real problems,” Buckner said. ““We can pin Russia’ is what a lot of people are thinking.”

Tanks and the problem with Germany

Ukraine’s ability to take back half the land Russia occupied at the beginning of the year encouraged thoughts of offensive weapons.

“The tank is a weapon of assault and attack and advance. ... They’re not defensive,” Chris Yates, a retired British tank commander with battlefield experience on the Challenger 2, told Al Jazeera.

“It’s symbolic that the West supports a Ukraine going into the assault, hitting back against Russia, not just minimizing or containing a Russian advance,” Yates said.

Europe’s most widely used tank is the Leopard 2, built by Germany, which needed to authorize re-export from its allies to Ukraine, but Germany’s resistance to first-mover status was slow to overcome. Britain had to commit Challenger 2 tanks and the US M1 Abrams tanks for Germany to agree to allow NATO allies to export its tanks to Ukraine in January. Allies have so far promised 223 Western main battle tanks, marking a **fifth** turning point in the war.

A **sixth** came on February 3, when the US agreed to supply Ground Launched Small Diameter Bombs (GLSDB), giving Ukraine twice the striking range of HIMARS.

Comment – I would add another – Intelligence sharing as the **seventh** turning point, although introduced much earlier than points three to six.

The US and Ukraine collaborate very closely in interpreting incoming intelligence, then satellite tracking source triangulation, relaying precise enemy coordinates to HIMARS batteries, which then concentrate extremely accurate counter fire at Russian positions and locations, all within minutes according to informed reports.

Will the fellowship hold?

There are practical concerns to this military aid.

Ukraine is depleting allies' reserves of NATO artillery shells, and defence industries need time to ramp up production.

"States [are] either hiring local or foreign workers, adding production lines, building new plants, especially in Eastern Europe, all to increase productivity, which combined will in time make a difference, but the time it will take to reach and sustain the levels of ammunition that Ukraine is using – I have a fear that it might not be enough," said Elisabeth Gosselin Malo, a Canadian defence correspondent.

The US announced in January that it was increasing shell production sixfold to 90,000 a month, but that will happen over a two-year period, Malo said.

"Defence manufacturers are being for the most part transparent about the numbers they're hoping to reach, but the inventory that states have is completely off the record, so there's not really a way for us to verify if they are in a position to sustain this for another year," Malo told Al Jazeera.

UN expected to endorse demand for Russia to leave Ukraine - The 193-strong UN general assembly is expected by a massive majority on Thursday to endorse a broad resolution demanding Russia unconditionally and immediately withdraw from Ukraine's territory, but China, South Africa, India and many countries in the global south are likely to continue to abstain, underlining their alienation from what they regarded as the west's war.

The resolution has been the subject of weeks of negotiations and has required Ukraine's allies in the G7 to persuade Kyiv not to press for very specific wider demands and risk seeing some of the countries that have previously voted for Ukraine's sovereignty peeling off.

The last time the UN general assembly voted on the issue 143 countries backed Ukraine and only 5 supported Russia. Ukraine has been warned the number may slip to 135 in today's vote, marking the first anniversary of the war's start, but Ukraine and its allies have been involved in last minute high-level lobbying of countries such as Pakistan and India.

Update - **Russian must withdraw from Ukraine 147 UNGA members say, including Israel** - Russia must unilaterally withdraw from Ukraine 147 countries including Israel demanded as they approved a resolution that called for a just and lasting peace that preserved the war-torn country's territorial integrity.

The UNGA called on Russia to "immediately, completely and unconditionally withdraw all of its military forces from the territory of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders" and for "the cessation of hostilities."

Only seven countries opposed the text and 457 nations abstained or were absent from Thursday's vote, which was timed to mark the one-year anniversary of the start of the war.

Among those who stood with Russia were Belarus, North Korea, Eritrea, Mali, Nicaragua and Syria. China and India abstained. Israel was among the dozens of countries that took to the podium to express their solidarity with Ukraine.

Israel's stance on Ukraine - Its Ambassador to the United Nations Gilad Erdan took the opportunity to connect Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, with the war in Ukraine, given that Tehran has a military alliance with Moscow and is supplying it with armed drones.

“Ukraine has been a testing ground for Iran,” Erdan said. “Their armaments are now being sold to some of the most dangerous international actors. If this is what the Iranian threat looks like today, I truly cannot imagine what it will be like should Iran become a nuclear threshold state,” he said.

All members of the B9 have jointly condemned Russia’s war in Ukraine, a Polish presidential adviser said. Biden and the B9 leaders “reaffirmed their unwavering support for Ukraine and underscored their shared commitment to stand with the Ukrainian people for as long as it takes” according to a White House account of Wednesday afternoon’s meeting in Warsaw.

NATO must “seriously plan” for the likely future reality of a Russian-controlled Belarus, the US-based thinktank the Institute for the Study of War (ISW) has warned. Putin will “very likely secure significant gains in restoring Russian suzerainty over Belarus” and use it as a launch pad to further threaten Ukraine and Nato’s eastern flank, regardless of the outcome of his invasion of Ukraine, the ISW said in its latest update on the war.

China says it's seeking role in Ukraine peace settlement - The foreign minister of China, which has provided strong political backing for Russia in its invasion of Ukraine, said Tuesday his country wants to play a role in ending the conflict.

Zelenskiy has said he had not seen any Chinese peace plan but he would welcome a meeting between Ukraine and China. “We would like to meet with China,” he said during a news briefing in Kyiv with the visiting Spanish prime minister, Pedro Sánchez, on the eve of the first anniversary the invasion. Sánchez, meanwhile, said: “I’m back in Ukraine a year after the start of the war. We will stay by Ukraine’s side until peace returns to Europe.”

Sanctions

Russia will slash oil exports 25% to try and push up crude prices for the West - Russia is planning to make hefty cuts to its crude exports in order to push oil prices up for the west, Reuters reported this week.

Three people in the Russian oil trade said the nation could slash shipments from its Western export hubs as much as 25% by March, Reuters originally reported on Wednesday. One source said the state-operated oil pipeline Transneft already told two businesses they would be given 20%-25% fewer shipments in March than it had originally requested from Russia's Western ports.

Sanctions introduced by G7 nations against Russia since its invasion of Ukraine should be applied by all G20 countries, Italy’s economy minister, Giancarlo Giorgetti, has said, saying sanctions “must be applied not only by the G7 countries but also by the G20 countries.”

Maersk gets closer to ending Russian operations by selling two logistics sites - Maersk has almost fully exited Russia. The Danish shipping and logistics giant - #1 in the world - announced it has “entered into an agreement to divest its logistics sites in St. Petersburg and Novorossiysk to IG Finance Development Limited.”

The decision to sell the two sites—one a container depot, the other a warehouse—was “a consequence of the company’s decision made in March 2022 to discontinue activities in Russia,” Maersk said.

Containment

‘It’s difficult’: Ukrainian soldiers take German tank course in double time - For 12 hours a day and six days a week, a **few hundred** Ukrainian soldiers are cramming an intensive course on operating tanks in Germany, knowing full well they have no time to waste.

“Our comrades are waiting for us,” said one of the soldiers, Vitali, who gave only his first name and covered his face with a scarf to ensure his anonymity.

“They are expecting us to return to Ukraine as quickly as possible and help to defeat the enemy,” he told reporters.

Vitali counts among student soldiers who are learning the basics of maintenance and operation for German-made Leopard 2 tanks, as well as Marder infantry fighting vehicles. The equipment had been recently pledged to Kyiv by Western allies, but before they arrive in Ukraine, the soldiers have to be taught to use them.

The Ukrainians, some of them straight from the front, would learn to be tank commanders, drivers and gunners in the space of just a few weeks in the middle of a forest near the small town of Munster.

The Ukrainians would race through their training in just five weeks.

“Normally, it would take twice as long,” Peter said.

In order not to waste any time, the soldiers take a break only on Sunday.

If the soldiers are behind, “then we take Sunday, too,” he added.

Germany and China clash over west’s supply of weapons to Ukraine - The German FM, Annalena Baerbock, clashed with Chinese diplomats today, passionately rejecting their claim the west was adding fuel to the fire by arming Ukraine.

She said it was time for China to tell Russia to stop its aggression.

In a debate at the UNGA marking the anniversary of the invasion and seen as a key barometer of the state of world opinion, China intervened to present itself as above the conflict by proposing a catalogue of measures: a ceasefire, dialogue, security guarantees for Russia, protection of civilians and the upholding of territorial integrity.

Deputy Chinese envoy to the UN, Dai Bing, insisted the west was worsening the situation by arming Ukraine, saying: “Adding fuel to the fire will only exacerbate tensions.”

His remarks provoked Baerbock into a powerful rebuttal rejecting his claim that the west was indulging in military spending at the expense of other priorities more important to ordinary people.

She asked: “Why on earth would we do that?”, adding: “We did not want this war. We did not choose this war.” She said her government “would much rather focus every bit of our energy and money in fixing our schools, in fighting the climate crisis and strengthening social justice”, adding: “The truth is that if Russia stops fighting, the war will end, If Ukraine stops this fighting, Ukraine ends.”

She said the suffering, including “abduction, rape and torture”, would continue every day, and that the world’s gaping wounds, caused by hunger, inflation and energy shortages, would not end.

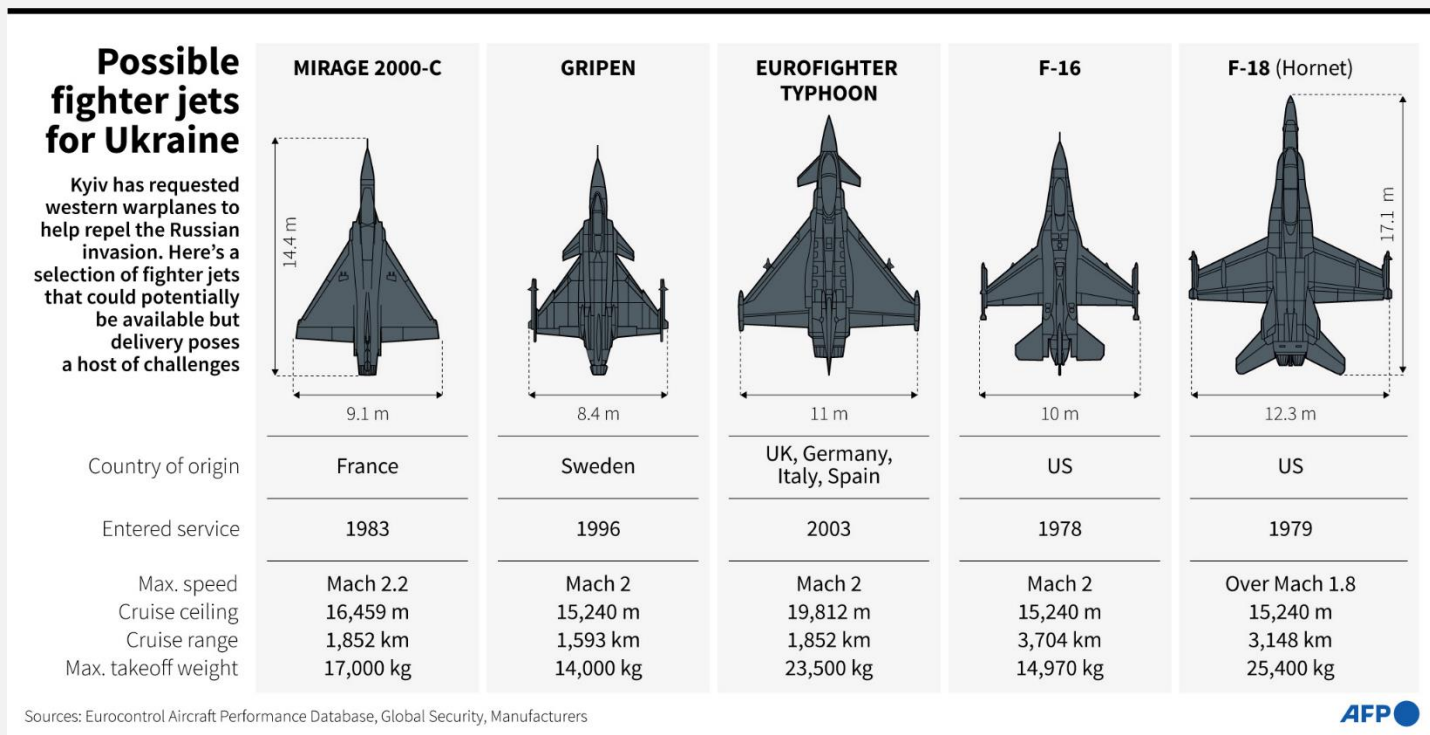
Every country, she argued, had a duty to send a clear signal that the war was coming to an end. Addressing the 30 to 40 countries likely to abstain from the resolution, including China, India and South Africa, she noted: “Today each of us has to make a decision to stand in isolation with the oppressor or stand together for peace.”

She said there was a peace plan for Ukraine, and it was called the UN charter with its principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity and the non-use of force.

Comment – China seeks a strong Russia as a partner in its pursuit of a new bi-polar world order, India seeks to continue purchasing Russian oil on the cheap with large discounts, and South Africa continues to exceed its station in life.

Australia will send drones to Ukraine and expand sanctions against Russian government, military and media figures as part of a pledge to stand with Kyiv “for as long as it takes.” The package includes travel bans and asset freezes for a further 90 Russian individuals and 40 Russian entities, including the state-owned media outlet Sputnik.

Finland will send three Leopard 2 battle tanks to Ukraine, the country’s defence ministry has said. The announcement comes after Sweden’s defence minister said it was open to sending some of its Leopard battle tanks. The Czech government has also announced a further military aid shipment to Ukraine.



Italy to send Ukraine 2 other air defense systems in addition to Mamba - Under its new military aid package, Italy will provide Ukraine with Spada and Skyguard air defense systems beyond the SAMP-T/Mamba, which it earlier pledged to deliver, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said.

Speaking at a joint press conference with President Zelenskyy in Kyiv, Meloni ruled out supplying Western fighter jets to Ukraine for the time being.

"Currently, there is no question of sending aircraft, and this decision must be made with international partners. We have focused on air defense systems, SAMP/T, Spada, and Skyguard. The priority is to protect infrastructure and civilian population," the prime minister said.

France and Italy approved the delivery of Italian-French SAMP-T air defense systems in early February. Ukrainian servicemen left for training on the system shortly after.

Spain may provide Ukraine with 10 Leopard 2 tanks - Spain will consider supplying Ukraine with four more Leopard 2 A4 tanks in addition to the six ones already promised by the government, Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said on Feb. 23. The decision will be made "in the coming weeks," he added.

Putin & Russia

Allies closely eyeing Russian nuclear arms activity, NATO says - NATO will closely monitor what Russia does with its nuclear weapons after President Vladimir Putin suspended his country's participation in the New START treaty, the alliance's chief Jens Stoltenberg said as he warned of the risk of an arms build-up.

"This is a reckless decision because we need arms control and we need transparency," SG Stoltenberg told Bloomberg TV in an interview. "A world without nuclear arms control agreements risks leading to more nuclear weapons."

Putin said during his state-of-the-nation address on Tuesday that Russia would suspend its observation of the treaty and won't allow the US and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to inspect its nuclear facilities. The treaty seeks to limit the deployment of intercontinental-range nuclear weapons by both Russia and the US by allowing checks of each country's program.

Russia has invested heavily in new modern nuclear capabilities in recent years, Stoltenberg said, adding the alliance was "taking the necessary steps to ensure our deterrence remains safe and credible."

Comment – The US in particular monitors every Russian – and all other nuclear states as well – move for signature steps it can identify as indicators toward a nuclear launch - on a 24/7/52 basis. Russia similarly monitors American moves, clear in the Cuban crisis when the two countries were able to decipher one another's "nuclear" indicators across the board.

Russia fully reopens Crimea bridge to cars on eve of anniversary - Moscow on Thursday announced the full reopening to road traffic of the controversial Crimea Bridge, which has been closed and under repair since it was badly damaged in an explosion in October.

The announcement came on the eve of the first anniversary of the Russian offensive in Ukraine, with both Moscow and Kyiv keen to control the narrative and project images of victory.

Moscow has always blamed Kyiv for the attack on the bridge, which links the Moscow-annexed Crimean peninsula to mainland Russia and is known to be a prestige project for Russian President Vladimir Putin personally. Kyiv has always denied its involvement in the attack, however.

"All lanes of the Crimean bridge are fully open to car traffic 39 days ahead of schedule," Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin said, according to his press service.



We do not target civilian areas – is what FM Lavrov and Putin continually state. What happened in Bakhmut then – pictured below?

'Putin is a global problem,' - Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba expressed confidence that Ukraine would win the war against the invading force of Russia, in an interview with FRANCE 24. Speaking in Brussels a few days ahead of the first anniversary of Russia's invasion, the top Ukrainian diplomat explained why he thinks Putin represents a global threat for the international community, saying that the Russian president's strategy was "destruction and undermining stability." Kuleba added, "No one is interested in having a UN Security Council member and a nuclear power messing up the world."

Kuleba admonished those raising concerns that Russians are gaining the upper hand on the battlefield.

He said Ukraine needs "weapons, sanctions, money and solidarity," urging each country to choose how to show solidarity.

He argued the process to deliver combat tanks to Ukraine was "on track" and that it was only a matter of "weeks" until they are delivered. With regard to fighter jets, he claimed he had "no doubt" that they would also be supplied.

According to him, Putin means trouble not only for Ukraine, but for the world. He cited the Balkans, the Central African Republic and Syria as places where Putin was implementing his strategy, namely "destruction and undermining stability."

Russian morgues ordered to keep military deaths under wraps to avoid 'panic' - Russian morgues have been instructed to limit the number of military dead they hand over to families each day to avoid "panicking" the public about the growing death toll, according to The Moscow Times.

"We have a small city, handing over so many dead to their relatives at once means creating a panic," the news outlet quoted one morgue worker in Orenburg as saying.

The worker said he'd received verbal instructions from city health officials, adding that the move would also prevent any "scandals" caused by a crowd of grieving family members lining up at the morgue.

In the Republic of North Ossetia, there is an unspoken order for morgues to "hand over no more than two bodies a day," according to an unnamed official.

Comment – We have been commenting on this factor for some months in our Updates.