

# Conflict Update # 279

November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2022

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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** – 88,380 (480) soldiers killed, 2,911 (+3) enemy tanks, 5,866 (+5) armored combat vehicles, 1,901 (+2) artillery systems, 395 (+0) MLRS systems, 209 (+0) air defense systems, 280 (+2) warplanes, 261 (+0) helicopters, 1,555 (+0) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 531 (+0) cruise missiles, 16 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,423 (+7) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 76 fuel bowsers (+0) and 163 (+2) units of specialized equipment.

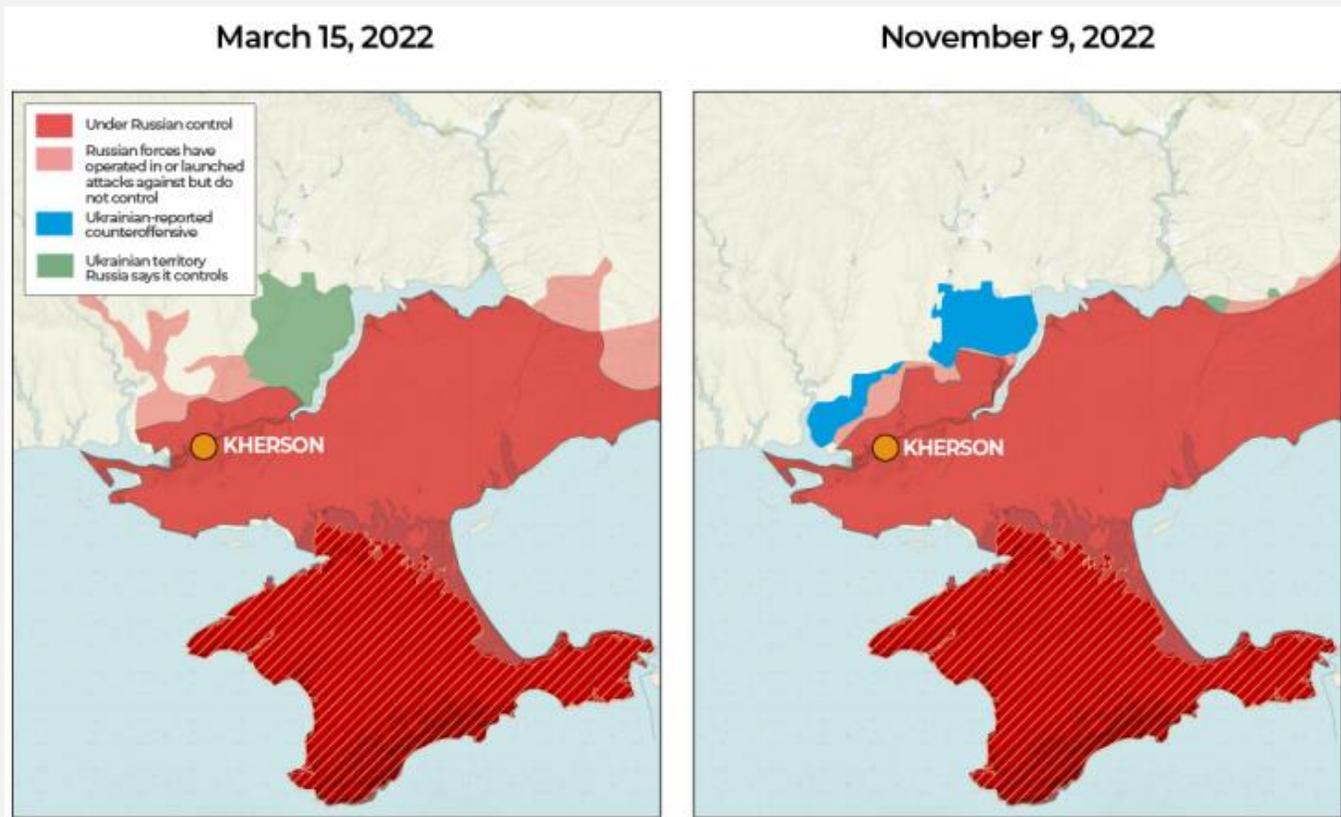
## Key Takeaways



**The War Grinds On** - Russian attacks on Ukraine's infrastructure are darkening cities as winter approaches, but Ukrainians' resolve may be burning even brighter, and Western support continues. Kadri Liik, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, joins host Steve Gutterman to discuss the latest phase of the war.

**Ukrainian troops say m777 howitzers change the course of battle in Donetsk region** - Ukrainian artillery crews make regular use of the Western-supplied M777 howitzer and say it has had a major impact against Russian forces. Crews operating one in a muddy field in the Donetsk region say the key to its success is its targeting precision.

### Recovering northern Kherson



**Russian forces continued to shell** civilian and infrastructure targets across Ukraine as fighting in the east continued unabated.

**The United States will announce new aid** on November 29 to help Ukraine restore electricity as its people faced another week of brutal cold and darkness after Russian missile strikes on its power grid caused rolling blackouts.

**Notorious Mercenary Company Scours Siberian Prisons For Soldiers To Fight In Ukraine** - As Moscow's war on Ukraine lurches into a new, uncertain phase, Russian authorities are increasingly turning to the country's prisons to replenish depleted units. The Wagner Group is leading the effort, and the result, in some cases, is inmates being coerced into signing up.

**Ukraine's Security Service finds 'content denying Ukraine's existence' during search in monasteries** - The Security Service of Ukraine and the National Police have found a large amount of "anti-Ukrainian content" during searches on the territory of the Pochaev Theological Seminary and the Ivano-Frankivsk Eparchy of the UOC (Moscow Patriarchate), the Security Service reports on Telegram.

“The Security Service has found literature that denies the existence of the Ukrainian people, their language, as well as the very right of Ukraine to statehood, and, on the contrary, claims that Ukraine is an artificially created state,” the agency said in a statement.

Also, “brochures and books of xenophobic and hateful content with offensive fabrications about other ethnicities and religions” were found. Most of the literature was published under the authorship of Russian people in Russian printing houses, according to the Security Service.

**Lose Kherson, lose it all** - After the defeat on the west bank of the Dnipro River, Russia could end up losing Melitopol, Berdyansk, and Mariupol.

On 9 November, general Sergey Surovikin, Russia’s top commander in Ukraine, reported the following to Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu: “After a thorough assessment of the current situation, it’s proposed we take up defensive positions on the east bank of the Dnipro River.”

In other words, it was proposed to abandon the bridgehead on the west bank of the river that spanned parts of the Kherson and Mykolaiv regions of Ukraine, and respectively, Kherson.

According to British general Richard Shirreff, ex-Deputy Commander of NATO forces, the loss of Kherson is a “great humiliation” for Putin. Furthermore, the loss of the west bank of the Dnipro River is a big military defeat for Russia, comparable to driving out Russian soldiers from Kharkiv region and banishing their Izium and Lyman groups of forces.

It could possibly have even greater significance. Two impressive victories by Ukraine’s Armed Forces in a row demonstrate that Russia losing the war is a real possibility now. The consequences for Putin personally and the governing regime would be less than ideal.

### **Chaotic evacuation**

On 10 November, the day after Russia announced the evacuation from the right bank of the Dnipro, Ukraine’s Armed Forces began to take control of the settlements left behind by the enemy, moving towards Kherson from the northwest (alongside the M14 highway) and northeast (including alongside the Dnipro River bank).

On 11 November, Russia’s Defence Ministry announced that by 5 AM, “the operation aimed at redeploying Russian forces to the left bank of Dnepr [sic] had been accomplished. No hardware or armament have been abandoned on the right bank. <...> Any casualties in personnel, armament, hardware, and material means have been prevented.”

But the numbers point out that no organised retreat could have taken place. The evacuation of Russian troops, most likely, resembled chaotic fleeing.

As of 10 November, according to Ukraine’s Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov, around 40,000 Russian soldiers and officers were present on the west bank of the Dnipro River. He thinks that it would have taken at least a week to move this number of troops to the east bank.



On 9 November, the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, general Mark Milley, said he “believed a retreat was underway”, however, Russia “had amassed as many as 30,000 troops in Kherson”, so not one but several weeks would be needed for a full withdrawal.

Meanwhile, the Russian Ministry of Defence reported that 30,000 Russian servicemen and 5,000 units of armament and hardware had been withdrawn to the east bank; furthermore, the task was accomplished in two days instead of several weeks. This is the time period specified by state-owned news agency TASS. But the only way to move such a large number of troops and equipment in an organised manner across the river in two days under enemy fire is via teleportation.

Pro-Russian “war correspondents” later reported that by the morning of 11 November, around 20,000 people and 2,000-3,500 units of military equipment had been withdrawn. This assessment is unverifiable; however, it sounds more likely than the information provided by the Defence Ministry.

It is possible that the retreat of the troops began earlier than reported by Moscow, however, there is no concrete and credible information on the subject.

Furthermore, up to 10 November, Ukraine’s leadership was saying that no troops were being actually withdrawn and all the messages of the kind appearing online were an attempt to push Ukraine’s Armed Forces towards an assault on a fortified big city, which could have led to significant losses.

It is likely that at least several thousands of Russian soldiers, probably just recently drafted, had remained on the west bank of the Dnipro River by the morning of 11 November. They were left to their own devices after the elite forces had been withdrawn to the east bank — the Russian command being primarily interested in keeping those forces alive.

And seeing as the Antonivka bridge and the bridge across the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant dam were blown up in the early hours of 11 November, the remaining Russian soldiers’ best case scenario is to surrender into captivity.

The statement by the Russian Defence Ministry on all personnel and military equipment “casualties being prevented” during the retreat seems completely implausible. This will be a hard pill to swallow even for Russian generals, who are used to all kinds of statements.

For example, ex-commander of the 58th Army, General Gurulyov, currently a member of Russia’s parliament, unambiguously refuted the Defence Ministry statement.

A retreat, he noted, is one of the most difficult types of combat operations: “You’re constantly under enemy fire, the main routes are obvious, the roads are being shelled, the maneuver can’t be realised fully, to withdraw without losing positions is quite difficult.” By the evening of 11 November, countless photos and videos showing the hardware left behind during the retreat had appeared online. Among the abandoned vehicles, there was a modern Russian tank T-90.

It is possible that detailed information on what was happening on the west bank during the last days and hours of Russian occupation will come out in the coming weeks. But the question of how many Russian soldiers were left behind on the west bank of the Dnipro River can potentially become one of the most inconvenient ones for Moscow to answer when it comes to the war between Russia and Ukraine.

### **What comes next**

The west bank was occupied by Russia during the first week of March, however, it played a secondary role in Moscow’s strategic plans for the next month and a half. The Kremlin was betting on capturing Kyiv and other big cities in the east of Ukraine. However, that territory began to play a special role in Russian military plans in the middle of April.

On 22 April, TASS quoted general Rustam Minnekayev — he said that one of the tasks for the second stage of the “special operation” was to occupy not just Donbas, but of all southern Ukraine. That, in turn, would give Russia access to Transnistria. Thus, the west bank of the Dnipro River was a place of strategic importance to Russia.

Russia planned to launch two offensives from that territory: first of all, the offensive in the western direction, towards the cities of Mykolaiv and Odesa, and secondly, in the eastern direction, towards the city of Kryvyi Rih, and from there — towards the cities of Zaporizhzhia and Dnipro.

Elite Russian forces with good training were deployed to the west bank; two powerful groups of forces for combat in the west and east of Ukraine were created under the leadership of general Mikhail Teplinsky, commander of Russian Airborne Forces. In particular, three out of four divisions and all four brigades of the Airborne Forces were stationed there, a sort of **crème de la crème** of Russia’s army.

By the middle of the summer, the situation on the front lines had changed. In particular, Ukraine’s Armed Forces received long-range American HIMARS capable of keeping under the firing control the transport communications used for delivering provisions for Russian troops to the west bank — first of all, the quite vulnerable stationary bridges across the Dnipro River.

Ukraine’s Armed Forces began to accumulate forces for the liberation of the west bank. The prospect of a successful Russian offensive in the direction of Mykolaiv and Kryvyi Rih came into question. And then, the Russian command had to face the question: does it make sense to continue keeping large forces on this bridgehead?

The planned offensive was a no-go, while bridges being destroyed would seriously reduce the possibility of delivering provisions to the troops stationed there and decrease their fighting capacity.

According to unverifiable but very plausible reports, the military command proposed the withdrawal of the troops from the west bank to Putin at the end of August, however, the president did not give his agreement until recently. Political interests and Putin’s goal of “saving face” no matter what dominated over military expediency.

Russian servicemen and political scientists state that large forces capable of fighting were withdrawn from the west bank, and they will be now used for offensives in other directions where they will change the situation in favour of Russia.

It is true that the most combat-ready forces of the Russian army were stationed on the west bank — battalion tactical groups, full of personnel and hardware, of two airborne assault divisions and three airborne assault brigades, one airborne division, the 45th Guards Spetsnaz Brigade units and the Spetsnaz GRU units, tank and motorized infantry units, all of them still capable of fighting.

Now, they will, most likely, be deployed to the city of Bakhmut and the Luhansk region in the coming days. In both locations, things are not going great for Russia. Russian forces have been trying to break through the defences of Ukraine’s army for the last several months, in order to take Bakhmut by storm or be able to bypass it so they can gain access to operational space.

Moscow is constantly sending new soldiers to Bakhmut and Vuhledar, a city located in the south-west of Bakhmut — the soldiers mostly being the recent draftees, who are suffering major losses. In the Luhansk region, Russia is barely holding back the onslaught coming from Ukraine’s Armed Forces in between the cities of Svatove and Kreminna.

However, the plans of Russia’s General Staff could not come to fruition. By destroying the Russian bridgehead on the west bank of the Dnipro River, Ukraine freed up forces comparable to the number of Russian troops that had withdrawn to the east bank.

The possibility of Russian forces pressing ahead on the Dnipro River front and recapturing the west bank is basically zero. Thus, Ukraine will get an opportunity to move major part of its troops stationed on the west bank and nearby to other parts of the front line. The part of the troops that includes 14 full-fledged brigades, which have become a de-facto operational reserve of Ukraine's Armed Forces.

Russia's command is expecting that at least six new Ukrainian brigades, 4,000-6,000 soldiers each, will be deployed to Donbas, the Zaporizhzhia region, or Svatove. Ukraine's long-range artillery weapon engagement zone has significantly expanded in the southern part of Ukraine, up to the accessway to Crimea.

With their additional reserve units freed up, Ukraine's Armed Forces now can go on the offensive both in the Luhansk region (on Svatove and, further ahead, on the city of Starobilsk) and in the southern direction.

In particular, in case of a potential breakthrough in the area of Hulyaipole and/or Vuhledar, Ukraine may even launch offensives on the cities of Melitopol, Berdyansk, and Mariupol. And that would lead to the destruction of all Russian defence in the south of Ukraine.

**Comment** – Our Updates reported months ago that Russia was in danger of losing upwards of 30,000 troops in western Kherson. And also that Russia needed to bolster its forces further east towards Donetsk and Luhansk as losses there provided Ukraine the opportunity to advance south to Mariupol, effectively splitting Russian forces in Ukraine in half.

We also reported, in multiple Updates, that Russia was “digging in” around Mariupol and the two bridges connecting Crimea to the mainland.

If we can determine this, then it is safe to assume that Russian Command can as well.

It therefore seems reasonable that when general Sergey Surovikin was appointed overall commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, he assessed the military situation and determined that, with broken supply chains and limited evacuation routes, western Kherson was isolated and thus “lost.”

Whilst also analyzing that he urgently needed top notch troops to defend areas closer to Russia with shorter supply lines.

In my opinion then, he would have commenced evacuation of as many of his prized and trained **crème de la crème** soldiers as possible out of the western Kherson danger zone and potential capture by Ukrainian forces, by relocating them further east - weeks ahead of the Russian withdrawal announcement.

If one goes back to reports of civilians being coercively evacuated by Russia across the River Dnipro from Kherson City, reports dating back weeks ahead of the withdrawal notice, then it is safe to assume that Russian soldiers were moving across to the eastern bank of the river – but in civilian clothing, mingling with civilian evacuees to camouflage troop withdrawals.

This explains the forced en masse civilian evacuation by Russian occupation authorities, an inexplicable and unnecessary maneuver under typical Russian occupation circumstances, but absolutely vital to provide plausible cover for their troops to evacuate – as civilians. There was literally no alternative to get them out of western Kherson where Ukrainian armed battalions were advancing at unstoppable pace.

And simultaneously explains how Russia extricated thousands of troops ahead of the “formal” announcement.

We analyzed and reported on these development throughout the months ahead of the formal Russian withdrawal.

**Putin will carpet-bomb Ukraine unless the West acts** - Russian air forces routinely pounded Syrian cities into dust, dropping indiscriminate “dumb bombs” by the thousands, seeking to simply destroy any support for the rebels fighting Putin's ally Bashar al-Assad.

Sadly, this carpet bombing proved very effective, and Putin seems inclined to try and copy it in Ukraine. The new general appointed to oversee the Ukraine war is the leader of Russia's air force, a man known for his Syrian atrocities. The strategy is simple: Grind down the Ukrainian electric grid and water distribution system to break the public's morale by literally freezing them out of their increasingly uninhabitable homes.

While Putin's stocks of precision-guided missiles are rapidly depleting (witness his turning to Iran for high-tech weapons), he still has plenty of dumb bombs, stockpiled for decades going back to the Cold War.

Because he doesn't care about collateral damage or civilian deaths, he will try to kill as many as he can from the skies

As the reality of his approach sinks in, the West must increase its support to Ukrainian air-defense efforts. Ukrainian President Zelenskyy, of course, desires a Nato no-fly zone above all else. He often implores the West to "close the skies" of his nation. More likely, he will receive increased numbers of high-end air-to-surface missile systems like the superb Iron Dome (developed jointly by the US and Israel), Nato Patriot batteries (that are also going along the Polish border), and possibly tactical fighters.

Leaders in Nato capitals are also revisiting an idea that was discarded in the early days of the war: providing either MiG-29 Soviet-era fighters (the Poles have offered to transfer them to the Ukrainians) or even US surplus F-16s, a simple-to-learn multi-role fighter. Without such measures, the air war will continue to go in favour of Putin.

With a land war favoring Ukraine and a brutal air war favoring Russia, the West's best option will be to significantly increase its assistance to Ukraine on the air war side of the conflict.

Giving the Ukrainians more tools to close their own skies may be the key to forcing the Russians to ultimately negotiate, perhaps as soon as early spring, given the success Zelenskyy and his military have achieved on the ground.

**Ukraine is hitting Russia with ancient World War II 'cannons'** - Ukraine Is Using Old World War II Mortars: As Russian forces began to mass on the Ukrainian border a year ago, Kyiv started to get creative with its defensive efforts.

Vintage small arms were pulled out of storage and provided to newly-formed militia units. There have even been reports of Ukrainian troops armed with DP-27 light machine guns and M1910 Maxim water-cooled heavy machine guns, each dating back to the Second World War or even earlier.

Though such weapons likely weren't used in great numbers, a different World War II-era platform is being put to significant effect by Ukraine in its war against the Russian invader.

It is the American-made M101 howitzer, which was the standard U.S. light field gun that saw service in both the European and Pacific Theaters and was later employed again during the Korean War.

The M101 can fire the 105mm high explosive (HE) semi-fixed ammunition, and it has a range of 12,300 yards (11,270 meters) or roughly seven miles, which makes it ideal as an infantry support weapon.

By the time production of the M101 ended in 1953, more than 10,000 had been manufactured by Rock Island Arsenal, and many were kept in storage or exported to NATO members and allies as surplus.

**Senior Ukraine military delegation visits Israel in bid for defense aid** - A senior Ukrainian military delegation visited Israel last week in a bid to secure defense assistance, according to a news report on Israeli television Monday.

The delegation, which included a top Ukrainian military commander, held several meetings with Israel Defense Forces and Defense Ministry officials, Channel 13 news reported.

The Ukrainians reportedly sought to push ahead with creating a missile alert system, which Israel has allegedly promised to build for Ukraine.

The delegation also pushed Israel to supply weapons systems, which Israel has so far refused to do, sending only humanitarian aid and protective equipment.

The network added that Israel tried to play down the delegation's visit to avoid sparking tensions with Russia.

Israel's refusal is seen as an attempt by Jerusalem to maintain working ties with Moscow, due to Russia's control of Syrian air space, where Israel's air force has carried out hundreds of sorties against alleged Iranian arms shipments and in order to keep groups backed by Tehran from establishing a foothold.

Kyiv's requests for air defense systems — and its public criticism of Israel's refusal to provide them — have grown more strident in recent weeks, as Iranian-made drones play an increasingly central role in Moscow's aerial attack on Ukrainian cities and infrastructure.

**Recent claims of Russian gains around Bakhmut on November 27 and 28** do not portend an imminent Russian encirclement of Bakhmut. Geolocated imagery shows that Russian forces likely captured Ozarianivka (a village about 15km southwest of Bakhmut) around November 27 and 28.

Multiple Russian sources claimed that Russian forces also captured Kurdiuvivka (13km southwest of Bakhmut), Klishchiivka (7km southwest of Bakhmut), Andriivka (10km southwest of Bakhmut), Zelenopillia (13km south of Bakhmut), Pidhorodne (5km northeast of Bakhmut) and Spirne (30km northeast of Bakhmut) with the intention of encircling Bakhmut from the south and east.

There is no open-source evidence supporting these claims at this time. Russian sources have notably propagated spurious claims regarding gains around Bakhmut as part of a continued information operation since October, and recent unsubstantiated territorial claims may be part of this continued information operation.

However, even if Russian forces have indeed succeeded in taking control of settlements south of Bakhmut, these gains do not threaten the critical T0513 (Bakhmut-Siversk) and T0504 (Bakhmut-Kostyantynivka) routes that serve as major Ukrainian ground lines of communication (GLOCs) into Bakhmut.

**Recent Russian force deployments to Belarus in November 2022** are likely part of a Russian effort to augment Russian training capacity and conduct an information operation targeted at Ukraine and the West — not to prepare to attack Ukraine from the north again.

Satellite imagery from mid-November indicates an increase in Russian equipment, particularly main battle tanks, at the 230th Combined Arms Obuz-Lesnovsky Training Ground in Brest, Belarus, including at least one brigade's worth of equipment observed at the training ground on November 20. Independent Belarusian monitoring organization The Hajun Project yesterday reported Russian forces transferred 15 Tor-M2 surface-to-air missile systems and 10 pieces of unspecified engineering equipment towards Brest. These deployments likely support Russian training efforts and are not preparing for combat from Belarus.

UGS reported it assesses Russian forces will transfer unspecified elements ("some units") from Belarus to an unspecified area after the units "acquire combat capabilities." This statement supports several ISW assessments that combat losses among Russian trainers and the stresses of mobilization have reduced Russia's training capacity, likely increasing Russia's reliance on Belarusian training capacity.

UGS additionally noted on November 28 that it has not observed indicators of Russia forming offensive groups near Ukraine's northern border regions.

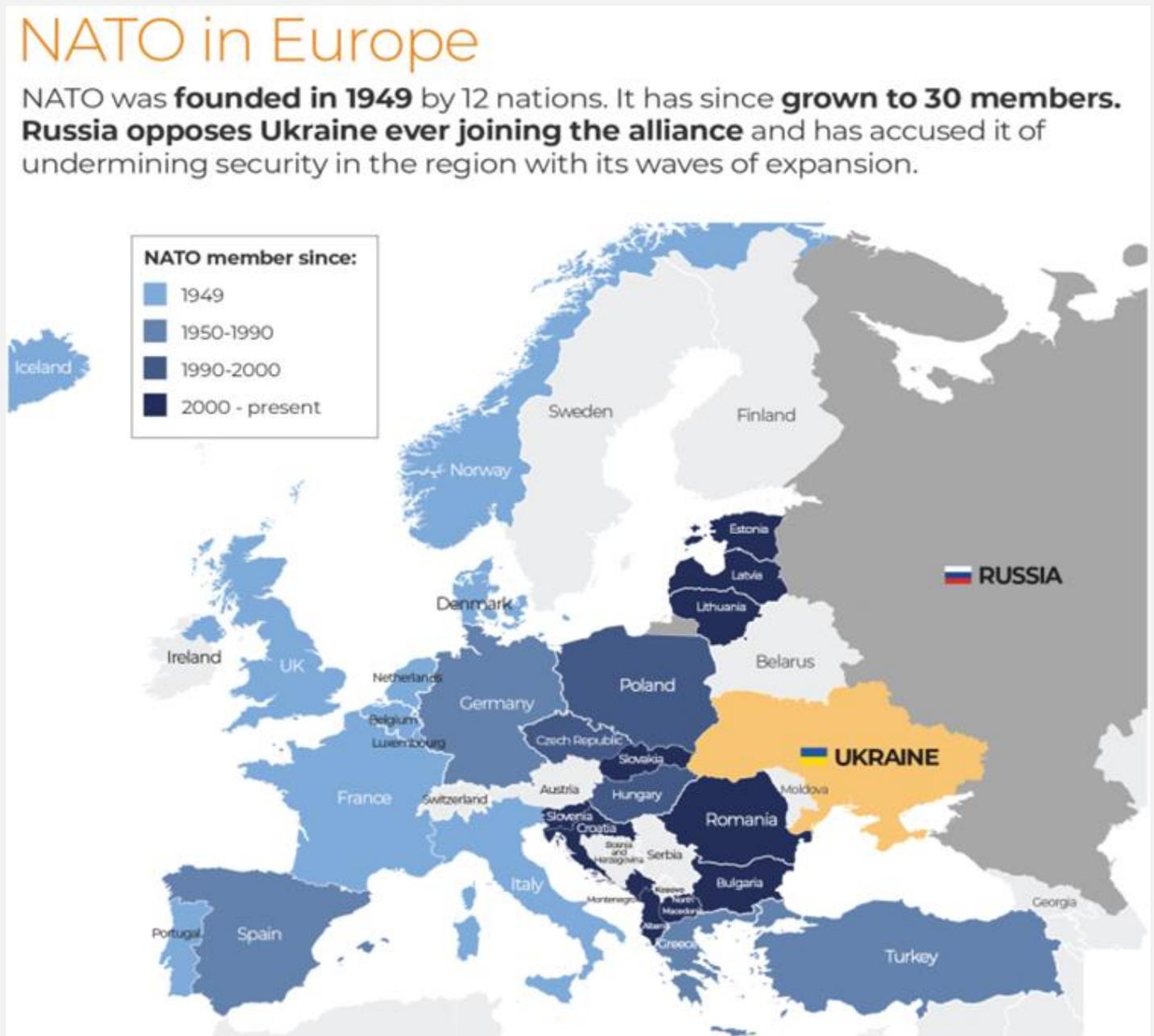
# NATO

**‘Lot of plans on the table’ at NATO meeting: AJ correspondent** - Al Jazeera’s Andrew Simmons, reporting from Bucharest, says, “there are a lot of plans on the table” at the NATO meeting of foreign ministers.

“Stoltenberg is promising a wide range of measures to continually support Ukraine at this foreign ministers’ meeting, there are a lot of plans on the table, but this is, of course, an organization, an alliance of 30 states in which consensus is the rule,” Simmons said.

“Not all the states agree that military aid should be given to Ukraine, so you have coalitions of the willing, so to speak.”

Ministers will also be discussing non-lethal aid in terms of heating, Simmons explained, but “the major issue right now is the winterization of this war, the use of the cold as a weapon by Russia, targeted attacks on infrastructure in the country, and blackouts all across Ukraine.”



“There is a desperate need for better air defence systems. There is a whole range of weaponry available, but there is resistance by some states about deploying them within Ukraine, and that is a major issue that is going to be discussed over the next 48 hours,” he added.

**NATO backs Kyiv’s future membership** - Kicking off a two-day meeting in Romania, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg says Ukraine will one day become a member but adds the more immediate focus should be on arming Kyiv’s forces and supplying non-lethal aid as the winter bites.

## Impacts

**Russia has lost Europe as a client ‘forever’: IEA Chief** - The International Energy Agency expects Russian crude production to be curtailed by about 2 million barrels of oil per day by the end of the first quarter of next year, its chief, Fatih Birol, told Reuters news agency on the sidelines of an energy conference.

Birol added that Russia has lost Europe as its largest energy client “forever.”

**Russian social network bans soldiers’ Mothers’ Group following Putin criticism** - Popular Russian social network VKontakte has banned an independent group of soldiers’ relatives lobbying the Kremlin for the return of mobilized troops from Ukraine.

The Council of Wives and Mothers said Sunday that its page had been blocked at the request of the Russian Prosecutor General’s Office without further explanation.

The group's ban came after it accused the Kremlin of excluding its members from President Vladimir Putin’s meeting with the mothers of soldiers Friday.

The council, which appeared after Putin declared a “partial” mobilization of reserves in September, claims to represent draftees’ relatives from 89 Russian cities.

Media outlets link its origins to a fringe political movement that seeks a return to Soviet rule and has protested Covid-19 restrictions during the pandemic.

**Russian Ambassador to Vatican lodges protest over Pope's comments** - Russian Ambassador to the Vatican Aleksandr Avdeyev says he visited the leadership of the diplomatic service of the Vatican on November 28 to lodge a protest in connection with statements made by Pope Francis that condemned the "cruelty" of Russia's actions in Ukraine. "I expressed indignation at such insinuations," Avdeyev told RIA Novosti. Francis said in an interview with the Jesuit magazine America that generally, "the cruelest are perhaps those who are of Russia but are not of the Russian tradition, such as the Chechens, the Buryati and so on. Certainly, the one who invades is the Russian state. This is very clear." (**Comment** – Russia compliments the Vatican for offering to broker a peace deal, but not for issuing any statements).

**NATO members call Russia’s attacks ‘unconscionable’** - NATO foreign ministers pledged to support Ukraine and help repair its energy infrastructure amid a wave of Russian attacks that have knocked out power supplies and heating for millions of Ukrainians.

“Russia’s aggression, including its persistent and unconscionable attacks on Ukrainian civilian and energy infrastructure, is depriving millions of Ukrainians of basic human services,” the foreign ministers said in a statement after the first day of talks in Bucharest.

They condemned Russia’s cruelty against Ukraine’s civilians and promised to assist the country as it repairs its energy infrastructure.

“We will continue and further step up political and practical support to Ukraine as it continues to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity...and will maintain our support for as long as necessary,” the statement noted.

Foreign ministers also confirmed a 2008 NATO summit decision that Ukraine would eventually become a member of the alliance.

**US involvement in conflict brings growing risks: TASS** - Russia is signaling to the United States that increasing involvement in the Ukrainian conflict brings growing risks, state news agency TASS quoted Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov as saying.

The Interfax agency also quoted Ryabkov saying, “We are sending signals to the Americans that their line of escalation and ever more profound involvement in this conflict is fraught with dire consequences. The risks are growing.”

A US official told Reuters news agency that a special “deconfliction” line between the Russian and US militaries had been used once since the start of the war. Still, Ryabkov said he was not “aware” of any channels.

“We do not have any dialogue with the United States on the Ukraine topic because our positions are radically different,” he said.

## Sanctions

**First Russian fertiliser shipment leaves the Netherlands for Malawi** - The first shipment of Russian-produced fertiliser left the Netherlands to Malawi under a previously brokered United Nations export deal, a spokesperson for the UN secretary-general said in a statement.

The spokesperson said that the shipment of 20,000 tonnes of fertiliser is the first of a series of exports destined for Africa in the coming months, adding that Tuesday’s delivery will be sent to Malawi via Mozambique.

Exports of 260,000 tonnes of Russian fertiliser products stored in Europe will be exported and “serve to alleviate humanitarian needs and prevent catastrophic crop loss in Africa, where it is currently planting season,” a spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

“The United Nations is continuing intense diplomatic efforts with all parties to ensure the unimpeded exports of critical food and fertilizers from Ukraine and the Russian Federation, exempt from sanction regimes to the world markets,” the spokesperson added.

## Humanitarian

More allegations of torture in Kherson after Russia’s retreat - More than two weeks after Russians retreated from Kherson, Ukrainian forces are uncovering sites where torture allegedly took place.

Five such rooms have been found in the city, along with at least four more in the wider Kherson region, where people allege that they were confined, beaten, shocked, interrogated and threatened with death, police said.

Human rights experts warn that the accusations made so far are likely only the beginning.

Oleksandra Matviichuk, head of the Center for Civil Liberties, a local rights group, told the Associated Press, “For months we’ve received information about torture and other kind of persecution of civilians.

“I am afraid that horrible findings in Kherson still lie ahead.”

## Containment

**The Ukrainian army captured dozens of the Russian army's old T-62 tanks—and is now sending them back into battle** - After losing a thousand of its best T-80 and T-72 tanks in Ukraine, the Kremlin early this summer began pulling 50-year-old T-62s out of long-term storage and sending them to the front—especially in the south.

Five months later in September, Ukrainian brigades launched counteroffensives in the east and south. The southern brigades started scooping up old T-62s by the dozen. And now, as was inevitable, those T-62s are beginning to appear on the front line again—on the Ukrainian side.

The first video of an ex-Russian T-62 in distinctive Ukrainian camouflage appeared online last week.

It's not yet clear where Ukraine has deployed its new-old T-62s or which unit is using them. But it's a safe bet the other 42 or so newly Ukrainian T-62s lurk nearby. Armies after all tend to organize their tanks in battalions of around three dozen vehicles.

The T-62 isn't the oldest tank model in the Ukraine theater. That honorific belongs to the 1950s-vintage, but heavily upgraded, M-55S that Slovenia has pledged to Ukraine.

But technologically, the T-62 is at least a generation behind Russia's main tank, the T-72—and somewhat farther behind Ukraine's own T-64. That doesn't make the T-62 useless. It does make it likely Ukrainian forces will assign the T-62s to second-line roles—fortifying garrison towns, for example.

That there are any T-62s on the Ukraine battlefield is testimony to the scale of the mechanized warfare in the country. The Russians went to war with thousands of T-80s and T-72s, and after nine months of fighting has lost at least 1,500 of them, including at least 500 that the Ukrainians have captured.

Ukraine's own tank corps, 900 T-64s and T-72s strong back in February, also has suffered heavy losses: around 375 total write-offs, of which 130 or so tanks were captured by the Russians.

The difference between Russian and Ukrainian tank attrition is that Ukraine has captured from Russia more modern tanks than it has lost to Russia, while Russia has had to dip into its warehouses and open-air tank parks in order to make good its own losses.

There weren't enough intact T-80s and T-72s in storage to replace the T-80s and T-72s Russia had lost, but there were lots of T-62s. The Kremlin ordered the 103rd Armored Plant in Chita, in southern Siberia, to recondition 800 T-62s through 2025.

The old tanks began arriving at the front this summer, where they stiffened Russian battalions trying—and ultimately failing—to hold onto Kherson Oblast in southern Ukraine. There's no evidence the T-62s played any meaningful role in the fighting. There's ample evidence their four-man crews abandoned the tanks at the first opportunity.

**Lithuania says NATO powers must send modern tanks to Ukraine** - NATO powers must send modern battle tanks to Ukraine to give it a military edge against Russian forces during the winter, Lithuania's foreign minister says

Kyiv has repeatedly asked NATO to supply it with state-of-the-art tanks as it seeks to consolidate gains it has made in counteroffensives in recent months.

But Western powers have been reluctant to go down that road for fear it could raise the risk of direct conflict with Russia.

"I've talked to a number of military experts, and the answer I'm hearing is that if we provided tanks by this winter, let's say January, it could make a difference," Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis told reporters during a NATO foreign ministers meeting in Bucharest.

**NATO pledges more support for Ukraine as Stoltenberg accuses Russia of using cold weather as a weapon** - NATO allies pledged to help Ukraine repair energy infrastructure that has been heavily damaged by Russian attacks after Ukraine urged its Western partners to supply it with specific electrical transmission equipment to rebuild its power grid.

NATO vowed to "further step up" support to Ukraine, including by providing equipment to help repair the country's energy infrastructure, as NATO foreign ministers met on November 29 in Bucharest. A declaration from the ministers also condemned Russia's "persistent and unconscionable attacks" that are "depriving millions of Ukrainians of basic human services."

**U.S. to grant \$53 million to Ukraine for power transmission** - The United States has announced \$53 million to support the purchase of power grid equipment to Ukraine to help Kyiv fight Russian attacks targeting its energy infrastructure that have left millions in the dark with no heating. "This equipment will be rapidly delivered to Ukraine on an emergency basis to help Ukrainians persevere through the winter," the State Department said in a statement on November 29. The announcement came as NATO foreign ministers meet in Bucharest to focus on ramping up military assistance for Ukraine.

**6,000 blankets delivered to Ukrainians ahead of winter** - In mid-November, Greater Good Charities distributed 6,000 blankets in south central Ukraine, to communities that were either recently occupied or along the front lines. The blankets residents received were made in Ukraine with local materials, in an effort to contribute to the country's economy. Among the towns and villages helped were Zelenodolsk, Zahradivka, Orlove, Natalyne, NovoBratske, and Kochubeivka, whose residents have been impacted heavily by the war.



**'We need air defence,' says Ukraine's foreign minister** - Ukraine urged its Western partners to supply it with air defence systems and transformers to brace Russian attacks on its energy infrastructure.

"We need air defence, IRIS, Hawks, Patriots, and we need transformers," Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba told reporters on the sidelines of a NATO meeting in Bucharest, singling out various Western air defence systems.

“If we have transformers and generators, we can restore our energy needs. If we have air defence systems, we can protect from the next Russian missile strikes. In a nutshell: Patriots and transformers is what Ukraine needs the most.”



**Italy to vote on sending Ukraine more weapons** - Italy’s ruling parties are preparing to vote on allowing the government to continue sending weapons to Ukraine throughout 2023, according to a draft amendment and a parliamentary motion seen by Reuters news agency.

The proposal, still subject to approval, is under discussion at the upper-house Senate and would amend a decree passed earlier this month by Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni’s government.

It would extend the authorization to send “military assets, materials and equipment” until December 31, 2023.

“It is worth supporting Ukraine because negotiations can only emerge from a balance of power on the field,” Meloni said in an interview with the daily Corriere della Sera.

The issue of weapons shipments is also being debated in the lower house, with part of the left-wing opposition lobbying the government to shift focus from sending arms to stepping up diplomatic negotiations.

However, the right-wing majority at the chamber is set to present a motion along the same lines as the upper-house amendment, urging the government to extend arms shipment until the end of 2023.

The draft motion, seen by Reuters, asks Meloni's administration "to take all necessary steps to achieve the (NATO) target of 2 percent of GDP in defence spending by 2028," laid down last March by the previous government of Mario Draghi.

## Turkey

**Columnist wonders about Turkey: 'What kind of an Ally is this?'** - In an opinion piece in the Washington Post last week, columnist David Ignatius writes that, "Turkey's fixation on alleged Kurdish terrorism reached a dangerous flash point this week, as Turkish warplanes bombed targets in northern Syria that are perilously close to U.S. forces there guarding against a resurgence of the Islamic State."

The writer explains that "the danger of this latest spasm of Turkish reprisal attacks was described to me on Wednesday by Gen. Mazloum Kobane Abdi, commander of the Syrian Kurdish militia known as the Syrian Democratic Forces or SDF. He said that after three days of Turkish bombing, the SDF could lose its ability to maintain security at prisons and a refugee camp for ISIS fighters and their families."

On the American side, Col. Joseph Buccino, spokesman for the U.S. Central Command which oversees the region, said, "these strikes have already placed the ISIS mission at risk," but he also said, "one of the strikes hit within 130 meters of U.S. personnel, so American forces are at risk. Any extension of these attacks will drive up that risk."

Ignatius writes that, "Mazloum said SDF forces are also 'at risk right now' as they try to maintain security at 28 makeshift prisons in northern Syria where about 12,000 captured ISIS fighters are housed. After a January prison break at the Hasakah prison, more than 3,000 of these detainees escaped, and it took more than a week to capture most of them and regain control."

Turkey claims that the SDF, and Mazloum personally, according to Ignatius, "are affiliated with the militant Kurdish militia known as the PKK, which they contend was responsible for a Nov. 13 terrorist bombing in Istanbul." Ignatius continues, saying that, "Mazloum told me his forces had no involvement in the attack and had expressed sympathy for the victims. As for the charge that he was personally affiliated with PKK terrorism, he said, 'these are just excuses' and that he had been working closely with U.S. and coalition forces for more than eight years."

Ignatius calls Northern Syria "a bomb that Turkey, through its reckless actions, seems determined to detonate" and adds that, "Mazloum said that he expects Turkey to soon begin a ground assault in northern Syria, seeking greater control of Manbij and Kobani, two areas liberated from ISIS by the United States and its SDF partners at great cost."

Mazloum feels the United States has an "ethical responsibility to protect the Kurds from being ethnically cleansed from this region." Ignatius writes also that Mazloum, "urged U.S. officials to pressure Turkey to de-escalate its attacks before there is a disaster."

"Gen. Mark A. Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, spoke on Wednesday with his Turkish counterpart and warned the Turks against attacking restricted zones around U.S. troops. But a Pentagon official said there was 'no sign that [the Turks] are ready to de-escalate,'" Ignatius reports, and continues by noting the danger posed by the Turkish military assault in northern Syria, which he said is beginning to "destabilize the U.S.-led coalition's fragile control over the murderous remnants of the Islamic State."

Ignatius concludes his article by saying: "A reasonable person begins to wonder: what kind of an ally is this?"

**Comment** – Turkey turning against Western Allies is too risky to contemplate – and Turkey is keenly aware of this.