

Conflict Update # 370

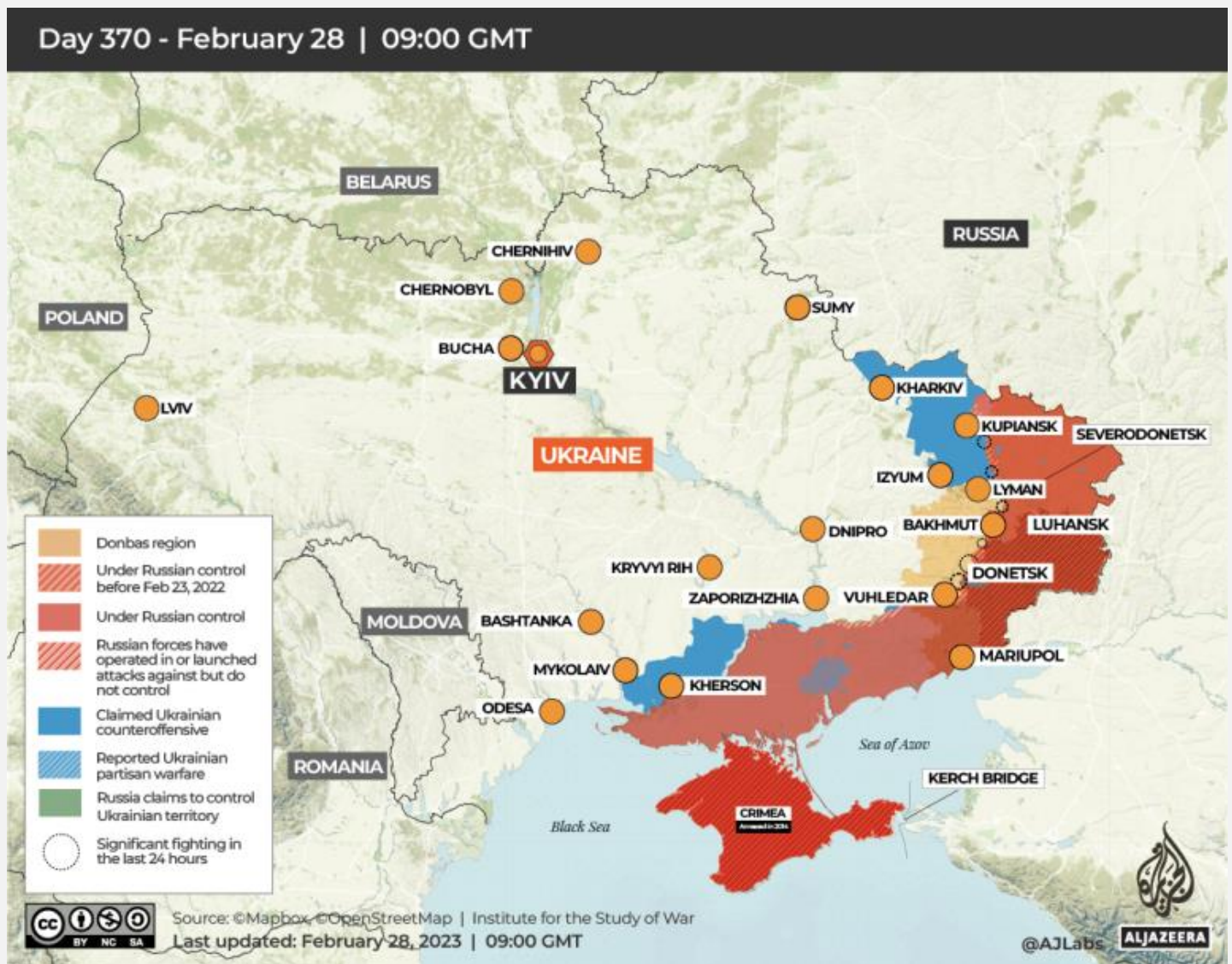
February 28th, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 149,240 (550) soldiers killed, 3,388 (+3) enemy tanks, 6,630 (+9) armored combat vehicles, 2,383 (+3) artillery systems, 478 (+3) MLRS systems, 244 (+0) air defense systems, 300 (+0) warplanes, 288 (+0) helicopters, 2,051 (+3) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 873 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,252 (+4) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 230 (+0) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways



Belarusian official calls partisan drone attack 'fake' - A senior Belarusian official dismissed a claim by anti-government activists that they had blown up a Russian military surveillance aircraft over the weekend.

Aliaksandr Azarov, leader of Belarusian anti-government organisation BYPOL, was quoted on Sunday as saying that Belarusian “partisans” had used drones to attack a Russian Beriev A-50 spy plane.

But the Belarusian deputy foreign minister Yuri Ambrazevich told the Reuters news agency on the sidelines of the UN Conference on Disarmament in Geneva on Tuesday, “Given the absence of an official reaction, I am deeply convinced that this is another fake [claim] aimed at highlighting certain failures in our national security.”

While Belarus has allowed Russia to use its territory to launch attacks on Ukraine, it has refrained from getting directly involved in the war.

Comment – Belarus will be embarrassed by the attack, do will embroider the truth to suit its own ends.

Death toll tapers down – With the onset of warmer weather and rain, fields and battlegrounds will be completely sodden with maneuvering extremely difficult. This will serve to reduce conflicts and front line skirmishes. Russia was trying to gain a head of steam in and around Bakhmut ahead of this weather pattern, but has failed thus far, but their desire was driven by the looming muddy season.



Russian deaths in Ukraine surpass all its war fatalities since WWII combined - Russian combat deaths in the first year of its war on neighboring Ukraine have likely now exceeded the combined death toll of all of its wars since World War II, according to new research from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS).

Elon Musk Warns Ukraine - The Tesla CEO, a big Ukraine supporter, warns Russia is planning a 'major offensive.'

Elon Musk remains extremely concerned about the Russia-Ukraine war.

The conflict, which has already claimed thousands of lives, is into its second year, and the billionaire entrepreneur talks about it almost every day.

Drone downed outside Moscow: Regional official - A drone likely targeting civilian infrastructure has crashed near Moscow, the regional governor says, after Russia’s Ministry of Defence reported downing two Ukrainian drones.

“As for the incident with the crash of a UAV [unmanned aerial vehicle] in the district of Kolomna, ... the target was probably a civilian infrastructure facility, which was not damaged,” Andrei Vorobyov said in a statement. “There are no casualties or damage on the ground.”

He said authorities were investigating the incident.

Kolomna lies 110km (70 miles) southeast of the Russian capital.

Comment – Kyiv needs to keep sending drone airborne “messages of presence” to Moscow by letting them know they are still there and capable.

In the Boer War, young Boer teenagers could shoot wild rabbits for the pot from a hundred plus yards away with their rifles. They were deadly accurate – it was a way of life.

Along come British troops, marching in formation through the veld (open field terrain), with mounted commanders resplendent in red tunics, blinking buttons and white feathers reaching for the sky – invincible they thought.

Huge mistake, presenting themselves as sitting ducks out in the open veld. Boer “seuns” (boys) would target the blinking buttons, taking out the officers and sending the soldiers to ground.

In order to keep them grounded, exposing them to the intense highveld heat, the Boerseuns would lie behind small hillocks and start a fire, with the aroma of barbecuing meat meandering down the fields to the by now very hungry, but grounded, soldiers.

Every so often they would unleash a few shots into the air – “messages of presence” - just to let the British know they were still there, forcing them to keep their heads down – while lying out in the African sun.

They would keep them there until sunset. A significant number of British soldiers died of heatstroke during the years of the Boer War, particularly in the early period.

This field tactic worked until the British started building forts – a la English kings in their battles against the Scots.

The Ukrainians should also continue to send Moscow such “messages of presence” by sending the odd drone or two toward their major cities, just as these Boerseuns did by firing into the air every now and again. (See following article).

Russia tries to encircle Bakhmut amid mud of Ukraine’s Donetsk - Russian forces have been pressing their offensive around Bakhmut, trying to encircle the small mining city, as rain and an early spring thaw turn eastern Ukraine’s battlefields to mud, potentially leaving both sides hamstringed as they try to secure an edge in the war.

The spring thaw, known as the “rasputitsa”, has a long history of ruining plans by armies to attack across Ukraine and western Russia because it turns roads into rivers and fields into impenetrable bogs.

Comment – “Tries to encircle” – And Russia has already claimed victory in Bakhmut?

Zelenskyy says situation increasingly 'difficult' as Russia steps up assault on Bakhmut - Russia's offensive in the east is increasingly zeroing in on the city of Bakhmut, the Ukrainian military said on February 28, with Zelenskyy warning that the situation is becoming "extremely difficult" for the defenders of the city, whom he called "heroes."

Ukrainian forces repelled more than 60 attacks by Russian troops in the eastern region of Donetsk over the past 24 hours, Ukraine's General Staff said in its morning briefing on February 28.

Russian attacks continue to focus on the Lymansk, Avdiyivka, and Shakhtarsk directions, but the main vector of the Russian assault remains Bakhmut, it added.

Zelenskyy said that "the enemy is constantly destroying everything that can be used to protect our positions for fortification and defense" in the embattled city, which is in the eastern Donetsk region.

Russian troops have been trying to encircle Bakhmut, where fighting has picked up since last month, in an attempt to cut off the Ukrainian forces' supply lines, but have met with fierce resistance.

“Destroy the entire city” – After failing to capture Vuhledar and losing the 155th BTG in the process, among many other casualties, the Russian commander issued the instruction to destroy the entire city by bombarding it to smithereens. He directed that every building should be targeted and reduced to rubble.

Comment – Now tell me Moscow doesn’t target civilian infrastructure.

Dozens of coffins stacked in Novosibirsk airport hint at soaring Russian losses in Ukraine - Dozens of crates are stacked in rows at what is said to be a hangar at Tolmachevo Airport in Novosibirsk, in Russia’s Siberia region, a video that has gone viral in recent days shows.

Zooming in, as per the picture to the right, footage indicates what appears to be death certificates tacked on to each wooden box, apparently serving as coffins. Each document contains a surname and initials.

One of those documents has the name “Gerbold. Buryatia” inscribed on it.

Relatives of Gennady Gerbold, 39, from Buryatia, in the Siberia region, confirmed to RFE/RL’s Siberia.Realities earlier this week that officials from

Wagner had informed them two weeks earlier of his death while fighting with the mercenary group in Ukraine and later that his body had been returned to Novosibirsk.



Officials at Tolmachevo Airport, however, deny that the video was filmed there.

“This is false information. The premises, which are broadcast in this video, do not belong to and are not located on the territory of Tolmachevo Airport,” a spokesperson for the facility told Russian media.

While not commenting on the video, local officials have recently confirmed that many former inmates from the region have died while fighting as contractors for Wagner in Ukraine in recent weeks.

Young men from Russia’s hinterlands, including Buryatia, an impoverished Russian region in Siberia with a significant ethnic Buryat population, have borne the brunt of Russian President Vladimir Putin’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, launched just a year ago on February 24, 2022, dying in disproportionate numbers compared to other areas of the country, especially in and around the richer capital, Moscow, and St. Petersburg.

Comment – We have reported on this factor a number of times over the past year. Outlying, relatively poor oblasts and provinces are in no position to deny Kremlin demands for more and more young recruits, given they are realistically wholly dependent on Moscow for their annual budgets and revenue. Refuse the recruitniks and see your money supply dry up. This way Putin tries to keep from mobilizing in major cities like St. Petersburg and Moscow, fearful this will alert Russian Main Street to the failure of his war and the high attrition rate.

“Open the coffin and check whether it is yours or not” - By the start of February, Oleysa Gerbold was informed only that her brother had died, with no further details provided.

“They said the coffin would be brought to Novosibirsk. ‘Open it and check whether it is yours or not,’” she said bitterly, adding that at least two other ex-prisoners from the same penal colony as her brother were among those returned in coffins to Novosibirsk.

Russia confirms air defence drills after St Petersburg flights suspension - Russia’s defence ministry says its forces carried out air defence drills involving interceptor jets after Saint Petersburg’s Pulkovo Airport was forced to suspend all flights on Tuesday for an hour.

In a statement issued about an hour after flights restarted, the ministry said it was conducting drills, which involved the dispatch of fighter jets, in Russia’s western airspace.

“During training, air defence forces worked on detection, interception and identification of targets, as well as interacting with emergency services and law enforcement agencies,” Russian agencies cited the ministry as saying.

It said fighter planes flew sorties as part of the exercise. The unannounced drills caused several flights to reroute and airlines to reschedule flights for the rest of the day.

Putin expands Russia's nuclear submarine fleet as NATO sounds alarm - The Russian Navy will be replenished with two new nuclear submarines by the end of the year, an official has said.

Alexei Rakhmanov, the head of Saint Petersburg-based United Shipbuilding Corporation, made the announcement in an interview with Russia’s state-run news agency RIA Novosti published on Monday.

He said Sevmash, Russia’s largest shipbuilding corporation and the country’s only producer of nuclear-powered submarines, will give the Russian Navy two of the newest submarines—the strategic Emperor Alexander III, and the multi-purpose Krasnoyarsk.

Russian tank convoy is ambushed by paratroopers with Javelin missiles - Dramatic war footage emerged as a video – pictured alongside - captured Ukrainian paratroopers taking out a Russia armored convoy made up of tanks and amphibious tracked infantry vehicles called BMPs with the help of US-made Javelin missiles.

The footage begins by showing a Ukrainian soldier in the middle of a field in the Maryinka region firing one of the anti-tank missiles, which blasts off into the air.



The images then cut to more drone-captured aerial footage, which shows several Russian war machines exploding on the battlefield.

With each blast, a small flash of a missile flying in is seen before it slams into the armored vehicles, blowing them to pieces one by one. In one of the attacks, a terrified Russian soldier flees moments before the missile strikes its target.

In another of the clips, the wrecks of several all-terrain vehicles are seen clustered together, with one in the middle still in flames.

Another shows a vehicle in the middle of a field being blown to pieces. Debris from the vehicle - including a turret - soars into the air as a huge fireball rises hundreds of feet into the sky before the parts crash back down to earth.

The footage was posted to social media by the **79th Air Assault Brigade** of the Ukrainian Air Assault Forces earlier this morning. 'In total, five enemy tanks and seven BMPs were destroyed in this heavy battle,' the brigade said in a statement with the video.

Ukrainian forces destroy Russian tanks near frontline town - Two Russian tanks were destroyed by Ukrainian defences near the frontline Donetsk Oblast town of Vuhledar, drone footage released shows.

In the footage, released by Ukraine's **72nd Mechanized Brigade**, a crew abandons their tank after driving over a mine near other abandoned tanks and armored vehicles.

In a second incident, a tank is travelling at speed when it is struck by a projectile. A crew member can be seen climbing out of the moving, smoking tanks.

Russian warship with hypersonic cruise missiles could be sailing towards conflict zone - A Russian frigate armed with hypersonic missile systems will continue a long-distance deployment mission after completing a joint naval exercise with Chinese and South African navies, and may join other Russian forces in the Ukraine war, analysts said.

The Admiral Gorshkov, which was part of a Russian naval flotilla that included the seagoing tanker Kama, were sailing to new waters after three days of naval drills off the South African city of Cape Town on Monday, Russian state-owned news agency Tass reported.

Ukraine's shadow war accelerates - Partisan operatives' destroying Putin's spy planes are among the forms of covert warfare that are becoming more common in the Ukraine war.

A shadow war of sabotage and other forms of covert warfare appears to be accelerating in and around Ukraine as the conventional conflict between local forces and those loyal to Putin grinds into a stalemate.

Local officials, including those loyal to the Kremlin, reported in the last week more than a dozen mysterious explosions around the Russian-occupied city of Mariupol, at least 50 miles behind front lines. Though international attention has centered on fighting in the region of eastern Ukraine known as the Donbas, the key port city on the sea of Azov remains one of the most strategically critical cities Russia has seized thus far.

The explosions have occurred at conspicuous logistical hubs, to include ammo caches at an airport, at least two fuel depots and a steel factory – significant in its own right but also a location the Russians have used as a military base.

Attribution for the apparent attacks remains unclear, but British intelligence on Monday identified the devastating blow that the attacks present to the Kremlin both practically and symbolically.

“Russia will likely be concerned that unexplained explosions are occurring in a zone it had probably previously assessed as beyond the range of routine Ukrainian strike capabilities,” U.K. defense intelligence concluded in an analysis on Monday. “Although widely devastated earlier in the war, Mariupol is important to Russia because it is the largest city Russia captured in 2022 that it still controls, and sits on a key logistics route.”

Comment – As relayed in preceding Updates, Ukraine has received missiles and rockets with increased ranges. It is being reported they are using these to strike Mariupol arms and fuel depots.

Local authorities report fire at oil depot in Russia's Krasnodar region - A fire broke out at an oil depot in Russia's southern city of Tuapse last evening, according to the city administration.

Local news outlet 93.ru previously reported two explosions on the oil depot territory, citing Tuapse residents.

The administration said the fire occurred in the depot's outbuilding, spreading at least 200 square meters. Local authorities added that the fire didn't affect oil tanks and was extinguished at about 3 am.

The city of Tuapse lies 680 kilometers southeast of the closest Ukrainian-controlled territory on the Black Sea coast in Russia's southern Krasnodar region. According to Russian news outlet Astra, the affected oil depot is owned by the largest Russian oil company Rosneft and is located next to military barracks.

Comment – Another “accident?”

Drone reportedly crashes near Gazprom facility in Moscow region - A drone crashed in Russia's Moscow region near the village of Gubastovo, Moscow Oblast Governor Andrey Vorobyov reported on Feb. 28. The drone was allegedly found next to the Voskresensk gas compressor station owned by Russia's energy giant Gazprom, the station's spokesperson told Russian media outlet RBC.

Russia has just one tank factory churning out 20 tanks a month, with demand outstripping production by a factor of ten, says report - In the 1940s the Soviet Union was able to produce 1,000 tanks a month. Today, Russia can produce just 20, with a single factory struggling to keep pace with outsized demand caused by the war in Ukraine, according to The Economist.

The British publication reported that Russia now has just one tank factory, UralVagonZavod, a massive 1930s-built industrial complex in eastern Russia.

It may be one of the largest tank manufacturers in the world, with Fortune estimating that it has 30,000 employees, but each month it is only able to produce tanks in the double digits, The Economist said, citing liberal Russian media outlet Novaya Gazeta.

Nowhere near demand: one Western official told the publication that demand is outstripping supply by a factor of 10.

Russia is losing around 280 tanks a month in Ukraine, according to daily Kievan reports and a whole lot more in other combat vehicles and APCs.

Comment – One of Russia's largest tank manufacturing factories was located in the Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. Russia blew it up in the first week of their illegal invasion last year. Reduced it to rubble.

What is generally undisclosed is that Ukraine was a huge exporter of arms, ammunition and other war matériel to Russia, and has been for decades.

Aside from being one of Moscow's primary sources of vital foods, it was also a massive provider of raw materials and other industrial products, not the least of which being war supplies. Great strategy Moscow!

Dead end - In the past 10 months, Russia managed to only capture about 4% of Donbas. Troops are basically treading water while losses are mounting as reported by *Novaya Gazeta*.

Having started the war with an attempt to “capture Kyiv in three days”, Russia has officially bogged down in fighting in 2023. The Battle for Donbas has been going nine months, with the Russian army spending six of them in one place.

They only managed to seize a little over 2,000 square kilometres of territories in bloody clashes, or just 4% of Ukraine's Donetsk and Luhansk regions. The last major city that Russian forces occupied was Lysychansk in early July.

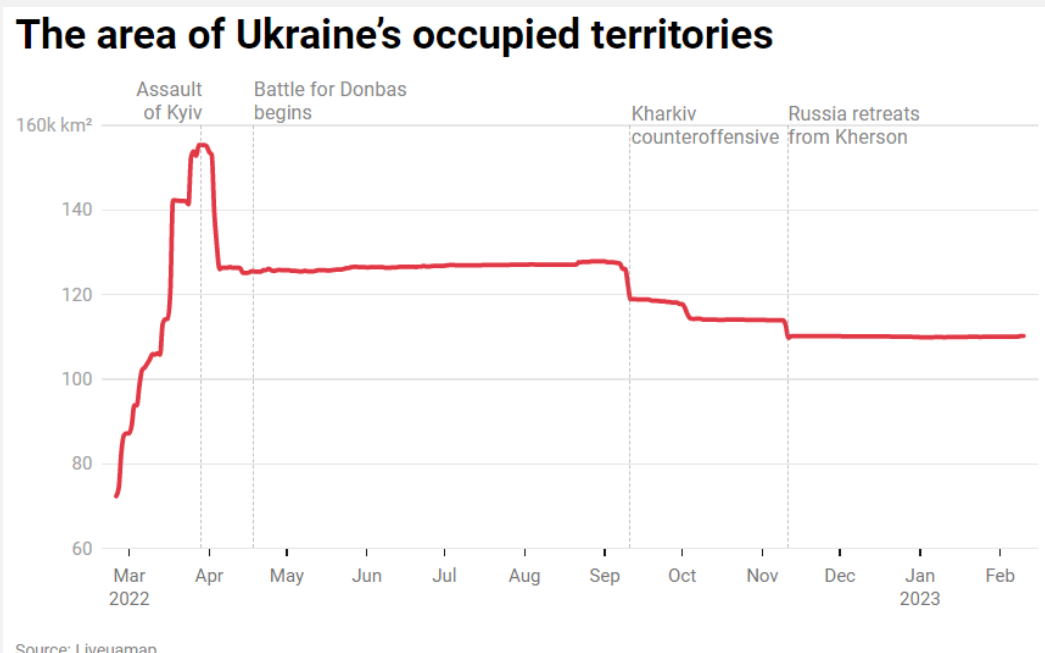
“In the beginning, Russia attempted to either assert control over the whole of Ukraine or most of it, including Kyiv and the southern part, naturally, to cut Ukraine from the coast. But this ambitious, completely reckless plan was not grounded in reality, completely disregarding capabilities and wishes of Ukrainians,” military observer David Sharp says.

The fast single-file nature of the offensive carried out sans any serious air force support or other cover as well as the participation of Russian National Guard units who were supposed to establish order in captured cities show that the Russian General Staff did not expect Ukraine to put up any serious resistance. The ten-day blitzkrieg went up in smoke.

After that, Russia regrouped and attempted a classic offensive manoeuvre to encircle the Ukrainian capital. This plan also suffered defeat.

In the beginning of the spring, Russian command announced the “second stage” of the “special military operation.” Defence Minister Shoigu underlined that the Donbas “liberation” was its key goal.

The Battle for Donbas, which was extensively covered and hailed by Russia’s propaganda media, commenced on 18 April. Many in Russia expected that the war would be over in weeks by 9 May, Victory Day. **(Comment** – Remember our coverage of Putin’s “Victory Day Parade” desires?).



However, nine months have passed, while Russia only lost more control over occupied territories. See chart to the right.

Russia’s standstill in Donbas

The key prize in this stage of the Ukraine war for Russia is to capture the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in their administrative borders.

Russia’s major territorial gains in Donbas came right in the beginning of the war, in February-March. Russia then secured the Sea of Azov coastline as well as northern areas of the Luhansk region and laid siege to Mariupol. In the two first months of the Ukraine war, Russia almost doubled its area of control in the Luhansk and Donetsk regions — from 34% to 73%. The Kremlin grabbed more than 670 cities, towns, and villages with a population of 465,000 people.

Russia changed its tactic in April and focused the bulk of its forces on capturing the whole of Donbas. Initially, Russia’s retreat from Kyiv yielded results and Russian troops successfully concentrated on this task. In May, Moscow claimed Popasna, Rubizhne, and Lyman — the three cities of strategic importance for a future offensive. By 20 May, Russia had occupied Mariupol, a city of 400,000 people, and forced almost 2,500 Ukrainian service members who were defending the Azovstal Steel Works to surrender.

However, the offensive pace started to slow down in June. Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk, where almost 200,000 people lived before the war, were the last significant breakthroughs for the Russian army to date. They were captured on 25 June and 3 July respectively.

“Unlike the Ukrainian army that launched a mobilisation, Russia [until October] tried to fight the war exclusively with professional service members. It exhausted the army’s powers and slowed down the offensive without any serious advances except for the captures of Popasna, Sievierodonetsk, Lysychansk, and Mariupol,” military analyst Kirill Mikhaylov explains.

The siege of Sievierodonetsk lasted more than three months and exhausted the Russian army. Moreover, Russia was forced to redeploy a significant number of troops to this area which left other sections of the frontline vulnerable.

“The struggle for Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk was a very long operation with huge losses. Even though I disagree, some analysts believe that it was almost the main reason behind Russia’s defeats near Balakliya, Iziium, Lyman, and in the Kherson region later in the war,” military observer David Sharp adds. “[The capture of Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk] was the epitome of a Pyrrhic victory. It showed that the nature of the war had changed. Russia stepped into the attrition stage.”

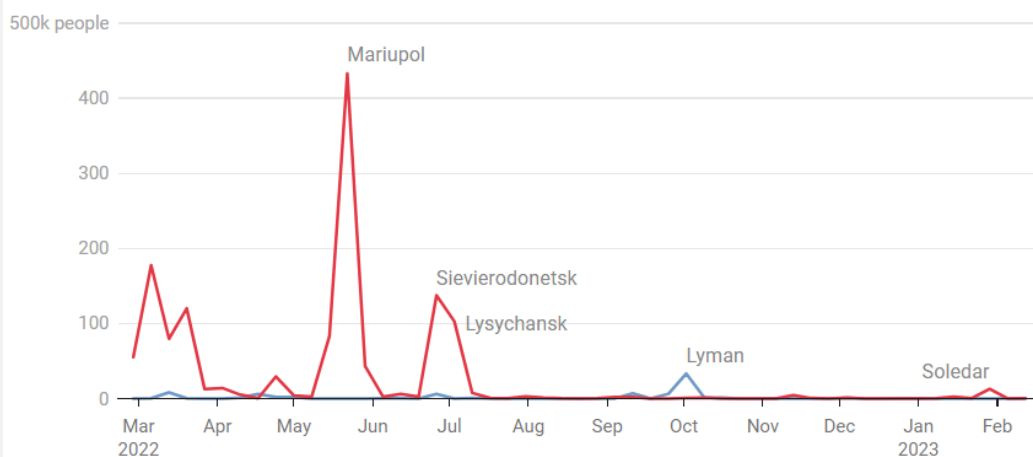
Russia’s offensive had completely stalled by August. The pace of the advance had dropped by four times compared to April. Meanwhile, Ukrainian forces began liberating their territories in September.

Having started the invasion with “Kyiv in three days” victory slogans, Russia had bogged down in the war by the end of 2022.

As a result, Russian forces managed to occupy just over 2,000 square kilometres of territories in the nine months of bloody clashes since the Battle of Donbas commenced, or 4% of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions combined. In total, 77% of these areas are controlled by Moscow. Supposing that the Russian army continues to advance at a similar pace in Donbas, the region will be occupied in four and a half years.

Lysychansk is the last major city seized by Russia in Donbas

Population of cities* **occupied by Russia** and **liberated by Ukraine**



*as of 1 January 2022

Source: Liveuamap, Openstreetmap, the State Statistics Service of Ukraine

Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

Russia open to talks, but won’t give up annexed regions: Kremlin - The Kremlin has repeated its position Russia is open to negotiations to end the war in Ukraine but reiterated new “territorial realities” cannot be ignored.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters Russia would never renounce its claims to four Ukrainian regions that Moscow declared it had annexed last year following referenda Kyiv and the West slammed as bogus and illegal.

“There are certain realities that have already become an internal factor. I mean the new territories. The constitution of the Russian Federation exists, and cannot be ignored. Russia will never be able to compromise on this, these are important realities,” Peskov said on Tuesday.

Russia proclaimed it had annexed the Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhia regions last September. Peskov said Russia was open to negotiations if Kyiv ceded the regions, none of which is fully controlled by Moscow’s forces.

Comment – Now we can see the need for urgency in Moscow military tactics ahead of any Ukrainian Spring offensive.

Putin and the Kremlin, at the very least, want retention of existing occupied Ukrainian territory. A Spring Kievan escalation will jeopardize even these “possessions,” given the array of Ukrainian weaponry pouring into the country (see our previous Update in this regard) and the Kremlin’s dismal performance to date.

And, is China now jumping in to save its ally Russia by presenting a “peace plan,” contemplating some form of Ukrainian land cession in exchange, albeit limited from Kievan and western perspectives at this stage?

Perhaps this is China’s way of saving Russia from itself? If so, what do they know that we don’t, or we think we don’t?

Is there an outside possibility behind the scenes moves are afoot to start some form of negotiation, with cessions by both – Russia retaining what are perceived as “Russian-speaking” zones, whilst Ukraine joins NATO as a fully-fledged member, along with all the guarantees such membership brings with it, particularly Article 5 with its “***an attack on one member of NATO is an attack on all***” provision.

It will take an absolute guarantee of security – as provided by NATO membership, to whet their negotiation appetite.

Moscow, and Putin, have ignored multiple “Agreements” with Ukraine since 1991, and Kyiv is understandably extremely, and dubiously, untrusting about any Russian signature appended to any document of “peace.”

Allow me a conspiratorial moment of rationality, is this what China is tabling – saving the (Russian and future new world order) day in the knowledge that Russia, its vital partner in their mutual long-term goal of a bi-polar new world order - is in danger of going down, destroying their vision?

If so, then now is the time for Chinese action.

But Ukraine has its tail up at the moment and no doubt see’s huge advantage in taking the fight to the Russians.

Putin's former adviser who denounced Ukraine war dies of 'serious illness' - Gleb Pavlovsky, a prominent Russian political scientist and longtime adviser to Putin who then became one of his most prominent critics, has died at the age of 71, according to local reports.

Simon Kordonsky, head of the local self-government department at Moscow's Higher School of Economics, told the Russian-language business daily newspaper Vedomosti on Monday that Pavlovsky died after a "serious illness."

Pavlovsky held a position with the Kremlin, serving as Putin's political adviser between 1996 and 2011.

In 1995, he co-founded and led the Foundation for Effective Politics, which played a crucial role in Russian political life and developed Putin's 2000 presidential campaign.

He was sacked from his position in the Russian government in 2011, reportedly for backing then-President Dmitry Medvedev to stay on instead of Putin. After that, he became critical of Putin's presidency and the Kremlin.

The former Kremlin spin doctor had been highly critical of Putin's decision to invade Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

He told RFE/RL's Georgian Service in April 2022, only weeks after the conflict began, that Putin made a grave miscalculation by invading Ukraine. His decision made "no political sense," Pavlovsky said.

"This is all Putin's own personal decision. Nobody other than Putin would have made it...," he said at the time. "Nobody, including myself, realized just how maniacally obsessed he must have been with Ukraine. We underestimated the extent of decay of the Russian government."

Putin "stepped into a trap in Ukraine," he said.

"Ukraine was supposed to be a lever for pressuring the West into discussion over security issues," Pavlovsky said. "It's a game of strategy. But I was flabbergasted to see him throw away all negotiating opportunities over the genuine security of Russia and instead opt for this strange pogrom that he calls a 'special military operation.'"

Pavlovsky said at the time that he believed Putin would find it difficult to declare "victory."

He also suggested that the war could "spill into conventional warfare between Russia and the West, with NATO."

"How exactly this would look is hard to say, but I no longer think this to be unthinkable and impossible," Pavlovsky said.

Kordonsky didn't specify what illness Pavlovsky had.

Russia and China cooperating in 'all areas,' envoy says amid weapons fears - Russia's ambassador to China said attempts to drive a wedge between them will fail amid U.S. concerns that Beijing might supply arms to Moscow.

Igor Morgulov told the Chinese government newspaper the Global Times that "anyone who has bad intentions and may try to break our friendship will not succeed."

Citing increased trade between the countries, he told the publication: "We are good neighbors."

The interview followed comments by CIA Director William Burns that the U.S. was "confident" Beijing is considering supplying Moscow with lethal equipment to support its invasion of Ukraine.

However, he told CBS on Sunday that he did not believe a final decision has been made and that there was no evidence of "actual shipments of lethal equipment."

Kyiv urges the UN and Turkey to extend Black Sea grain deal - Ukraine appealed to the UN and Turkey to start negotiations on extending a grain export deal, but a Ukrainian government source said there had been no response.

Yuriy Vaskov, Ukraine's deputy minister of restoration, told the Reuters news agency last week that Kyiv would seek an extension of at least one year, including Mykolaiv's ports.

"We have sent a letter requesting that we start dealing with this issue as March 18 is very soon, but we have not had any feedback so far," a source said.

Last July, the Black Sea Grain Initiative allowed grain to be exported from three Ukrainian ports.

The agreement was extended in November and will expire on March 18 unless an extension is agreed upon.

'China can't have it both ways': US official - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the US had warned China about giving material support to Russia, including targeting Chinese individuals/companies for violating sanctions.

During a news conference in Astana, Kazakhstan, Blinken said, "China can't have it both ways when it comes to the Russian aggression in Ukraine. You can't be putting forward these proposals on the one hand while actually feeding the flames of the fire that Russia has started with the other hand."

"So I hope that China will take what we said very seriously but not only what we said, what many other countries around the world are saying, and refrain from any further consideration," he added.

Blinken in Central Asia for talks - US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, pictured below with Kazakh FM Tileuberdi), has visited Kazakhstan for a series of meetings with top diplomats of Central Asian nations as tensions soar over Russia's war in Ukraine.

Blinken sat down for talks with Kazakh foreign minister Mukhtar Tileuberdi and then with Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev on Tuesday.

A meeting of the so-called C5+1 former Soviet republics of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan,

It is important for American to continue and intensify, and influence in this strategic central Asia.

Just yesterday it was reported forces by Moscow to tow the diplomatic offense.



group made up of the US and the Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, was expected to follow.

and EU initiatives in Central Asia given historical Soviet presence area of eastern Europe and

that Turkmenistan is being Russian oil pressure line of

Belarus' Alexander Lukashenko's visit to China raises concerns - China is hosting Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, Russia's military ally, for a state visit on Tuesday, sparking speculation of China's possible increasing involvement in the year-old invasion of Ukraine.

Lukashenko was expected to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping and sign trade, education and technology agreements. China has denied that it is providing direct aid to Russia in its war against Ukraine.

"There's been a clear push by Beijing, Moscow, Minsk and Tehran to demonstrate a narrative that says, 'We have other options, and we'll put them on proud display -- you can sanction us all you want, and it doesn't matter,'" Raffaello Pantucci, senior associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute for Defense and Security Studies in London told the Washington Post.

Sanctions

Washington will not hesitate to target Chinese companies: Blinken - The US will not hesitate to target Chinese companies and individuals if Beijing violates US sanctions on Russia over the Ukraine war, Secretary of State Antony Blinken said.

If China provides lethal aid to Moscow, it will be a severe problem for Beijing's relationship with countries worldwide, Blinken told reporters during a trip to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Lithuania insists on stronger sanctions against Russia - Lithuania's President Gitanas Nauseda is insisting on far-reaching measures on top of what has been imposed in the 10th EU sanctions package on Russia.

"We will keep up the pressure. There will be packages 11 and 12. We will not sit back," Nauseda said on the Lithuanian Baltic Sea resort of Palanga, according to the BNS agency.

He said he was particularly committed to punitive measures against the state-owned nuclear power company Rosatom and the Russian nuclear industry.

Nauseda said that while it was good that the measures coincided with the anniversary of the Russian attack on Ukraine, "I am not very happy now about the latest sanctions package. We have always stressed that what Russia is doing in the nuclear field – destabilizing and posing a very concrete threat to nuclear facilities in Ukraine – cannot remain without consequences."

NATO

Hungary to send delegation to Finland for NATO talks - Finnish foreign minister Pekka Haavisto says Hungary intends to send a parliamentary delegation to Finland on or around March 9 to discuss its pending NATO membership.

Hungary and Turkey are the only NATO member countries that have yet to ratify Finland's and Sweden's applications to join the alliance.

Turkey will resume NATO membership talks with Finland and Sweden on March 9, according to Turkish foreign minister Mevlut Cavusoglu.

Ukraine will join NATO in the 'long term': Stoltenberg - NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg says Ukraine will become a member of the transatlantic military alliance in the "long term".

He, however, stressed that the immediate issue is Ukraine remaining an independent nation in the face of the Russian invasion.

"NATO allies have agreed that Ukraine will become a member of our alliance, but at the same time that is a long-term perspective," Stoltenberg told reporters during a visit to Finland's capital Helsinki.

Prior to launching Russia's full-scale invasion on February 24 last year, President Vladimir Putin said Moscow was intent on preventing NATO from expanding further eastwards and gaining a "military foothold" in Ukraine, which was part of the Soviet Union prior to its collapse in 1991.

Comment – Methinks any negotiated settlement involving Ukrainian cession of territory to Moscow will be accompanied by Ukraine being admitted into NATO.

Containment

Hacking attack prompts Russian regional broadcasters to issue air alert warnings - A hacking attack caused some Russian regional broadcasters to put out a false warning on Tuesday, urging people to take shelter from an incoming missile attack, the country's emergencies ministry has said.



“As a result of the hacking of servers of radio stations and TV channels, in some regions of the country information about the announcement of an air alert was broadcast,” the ministry said in a statement. “This information is false and does not correspond to reality.”

Among the regions where the fake messages were broadcast was Crimea, the peninsula Russia annexed from Ukraine in 2014, the state-run RIA Novosti news agency reported.

Radio stations played a loud siren sound with a message stating: “Attention, attention. An air alert is being issued. Everybody head to shelters now. Attention, attention. Missile threat.”

Several radio stations put out similar warnings last week, and websites run by Russia’s state TV conglomerate went down during President Putin’s annual state-of-the-nation address to Russian lawmakers on February 21 in what state media said was a distributed denial of service (DDoS) attack.

Putin & Russia

Russia repeats nuclear threat, demanding West halt arming of Ukraine - Former Russian President Medvedev reiterated yesterday his country's threat of nuclear war if the West's supply of arms to Ukraine continues.

The warning, published in an op-ed piece in the state-run newspaper Izvestiya, was the second time in three weeks the key Putin aide to has invoked the nuclear option in an effort to deter the U.S.-led NATO alliance from arming Ukraine.

Medvedev, who was president from 2008 to 2012 and currently serves as the deputy chairman of the powerful Security Council of Russia, dangled the prospect of talks while demanding shipments of arms to Ukraine be halted immediately.

Echoing comments by Putin on Sunday, Medvedev wrote that any existential threat to Russia would not be decided on the front in Ukraine, but would spiral into an existential threat to human civilization, repeating the refrain "we don't need a world without Russia."

Putin's spokesman admits the 70-year-old is 'definitely not up to it now' when asked if Vladimir is ready to decide if he will run for president next year - Putin's spokesman today admitted the 70-year-old is 'definitely not up to' deciding whether he will run for a new presidential term next year.

The Kremlin leader has been dogged by rumors of ill health and is embroiled in the brutal war he unleashed in Ukraine, which is not going according to plan.

His spokesman Dmitry Peskov said elections would go ahead despite the military conflict, even though they had been 'called into question'.

Putin urges Russians to be wary of traitors - During his address to the FSB security agency, Putin urged Russians to guard against traitors in their midst.

“It’s necessary to identify and stop the illegal activities of those who are trying to divide and weaken our society; to use separatism, nationalism, neo-Nazism and xenophobia as weapons.”

He said Russia had always experienced such activity.

“And now the attempts, of course, are at their most active. Attempts to activate all this scum on our land.”

Comment – Just as the Soviet Union, Nazi’s and South Africa during Apartheid years did – sow fear in the ranks and get ordinary citizens to inform on their neighbors.

Upcoming spring draft in Russia would seriously impact society, experts say - Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and President Putin signaled in January that they wanted to increase the size of the Russian military by 350,000 over the next three years.

Any such draft will create significant demographic challenges to the Russian Federation as outlined in yesterday's Update.

Ukraine's counteroffensive 'shocked' Putin into another mobilization: ISW - Ukraine's fall counteroffensive "shocked" Putin into launching a partial troop mobilization late last year, according to a new assessment by ISW.

Putin ordered the mobilization last September following months of stagnation in the war against Ukraine, launching his "special military operation" on the Eastern European country on February 24, 2022, hoping for a quick victory.

However, Kyiv responded with a stronger-than-expected defense effort bolstered by Western military aid that blunted Russian military gains.

Following months of combat, Ukraine launched its own counteroffensive last fall, retaking thousands of square miles of formerly occupied territory in the eastern part of Ukraine from Russian control—delivering a major loss to Putin, as the Kremlin continued to face growing criticism over the handling of the invasion.

Ukraine's counteroffensive reportedly prompted Putin to order a decree of the partial mobilization of soldiers to the battlefield, the ISW, a U.S.-based think tank, wrote yesterday

Russia doesn't attack civilian targets – how false this claim and statement when viewing the picture below of a Ukrainian shopping mall obliterated by a Russian missile.

