

# Conflict Update # 189

September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022

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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** – 55,110 (+300) soldiers killed, 2,227 (+11) enemy tanks, 4,748 (+24) armored combat vehicles, 1,340 (+17) artillery systems, 318 (+6) MLRS systems, 168 (+0) air defense systems, 253 (+1) warplanes, 217 (+0) helicopters, 932 (+7) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 238 (+0) cruise missiles, 15 (+0) warships/cutters, 3,610 (+33) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 76 fuel bowsers (+0) and 125 (+0) units of specialized equipment.

### Key takeaways

**Ukraine makes massive gains as tanks seize key river from retreating Russian troops in latest humiliation for Putin** – Ukraine has taken control of the settlements of Studenok and Sosnove and have continued to advance to Oleksandrivka and Rubsty.

Ukrainian troops have continued consolidating their positions across the Oskil River in the Kharkiv region in the latest humiliating blow to Putin.

Luhansk Oblast Governor Serhiy Haidai confirmed Ukraine was now in control of the east bank of the River Oskil, key position on the frontline, adding that the army's next target would be neighboring Luhansk.

"Luhansk region is right next door. De-occupation is not far away," Haidai wrote on Telegram.

This latest development also means Ukraine has exposed one of Moscow's key remaining supply routes.

The Oskil flows south into the Siverskyi Donets river, which in turn winds through the Donbas.

The Donbas is Moscow's prized territory and the main focus of the invasion.

The southern campaign's strategy was to liberate Kherson and cut off Mariupol from the Kremlin's troops in the east.

This strategy both north-east and south of the country has devastated Russian command and control.

"Further Ukrainian advances east along the north bank of the Siverskyi Donets River could make Russian positions around Lyman untenable and open the approaches to Lysychansk and ultimately Severodonetsk," The Institute for the Study of War in Washington, D.C, explained in an article.

The thinktank also shared a more pessimistic scenario for the Russian situation in Lyman.

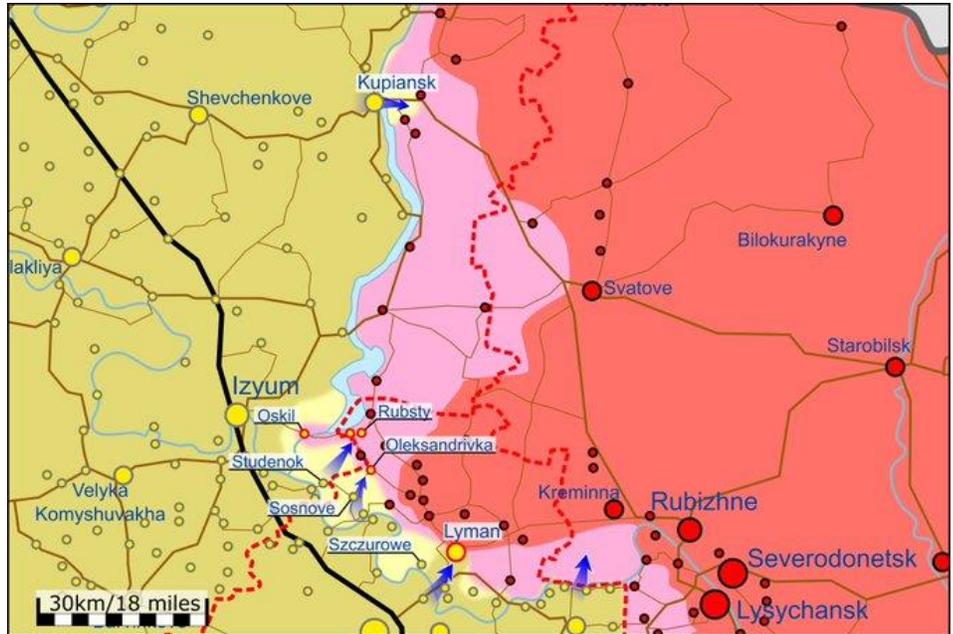


"The Russian defenders in Lyman still appear to consist in large part of [...] reservists and the remnants of units badly damaged in the Kharkiv Oblast counteroffensive."

"The Russians do not appear to be directing reinforcements from elsewhere in the theatre to these areas."

The dramatic advancement of the Ukrainian army has led U.S. President Biden to predict Ukraine would win the war.

"They're defeating Russia," Biden said in an interview with CBS.



He added: "Russia's turning out not to be as competent and capable as many people thought they were going to be."

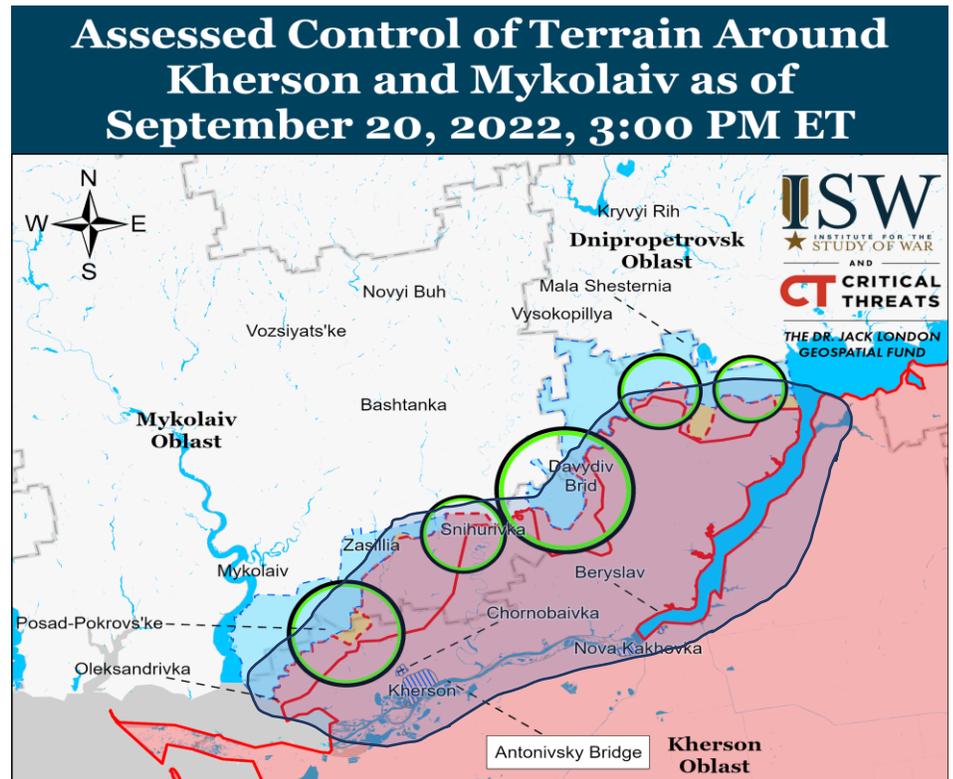
**Russian troops boxed in by Ukrainian forces and Dnieper River, barge carrying supplies to Russian troops sinks**

Retreat will prove difficult for Russian forces contending with Dnieper River in Ukraine's Kherson region, as seen in the adapted map alongside where the blue shaded areas reflects the area with the river to the south, blocking Russian withdrawal routes.

Ukraine has systematically destroyed connecting bridges, roads and re-supply routes over the past six weeks, effectively locking these troops into a "killing zone."

Russia extracted its leadership corps out of this areas over a month ago.

Russian troops are now boxed in between advancing Ukrainian forces in the southern Kherson region and the Dnieper River, with access to supplies and eastern routes blocked.



Ukrainian forces sank a Russian barge transporting troops, equipment and weapons across the major river crossing, Ukraine's Operational Command South said, according to Pravda Tuesday.

"Attempts to establish an alternative crossing over the River Dnieper near Nova Kakhovka and Kozatske were unsuccessful," the command said. "A barge carrying weapons, equipment and military personnel joined the occupiers' underwater fleet."

Russian forces have been relying on pontoon crossings to provide supplies and transportation routes to its forces west of the Dnieper River after Ukrainian troops destroyed two key bridges in July.

While Ukrainian forces made significant advancement in the northern Kharkiv region during a major counteroffensive this month, it has also been gaining in its southern Kherson region – where intense fighting has been ongoing for months.

Reports of guerrilla warfare in the city of Kherson reportedly broke out over the weekend between Russian troops who are looking to take what they can before they "flee."

Podolyak's comments suggest Russia could withdraw troops from the regional stronghold as Ukrainian forces advance, similar to steps taken by Moscow as Ukrainian soldiers made swift gains in Kharkiv.

But retreating east from Kherson will prove more difficult for Russian forces who have to contend with the Dnieper River, a major waterway that runs the entire length of the country and splits its eastern regions in the south from central and western Ukraine.

"As we've established fire control over river crossings and logistical routes in the region, these (enemy) units have to realize they are stuck between our forces and the (Dnipro) river bank," Ukrainian Operational Command South spokesperson Natalya Humeniuk told a Ukrainian news outlet Monday.

According to the spokesperson, Russian forces in the region are losing a sense of purpose and morale remains low.

**Growing dissent within Russian forces in Kherson** – A top adviser to Ukraine's president and a vocal critic on social media, Mykhailo Podolyak, said that the fighting in downtown Kherson showed a "manifestation of growing tension" between Kremlin-linked militant force the Wagner Group, Chechen forces led by Kadyrov, Russian soldiers and intelligence officials affiliated with Russia's Federal Security Service – the successor agency to the KGB.

"[The] number of 'domestic conflicts' is increasing. Parties divide the loot before [they] flee considering the news about Armed Forces of Ukraine approach," he added.

**Chechnyan leader lambasts Russian defense ministry for failures in Ukraine** - Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the most scathing criticism directed at the Russian Defense Ministry's handling of the situation was leveled by Kadyrov, though he is not one with a real knack for words.

"I am not a strategist of the same level as those in the Defense Ministry, but mistakes were made," the Moscow-appointed Chechnyan leader said. Kadyrov added that unless the strategy is changed "today or tomorrow," he "will be forced to go to the leadership of the Ministry of Defense and the leadership of the country to explain to them the real situation on the ground," thereby implying that the Kremlin and Russia's top brass may not have a realistic picture of the true state of affairs in eastern Ukraine (T.me/RKadyrov\_95, August 11). Although Kadyrov never once mentioned Shoigu by name, his 11-minute voice message was, in effect, an ad hominem assault on the country's top defense official.

It behooves a politician to discuss certain realities with euphemisms and circumlocutions, but Kadyrov, who does not appear to hold Shoigu in high regard and is never one to let the dictates of tact or courtesy get in the way, clearly relished crossing the line of acceptable discourse.

This is because, firstly, he knew he was reflecting the views of broad swathes of Russian society and the political class.

Secondly, the message was probably meant mostly for Putin, who is known for his penchant for direct, no-nonsense and occasionally crude talk.

And thirdly, by dropping some not-so-subtle digs at Shoigu and promising that his forces will recapture the lost territories and “reach Odesa in the nearest future,” Kadyrov played to shocked audiences from Vladivostok to Belgorod and simultaneously signaled his aspirations for a more senior leadership or command role, perhaps even at the helm of the Russian army.

**Russian officials rush to annex after Ukraine's successes** – as mentioned in yesterday’s Update, Putin and the Kremlin are rushing to absorb the four oblasts – Donetsk, Luhansk, Kherson and Zaporizhzhia into Russia as part of the “New Russia.”

This effort languished for some time, but after Ukraine’s stunning success in the two counteroffensives they launched, particularly in the Kharkiv Oblast, Putin is barreling toward a panic-invoked “referendum” in each oblast.

The only reason he is so hell-bent is to call these areas “Russia,” and hope that this wards off Western support for Ukraine, for fear that it will invoke a Russian response.

It will also provide him the rhetoric he needs to pursue a declaration of war, followed by full mobilization in order to combat Ukrainian successes.

These referendums will not be accepted by Ukraine and its supporters, but Putin is aiming his rhetoric to his internal audience who, with a lack of any alternative information, may believe his statements and rise to the occasion.

This may up the ante, rally Russians behind him and appease his rising number of war critics, but it doesn’t resolve his war woes of a lack of matériel, any semblance of a half-decent command structure and a severe lack of manpower.

The full effects of global sanctions are starting to affect his ability to replace spent weaponry and lost equipment and will progressively worsen as the weeks drag on. He is also beset with a fundamental maintenance challenge. He cannot maintain and repair his legions of tanks and hard equipment any better than feed his troops and stop their personal cell calls which reveal Russian positions to eaves-dropping Ukrainian listening stations.

**One notable complication:** “Russian forces do not control all of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts,” ISW warns. And this suggests Russian officials could soon find themselves “in the strange position of demanding that Ukrainian forces exit ‘Russian’ territory” after the sham votes, “and the humiliating position of being unable to enforce that demand,” according to ISW.

**Putin's troops are performing 'so poorly' in Ukraine right now that many Russian volunteers are refusing to go into combat, US official says** - Russia is struggling to find volunteers to fight in Ukraine as devastating losses and poor battlefield performance have led to refusals to go into combat, a US official said.

Ukraine's punishing counteroffensive in the northeastern Kharkiv region and the significant damage its forces have inflicted on Russian troops have led to a personnel shortage within Putin's military, he said.

"We're seeing the Kremlin increasingly straining to find new recruits to fill out their thin ranks, and they are performing so poorly that news from Kharkiv province has inspired many Russian volunteers to refuse combat," the official said.

The official also said the Wagner Group — a shadowy Russian mercenary group with close ties to the Kremlin — is having its own recruitment problems.

**Russia’s Draft** - Putin has ordered a “partial mobilization” of about 300,000 reserve troops to help fight his flagging invasion of democratic Ukraine, now in its seventh month, as Ukraine has begun clawing back land previously occupied

by Putin's forces in the east and south. The new order, which Putin described as "necessary, imperative measures," allegedly covers only soldiers with "combat experience," and excludes students and "conscripts," though exactly how for the latter remains unclear.

Putin still insists Russia is fighting "neo-Nazis" in Ukraine; and he said he expects referendum votes in four occupied territories—set to begin Friday—to proceed without complication. That particular goal, as we highlighted in Tuesday's newsletter, seems to be one of the dominant motivations for Wednesday's apparently abrupt mobilization.

**Big picture:** Putin is "threading a needle of sorts." That's because he desperately needs more soldiers but doesn't want them in such large numbers that it could provoke potential questioning and possible political instability over why exactly his invasion force has been stopped from advancing over the past several weeks—and indeed is losing ground in occupied Ukraine, particularly around Kharkiv in the northeast.

He told his countrymen that Russia is fighting "virtually the entire military machine of the collective West," according to the text of his speech Wednesday. And "The goal of that part of the West is to weaken, divide, and ultimately destroy our country," Putin said.

But he also has his eye on a "line of contact that is over 1,000 kilometers long" in Ukraine, he explained. And he needs these new troops "to defend our motherland and its sovereignty and territorial integrity, and to ensure the safety of our people and people in the liberated territories."

According to Putin's logic, "Washington, London, and Brussels are openly encouraging Kiev to move the hostilities to our territory," he claimed Wednesday, against any apparent evidence in the public record. "They openly say that Russia must be defeated on the battlefield by any means, and subsequently deprived of political, economic, cultural, and any other sovereignty and ransacked," Putin claimed.

**Nuclear threat** - Putin also delivered a not-so-veiled nuclear threat, warning in his address, "In the event of a threat to the territorial integrity of our country and to defend Russia and our people, we will certainly make use of all weapon systems available to us," he said, and added, "This is not a bluff." Warned one expert to the Wall Street Journal, "Any decision by Putin to use nuclear weapons would be catastrophically stupid...The nuclear threat has been taken seriously from the outset, but you have to combine taking it seriously with not being intimidated by the mere mention of nuclear weapons."

**US reaction:** "It's irresponsible rhetoric for a nuclear power to talk that way. But it's not atypical for how he's been talking the last seven months and we take it very seriously," said John Kirby, of the National Security Council.

**NATO reaction:** "The speech of President Putin demonstrates that the war is not going according to his plans," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told Reuters in an interview this morning. "He has made a big miscalculation."

**Kyiv's reaction:** "We will act according to our plans step by step. I'm sure we will liberate our territory," President Zelenskyy told Germany's Bild on Wednesday.

**China's reaction:** "We call on all the parties involved to reach a cease-fire through dialogue and negotiations and find a way as quickly as possible to take into account the reasonable security concerns of all sides," Wang Wenbin, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, told reporters Wednesday in Beijing. "We also hope that the international community will create the conditions and room to bring this about," he said.

**Expert reaction:** The new forces could potentially be enough "to prevent a collapse of Russian forces" in Ukraine, said Rob Lee. "Otherwise, Russia's manpower issues could have become catastrophic this winter when many short-term volunteers likely would not sign another contract." However, Lee cautioned, "the war will now increasingly be fought

on the Russian side by people who do not want to be there. The difference in morale, unit cohesion, and other critical factors between Ukrainian and Russian units will grow even greater.”

**A second opinion:** Putin’s order will very likely “extend Russia’s ability to sustain this war more so than alter the outcome,” said Michael Kofman of CNA. On the other hand, he continued, “Having used up its best equipment, officers, and personnel” already in the Ukraine invasion, “I don’t see how this can be recovered.”

**Comment** – Calling up additional troops, irrespective of how he accomplishes this, is the easy part, relatively speaking. Putin now needs (i) an army command structure that doesn’t exist in modern-day terms, (ii) arms for these new recruits that don’t exist as supplies and manufacturing capabilities have been exhausted and restricted and (iii) to train this new folk with trainers who have all reportedly been sent to the front line(s).

Atop this is lagging morale and a keen lack of interest from Main Street Russians to join ranks and die in battle. Stories from returning soldiers, wounded and traumatized, are spreading and dampening any patriotic desire to enlist.

Adding further to Putin’s war invasion woes, is the reality that Ukraine is about to start receiving vastly improved weaponry in order to maximize a winter offensive. They will shortly have longer-range artillery and more of it. America is hinting that it will provide battle tanks – the US doesn’t “leak” or make such statements without something in the works for some time.

Ukraine is also receiving additional smart anti-aircraft systems. Witness the daily shooting down of Russian combat aircraft of late. There was a period when Russian aircraft losses were few and far between. Ukrainian forces have something that is seeing increased fighter aircraft been shot down.

**Comment 2** – there appears to be a very effective Ukrainian command structure in place – with direct assistance from NATO and US planners and control structures. Intelligence, reaction plans, in situ partisan forces sending back precise Russian unit locations and satellite positioning all contribute to the defending force successes.

One must believe this “defensive command network” is an advanced and extensive capability with the latest world-class technology and resources at their command. NATO and the US will be using this conflict to understand, interpret and defeat Russian arms and tactics, just as they did in Angola on the 1970’s and 1980’s where, alongside South African military forces and Israeli combat pilots flying South African “Cheetah” aircraft, they were up against Russian and Cuban arms and command structures. (See also below under “Containment.”)

A large part of the development cycle of modern-day “smart” weapons were developed in this African war theater, tested in combat and honed to perfection.

## Impacts

**One-way flights out of Russia began selling out moments after Putin’s comments** – Reuters was specifically citing sold out Turkish and Armenian destinations. Flights to Dubai, meanwhile, listed at around \$5,000 apiece. Other destinations from Moscow are jacking up their prices as well. Dmetri Alperovitch offered some travel advice to Russians pondering an exit, here.

**Ukraine war reveals need for more anti-drone tech, US Army says** - Russia’s heavy use of a wide variety of drones against Ukraine has the U.S. Army rethinking its anti-drone plan, service officials said.

Much of the Army’s current thinking is based on the Army’s experience in Iraq and Afghanistan, said Maj. Gen. Gainey, who runs the service’s Joint C-UAS Office. In those wars, the United States could deploy very large armed drones virtually anywhere while adversaries such as ISIS were just beginning to use small drones to drop small munitions. So the United States developed and published a plan for dealing with small UAS in January 2021.

“What we're seeing in Ukraine,” Gainey said, is that “when you scale this capability from a small quadcopter all the way up to a larger group three” — a drone that weighs around 1,300 pounds and flies at 1,800 feet — “and are able to leverage [intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance] to put other effects of other systems to bear, [it] really shows the importance of having counter UAS at scale, not just at a fixed site.”

The Army is trying to equip at least two divisions with new anti-drone weapons by Sept. 30, he said at an AUSA event on Tuesday. The Defense Department plans to spend \$668 million on research into new anti-drone tech and \$78 million on procurement of new technologies for the next fiscal year (starting in September and ending in October 2023.)

“So we're not hamstrung from a UAS attack and not being able to defend all the way down to the forward lines,” Gainey said.

Those capabilities can take a variety of forms; the military is already working with hunter drones and laser and microwave guns. And they're looking to experiment with more as soon as next month at a new tech demonstration, said Gainey. But new experimental capabilities should work with the Army's Forward Area Air Defense Command and Control, or FAAD C2, software to better coordinate detection and delivery of effects, he said.

Russia has made large and small drones a key feature of its campaign against Ukrainian forces, but the war has also shown how drones, in the hands of a poorly-trained or poorly motivated force, can also be a liability. For instance, downed Russian UAVs have produced intelligence gains for Ukraine, as when Ukrainians were able to collect information about a Russian base from footage left on the memory card of a captured drone.

## Sanctions

**White House targets 'facilitators' of 'global bully' as it aims to broaden Russian sanctions** - Nearly seven months ago Vladimir Putin invaded Ukraine, prompting the West to implement what has often been described as the biggest sanctions response in modern history.

And while measures like seizing yachts and revoking international banking access have gained plenty of notice, they have nonetheless failed so far to stop Putin's apparent resolve to continue his war with Ukraine.

On Tuesday, two key Biden officials traveled to Capitol Hill to promise the sanctions will not only continue but also grow in the months ahead with Congress's help. One branch of the effort, the so-called KleptoCapture Task Force, is looking to target the "facilitators" who enable individuals and groups that are coming to Putin's aid.

The focus on facilitators "would be particularly powerful and allow us to go after a broader set of actors," Andrew Adams, the director of the task force, testified on Tuesday.

Adams — a veteran federal prosecutor who has investigated Russian organized crime — has been charged with targeting the finances of Russia's oligarchs. Elizabeth Rosenberg, the assistant secretary for terrorist financing at the Treasury Department, also testified about US efforts to cap the price of Russian oil.

**A former top Russian finance official says Western sanctions have been at most 40% effective — but says economic growth will be interrupted for years** - Sanctions against Russia have been 30% to 40% effective, a former finance official told Reuters.

But the sanctions will interrupt Russia's economic growth for several years to come, said Oleg Vyugin. Russia's tech industry will also be impacted by sanctions, as it's reliant on foreign imports.

Western sanctions against Russia over the invasion of Ukraine have been 30% to 40% effective, but there are headwinds to come, Vyugin, a former high-level finance ministry and central bank official, told Reuters on Tuesday.

His comments come as Russia's economy continues to appear resilient almost seven months into trade restrictions. Russia has put in measures to overcome the challenges posed by the sanctions, added Vyugin, who was a deputy finance minister and deputy governor at the Bank of Russia. He retired from the Moscow Exchange this year.

While sanctions have not been entirely effective, Vyugin told Reuters that "the main result of sanctions is that the economic growth process in Russia has been interrupted for several years."

## Putin

**Kremlin's new Hail Mary shows Putin is more panicked than ever** - Frantic efforts to rush through the referendums in four oblasts mark a complete 180° from Russia's plans just a couple weeks ago, when the Kremlin repeatedly postponed plans for the votes after failing to seize enough territory or win enough support. Sources cited by Meduza at that time said Vladimir Putin had set his sights on Nov. 4 after he became "tired of waiting."

But by mid-September, even that date no longer seemed feasible after Ukrainian forces won back territories throughout the east thanks to multiple surprise counter-offensives that literally sent Russian troops fleeing.

It was apparently those humiliating defeats that pushed the Kremlin to act now.

"There is a mindset now to do everything very quickly," a source close to the Russian presidential administration was quoted telling Meduza on Wednesday.

Sources cited by the outlet said Putin's sudden change of plans was the result of a pressure campaign by high-ranking Russian officials who want to ramp up the war efforts against Ukraine and go as far as introducing mobilization. They were reportedly amped up by concerns Ukraine might soon retake territories currently occupied by Russia.

Their thinking, according to three sources cited by Meduza, is that the referendums will stop further Ukrainian counter-offensives because, as one of them put it, Ukraine "won't risk attacking on Russian territory."

If Ukraine's counter-attacks continue, they said, Russian authorities plan to use the new legislation to impose martial law and a partial mobilization.

It's not clear how Russia intends to annex territories that are not even fully under their control.

As the Institute for the Study of War noted Tuesday, on the eve of Russia's latest bombshell announcements, the idea that Russia can win the upper hand in the war by partially annexing Ukrainian land is "incoherent."

**Comment** – Aside from obvious panic within the Kremlin, their moves yesterday evidence in no small manner their losses and fear of further humiliation at the hands of Ukrainian forces. It shows they have no battlefield answer and instead have needed to pivot to a pseudo-political position, namely claiming that the four oblasts are now part of Russia and any attack on them is now and consequently an attack on Russia itself.

Putin and the Kremlin have no answers outside of escalating the conflict to justify use of weapons of mass destruction.

They have been beaten on the battlefield and now are forced to pivot.

Dangerous territory indeed for all.

**More than 1,000 arrests reported after Putin's partial military mobilization sparks protests** - More than 1,000 people have been arrested in Russia during protests in several cities against a partial military mobilization announced by President Vladimir Putin on September 21.

Demonstrations broke out in Moscow and St. Petersburg and more than 30 other Russian cities after Putin announced the mobilization, OVD-Info said.

By 10 p.m. Moscow time nearly 1,000 people had been detained at protests in the Russian capital and St. Petersburg, the human rights project said. A total of about 200 people were arrested in other cities, including Chelyabinsk, Yekaterinburg, Krasnoyarsk, Ufa, Krasnodar, and Irkutsk.

The protest in Moscow included many women who chanted "Life to our children!" and "No to war!" Videos posted on social media indicated that several hundred people took part in the Moscow protest, where people formed a chain by clasping their hands. The police pulled protesters out of the chain one by one.

Participants held up posters with the blue and yellow colors of the Ukrainian flag and chanted "No to mobilization!" and "Russia without Putin."

Authorities warned people that they faced up to 15 years in prison for taking part in the demonstrations.

**Failure in Ukraine increases Moscow's repression and citizens' distrust** - Despite unprecedented repression by the Russian authorities against anyone who doubts the necessity of Putin's war in Ukraine, more citizens are finding the courage to speak out.

At the beginning of September 2022, a group of deputies representing St. Petersburg's Smolninsky district appealed to members of the Russian State Duma to charge Putin with state treason and remove him from office due to the so-called "special military operation" in Ukraine. The municipal deputies noted that the Russian president's actions led to results directly opposite to the goals of the "special military operation"—namely, the destruction of the Russian army's combat capabilities, harm to the economy and citizens of Russia, and the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (Twitter.com/Dmitry\_Palyuga, September 7).

The authors of the appeal were immediately summoned by the police and charged with "discrediting the Russian army" (Sever Realii, September 9). This time, the authorities did not limit themselves to the persecution of individuals. A few days after the appeal, the Smolninsky District Court of St. Petersburg, at the request of the prosecutor's office, ruled on the "inaction" of the entire council of municipal deputies. Now, in accordance with the law, the governor of St. Petersburg can submit a bill to the Legislative Assembly of the city to dissolve the council (Current Time TV, September 13). Meanwhile, the deputies themselves confirm that their initiative has found widespread support in their own city and in Moscow (Golosameriki.com, September 13).

Another resonant event was the appeal of the famous singer, considered in Russia to be the country's main pop star, Alla Pugacheva to Putin. In it, she not only declared solidarity with her husband, artist Maxim Galkin, who was declared a "foreign agent," but also opposed the death of Russians "for illusory goals that make our country an outcast and make life difficult for our citizens" (RBC.ua, September 18).

Fearing popular unrest, the Russian authorities are trying to strengthen repression and amplify the messages of war propaganda. Several State Duma deputies have revealed that "information for the citizenry on the course of the special military operation is insufficient," and therefore, the Russian parliament should create an "information bureau" (REGNUM, September 14). Another parliament deputy, Andrey Lugovoy, accused by a British court of murdering former Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) officer Alexander Litvinenko, announced the initiation of a bill enacting life imprisonment for state treason without appeal, as well as stripping convicts of Russian citizenship (Ura.news, September 14).

However, even the new round of repressions is powerless in influencing certain processes now occurring in Russian society. First, the "passive majority," which formally supports the war, increasingly avoids the military agenda. Even sociologists loyal to the Kremlin note that "the overwhelming majority of citizens ... demonstrate increasing political

neutrality,” and the number of people trying to distance themselves from Moscow’s military agenda is steadily growing (T.me/russica2, September 10). They are also forced to admit that the number of respondents whose answers make it clear they do not support the war has increased (T.me/russica2, September 10).

This does not mean that these people will begin to openly oppose the war. However, they clearly do not support a general mobilization and might more actively express their disagreement if the war affects them directly. In this regard, the rhetoric of some “moderately pro-Kremlin” Telegram channels have become more specific regarding the fact that “Russian society is categorically against general mobilization” (Tgstat.ru, September 15).

According to data from the Minsk-based Center for Strategic and Foreign Policy Studies, support among Russians in large cities for the military campaign is low. The Belarusian analysts also affirm that “similar sentiments are prevalent in most groups of the Russian elite, including even the security forces, whom Vladimir Putin has still not been able to convince them of the real need for this war” (T.me/forstrategy, September 15).

Against a background of continuing successes for the Ukrainian army, dissatisfaction with Putin has increased among the most ardent supporters of the war (see EDM, July 19). Ultra-Orthodox sites have, for some time, accused the Russian leader of “betraying Russia and the army” because Putin has done nothing to prevent weapons reaching Ukraine (3rm.info, May 3). Now, Russian military experts have joined them in demanding explanations for what is happening at the front (Topwar.ru, September 11).

Apparently, in order to increase influence on radical religious circles, Orthodox-patriotic websites controlled by Russian authorities have published articles stating that there is no treason in the Kremlin and that those who claim otherwise are “working for the enemy” (Tsargrad.tv, September 13). To convince the “believers” in the electorate, propaganda has even resorted to the services of an “Orthodox psychotherapist” who has devoted a separate video to the idea that defeat should not be feared.

According to him, society has grown unaccustomed to wartime, while in fact, war is a natural and normal state for Russia. The “Orthodox doctor” also said that what is happening in Ukraine is “a divine instruction necessary for all of us,” but Russia eventually will win and will be able to challenge the “Western puppeteers.” Finally, the “psychotherapist” consoled his flock with a promise of the coming end of the world in the mode “desired by Christians” (YouTube, September 15).

Nevertheless, it is extremely doubtful that arguments regarding the normality and correctness of killing will motivate more Russian citizens to go to war. The Kremlin is driving itself into a trap between a majority unwilling to fight and a radical minority demanding more blood and new victories. In the current environment, Putin is unable to meet the either group’s expectations.

Comment – This something we reported in previous Updates – that Russian society as we understand it today, does not hanker for aggressive campaigns and war actions around the globe. Young Russians have grown accustomed to living in peace and enjoying the benefits of consumerism and choice.

This is not the Russia of Stalin, or of even Gorbachev of a few years ago. Russian Millennials want what they are used to – and Putin is aware of this, hence not calling for a full mobilization, recruiting from far-flung regions of the country and abroad, as opposed to the population dense areas in western Russia.

**The last Russian mobilization** - Eighty-three years ago, the Soviet Union attacked Poland, and the dismemberment of that country in the alliance with Hitler’s Reich began. The fact that the Soviet Union actively participated in the outbreak of World War II, along with Germany, only 16 days later, weighs heavily on the anti-fascist heritage that Russia carefully nurtures. **Comment** – During my multiple travels in and around Poland some years ago, the constant I always encountered was the Polish hatred of Russia, they detested the Nazi’s but reserve a special hatred for Russians.

It is a stain in the biography of a nation, an unpleasant matter covered up and “buried” with subsequent interpretations and retellings for decades.

It was only an assessment that the imperial goals of Russia and the USSR could be achieved with the help of Hitler, which did not represent any ideological and moral problem for Moscow.

That assessment was bad, which will be exhibited two years later when Germany attacked the USSR. Still, if that had not happened and if Hitler’s venture had succeeded by some accident, Russia would have been, even then, on the side of the winner with whom it would have divided and tyrannically ruled Europe.

One of Putin’s influential propagandists said at the beginning of the aggression that the greatest danger to the Russian army, which would enter Odesa, would be, for example, one of the citizens hugging them too tightly in a brotherly embrace as a sign of enthusiasm and welcome.

Putin and Russia attacked Ukraine on 24 February, convinced they were only attacking Ukraine. Since the glorious victory did not happen after five days or five months, a plausible excuse had to be found for the absence of a triumph. That excuse was always there at hand; it was even used occasionally, in passing to convincingly describe that on the way to a final and inevitable victory, there are still things that make it difficult and slow it down.

But it was not until the collapse of the Russian invasion in the Kharkiv region that the Kremlin made casual excuses, a definition of the war, and even a kind of war goal. The war is not against Ukraine but the whole West – this slogan has been reinforced and has come to the top of the Kremlin’s propaganda narrative since its army was defeated in the Kharkiv region.

In the preparations for the invasion, which he carried out in an unacceptably narrow circle of collaborators, Putin and his strategists ignored the possibility that the entire liberal Western world, with resources that Russia can’t even come close to, would stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian defence. This misjudgment resulted from a long-standing self-delusion that Europe, NATO and the West are so internally divided that they would not be able to organize a meeting regarding Ukraine, let alone send any aid to it.

Russia worked on these divisions persistently and, for a long time, invested huge money in corrupting Western leaders, business people, and the media. Unfortunately, with a lot of success.

They underestimated Western unity and solidarity until the last moment; they relied on the fact that there would be no response from the West, lying until the very invasion that there would be none. Blinded by their greatness and power, about which they created a myth and illusion decades ago, they also overlooked clear signs that the West would stand by Ukraine, for example, the fact that Britain sent certain quantities of modern weapons to Ukraine even before the start of the aggression.

The so-called “special military operation” against the drugged (Putin’s term) leadership in Kyiv turned, as time passed and the defeats continued, into a real war, then into a war against Ukraine and its people, and finally, a fight against the whole West. The enemy must present itself as a bigger force when things go badly in war. And for Russia, things started to go wrong even before its army crossed the Ukrainian border.

From day one, Russian aggression was opposed “only” by Ukraine, its army and its people. The problem with Russia’s and Putin’s perception of the war is that they underestimated Ukraine’s determination to defend its country and its independence. They entered the fight with a deep-seated belief that neither Ukraine nor Ukrainians exist, that their identity has been “forcibly changed,” as Putin wrote a year ago in his author text “On the historical unity of Russians and Ukrainians.”

An even bigger problem is that they did not understand the modern world, which was taking shape before their eyes. They did not want to accept it, blinded by the arrogance of their “Russian world” as a superior alternative.

Ukraine was looking for a place in that world because it wanted to participate as a free nation, which was unacceptable for Russia.

Therefore, the declaration of the West as the primary opponent in the war in Ukraine has a dual function for Russia. First of all, to justify shocking defeats on the front, thousands of victims, the loss of conquered territories and the daily collapse of its reputation as the “second-best army in the world,” as they proclaimed themselves for decades. Another function is to mobilize what remains of imperial sentiment.

How to convince Russians that they should not stop until they build a “Russian world” and regain their “historical Russia” if the whole enterprise fails on the first step, the Ukrainian one?

Alexander Dugin, the shaman of the “Russian World,” is working hard on this mobilization. After the defeat in Kharkiv, he asked his compatriots to start a decisive and total battle against the West. “This time, too, we will be victorious, if only in the war against the West, and this time it will be a people’s war. Culture, information, education, enlightenment, politics, the social sphere: everything must work unanimously for war, i.e. for victory,” read Dugin’s call to mobilize Russian people and all their resources.

If they listen to Dugin in the Kremlin, it will be another in a series of disastrous historical assessments. And given the stakes, it might be the last.

## Containment

**Pentagon official says tanks are 'absolutely on the table' for Ukraine as Kyiv continues its counter-offensive against Russian invasion** - A plan for the United States to supply Ukraine with new tanks is 'absolutely on the table,' according to a Department of Defense official.

Ukraine has been utilizing Soviet-era tanks throughout its counter-offensive against Russia but has requested modern replacements.

The US has previously advised European countries to supply Ukraine with more Soviet-era tanks if possible, as any tank provided by a NATO country would require extensive training to use.

'Tanks are absolutely on the table along with other areas,' the official told reporters in anonymity at the Pentagon.

'We're looking at the entirety of the Ukrainian armed forces and considering for the future ... what capabilities they will need and how the US and our allies will be able to support Ukraine in building out those capabilities.'



The US provided \$25 billion in military aid to Ukraine between January 24 and August 3, 2022, according to Newsweek. Ukraine has been utilizing T-64 tanks in its efforts, which were first made in 1966 by Ukrainian tank designer Alexander Alexandrovich Morozov.

Should Ukraine be supplied with NATO-based tanks in the near future, the Pentagon official said additional support to help with training efforts will be provided.

'The tanks that are available that could be provided very quickly with little to no training are Soviet-type tanks but we're certainly open to other options provided that the training, maintenance, and sustainment can be taken care of.'

'There will be a day when they want to transition and may need to transition to, you know, NATO compatible models.

'We're always very cognizant though with any new equipment that we provide to Ukraine or that our allies, our partners provide that there is substantial training, maintenance and sustainment ... and sustainment consideration.'

In response to Ukraine's request for new tanks as the Russian invasion reaches its seven-month mark, Germany's Minister of Defense Christine Lambrecht told Reuters that her country would not take action 'unilaterally.'

'No country has delivered Western-built infantry fighting vehicles or main battle tanks so far,' Lambrecht said.

'We have agreed with our partners that Germany will not take such action unilaterally.'

**USAF Puts HARMs on MiG-29s** - In the last few months, the U.S. Air Force has modified Ukrainian MiG-29s to carry Western anti-radar missiles, turned U.S. strategic bombers into cargo carriers, and transformed airlifters into long-range strike aircraft, officials said this week, as Russia and the changing Indo-Pacific security environment have forced the service to think outside the box.

The modifications to the Soviet-era MiG-29s, which were done by an undisclosed Air Force contractor, will allow Ukraine to wield U.S. AGM-88 High-Speed Anti-Radiation Missiles. It's one way to get Kyiv Western-compatible capabilities without the policy decision on whether to provide Ukraine U.S. fighter aircraft, and the Air Force is interested in seeing what else can be done, said Chief of Staff Gen. C.Q. Brown Jr.

"These are the conversations I want to make sure we are having," Brown said at the Air & Space Forces Association's annual conference outside Washington, D.C.. "Whether we decide to do it or not, I think we actually need to have the conversations on some of these to see what options there are."

**Dropping US Cruise missiles out of planes on to the battlefield** - Air Force Special Operations Command and the Air Force Research Laboratory are testing another option: palletizing U.S. cruise missiles so they can be dropped out of the back of a cargo airplane. Last fall, a pallet was pushed out the back of an MC-130J during flight. After parachutes stabilized the descending pallet, a mock AGM-158B Joint Air-to-Surface Standoff Missile - Extended Range (JASSM-ER) was successfully released.

It could be a way to get cruise missile capability to NATO allies and other countries whose smaller militaries lack bombers but do have some type of cargo plane.

"We've got a lot of allies and partners that have cargo airplanes, and they don't necessarily have, you know, deep-magazine heavy bombers in the way that the United States does," said Lt. Gen. James Slife, who leads Air Force Special Operations Command. "If we can give them similar kinds of capability to us with the cargo platforms we have, then we're helping our partners become more capable."

**US soldiers provide Telemaintenance as Ukrainians MacGyver their weapons** - Some four dozen U.S. troops here are helping their Ukrainian counterparts across the border fix and maintain 155mm howitzers, Javelin launchers,

HIMARS and other weapons. But since the Americans aren't in Ukraine, they're providing assistance via encrypted digital chats, sending replacement parts, and consulting on parts the Ukrainians make themselves. It's vital work at an airbase that could be among the first targets if Russia expands the war beyond Ukraine.

With the help of some Ukrainian linguists, the U.S. maintenance specialists communicate in 14 chatrooms, one for each weapon and system the Ukrainians need help with. The Ukrainians use Starlink satellite communication terminals to share video clips as needed.

"Ukrainians are going to identify a need, the experts are going to diagnose...what's needed and either walk them through it or put parts on order. And then we use the American supply system to get that part here to transfer right down," said one lieutenant colonel involved in the effort. (Defense One is not allowed to publish the names of the personnel involved or the name of the base.)

Some of the needs are new even to the U.S. specialists. The Ukrainians have been using long-range fires like howitzers much more heavily than the United States has used such weapons in decades.

"The wear and tear on these guns is something that we just weren't ready for because of the rates that [the Ukrainians] are firing these rounds. Their dependency on that field artillery system is what's keeping them in this fight," said the colonel. "When they're firing them in this way, you're seeing trends, you're seeing common faults. They haven't been tested in this manner...because they're just, these are not [firing] numbers that the product or the program managers even use to stress us."

For instance, the heavy use is wearing down the internal grooves of howitzer barrels, requiring frequent replacement. Other problems, such as damage from bullets or normal wear and tear the Ukrainians can fix themselves.

But certain hard-to-get parts require the full spectrum of Ukrainian ingenuity. They use computer-assisted design to draw up designs, run them past U.S. specialists for guidance, and make the parts themselves.

The Ukrainians have no direct line to U.S. weapons manufacturers and there are no U.S. personnel in the country to order replacement parts or coordinate shipments, much to the frustration of some volunteers who have journeyed to Ukraine to assist in the war effort.

**Comment** – Russia has the same challenge in that its artillery barrels are worn out – but the difference is that they cannot maintain or replace them.

**US working on AI to predict Ukraine's ammo and weapons needs** - In a large office building amid closely-cut grass, one of the U.S. military's top data minds is developing machine-learning algorithms to predict Ukraine's ammo and repair needs, rather than just react to them. But an older problem persists, according to the Defense Department's inspector general: the Pentagon isn't doing enough to keep track of what's going where.

This is the joint operations center of the International Donor Coordination Center, or IDCC, where officials from the U.S., Britain, Ukraine, and a dozen other countries track the transfer of donated weapons and supplies, right down to individual bullets, IDCC officials told reporters this week.

The process begins with a request from the Ukrainian Defense Ministry for, say, armored vehicles or bullets. IDCC officials check to see if there's a donor country or entity that has the item. The coalition officials then design a process to get that materiel to Ukrainians, who then take it over the border. Along the way, the coalition officials document what was requested, what was donated, and what was received.

The requests also allow the IDCC to calculate and track how quickly the Ukrainians are using up matériel.

“Understanding their usage rates is important to understand how quickly they need to be replaced,” one coalition official told reporters.

The IDCC also works security issues, such as when an arms shipment from Macedonia was picked up on social media. Officials adjusted the timing of the shipment to avoid drawing public attention. They said that while some of the shipments were very conspicuous at first—think armored vehicles on flatbed trucks—the shipments have since become much harder for the outside world to detect. IDCC officials have figured out ways to ship items without flight numbers or other tracking indicators that might tip off Russian intelligence trying to intercept or destroy the aid in transit.

It’s the sort of thing big companies like Amazon do to ensure they can meet demand. But large retail outfits have a few advantages that the IDCC does not. They can add sensors to shipments to get a complete data picture. Summers said the IDCC is planning to work around this shortfall by developing predictive models from existing data.

**Comment** - as always, Main Street benefits from wartime escapades. Long waiting development and execution of RFID (**R**adio **F**requency **I**dentification) tracking chips, held back due to unit cost, should rapidly see market resolution through government-funded development and manufacture.

**Russia’s draft, setbacks mean it’s time for more advanced weapons** - Putin’s decision to call up 300,000 reservists should prod the West to send the longer-range artillery and more technologically advanced weapons that Kyiv will need to press its advantage in the harsh winter months ahead, Ukraine’s deputy defense minister said Wednesday.

Volodymyr Havrylov’s list is topped by the ATACMS, a missile that can outrange the artillery rockets Ukraine is currently using, and fighter jets, which Washington has been reluctant to provide out of fear that Russia would escalate the nearly seven-month-old war.

“I think after today’s announcement [by] Putin, we are closer to a political decision here in Washington, D.C., that Ukraine deserves and really needs to be provided with ATACMS,” Havrylov said at a conference sponsored by the National Defense Industrial Association in Austin, Texas.

Ukraine’s highly successful use of the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, known as HIMARS, has prompted the Russians to move its ammunition depots and logistics hubs more than 100 kilometers from the front lines, Havrylov said. That places them out of the range of HIMARS.

“If we had a capability to destroy the targets of the depots to 100 kilometers [away], it would be a total disaster for Russia,” he said. “That’s why we’re asking for ATACMS,” which has a published range of 300 km (**Comment** – with added propellant charges this range can be significantly boosted).

Havrylov also called for “Stinger-type air defense,” a reference to the U.S.-provided shoulder-fired rockets.

He also said Ukraine needs anti-tank weapons with a longer range than the Javelin anti-tank missile. “Javelin is okay, but it’s only two-and-a-half kilometers’ range,” and Russian tanks have become careful to stay farther away, Havrylov said. “For us to reach them, we need to find something else like drones, kamikaze drones, or ... anti-tank systems with a range up to six kilometers.”

He said, “We started to receive something from the United States as well,” but did not specify what.

The U.S. has given Ukraine Phoenix Ghost drones, which can loiter before crashing into a target.

“Winter also is a window of opportunity for [our] military,” Havrylov said. With the “right armament and equipment, we can also succeed more during the wintertime.” (Defense One).

**NATO Battle Group Sets Up In Central Romania** - As part of what NATO calls a "fundamental shift in deterrence and defense," construction is under way in Cincu on a base that will house and train European troops.

In May this year, as NATO beefed up its presence across Eastern Europe, Colonel Vincent Minguet, the commander of the NATO Combat Group in Romania, announced the military alliance would be shifting its "center of gravity" from the Black Sea port city of Constanta, to Cincu, near the exact center of the country.

According to Minguet, the base will allow "the creation of a permanent, stronger battalion, with more heavy weapons, to prevent any aggression or any destabilization in Romania." He added, "We will be here for a period of 4-5 years."

NATO say it currently has "over 40,000 troops, along with significant air and naval assets" under direct NATO command across the eastern edge of the alliance.

It also says it's establishing four new "multinational battle groups" in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia.

## GeoPolitics

**Russia's Invasion Of Ukraine An Affront To UN Charter, Biden Tells World Leaders** - U.S. President Biden has told world leaders at the United Nations in New York that Russia "has shamelessly violated the core tenets" of the UN Charter with its "brutal, needless war" in Ukraine.

Speaking at the annual UN General Assembly today, the U.S. president said the attempt to "erase a sovereign state from the map" by a member of the UN Security Council is an affront to the heart of what the UN stands for.

Russia's "naked aggression" in Ukraine is about "extinguishing Ukraine's right to exist as a state," Biden said, adding that reports of abuses allegedly carried out by Russian soldiers against civilians "should make your blood run cold."

In issuing the firm rebuke of Russia's invasion, Biden also reaffirmed U.S. backing for Ukraine's efforts to defend itself.

"We will stand in solidarity against Russia's aggression, period," Biden said.

His speech came hours after Russian President Vladimir Putin announced a partial military mobilization and warned the West that "it's not a bluff" that Russia would use all the means at its disposal to protect its territory.

Biden said Putin's nuclear threats against Europe showed "reckless disregard" for Russia's responsibilities as a signatory to the Treaty On The Non-Proliferation Of Nuclear Weapons.

Biden also responded to plans by Moscow-installed officials in Russian-occupied regions in eastern and southern Ukraine to hold votes on being incorporated into Russia, criticizing them as "sham" referendums.