

Conflict Update # 251

November 3rd, 2022

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – **74,000** (730) soldiers killed, 2,734 (+20) enemy tanks, 5,552 (+27) armored combat vehicles, 1,755 (+22) artillery systems, 390 (+3) MLRS systems, 198 (+0) air defense systems, 277 (+0) warplanes, 258 (+0) helicopters, 1,442 (+4) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 397 (+0) cruise missiles, 15 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,162 (+9) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 76 fuel bowsers (+0) and 155 (+1) units of specialized equipment.

Key Takeaways

By the numbers – Russian losses are mounting and over the past week are registered at 4,750, despite Russia throwing increasing numbers of untrained enlistees into the affray.

These casualties are being reported out of the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts indicating tough fighting in areas crucial to Russia's supply network.

Russia's Admiral Makarov frigate: did Ukraine sink it? - Initially, there were conflicting reports on whether the ship was sunk or merely damaged. The reliable information seems to come from a Yahoo! News report dated 30 October 2022:

“At least three ships of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, including the Admiral Makarov flagship, were damaged as a result of the unmanned surface vessel [USV] attack on 29 October ... GeoConfirmed investigators have analyzed footage from the unmanned surface vessels [USVs are speedboat-size vessels that can pack hundreds of pounds of explosives – ed.], which roamed the harbour and the sea near Sevastopol ... The investigators released footage of an attack on an Admiral Grigorovich-class frigate. They concluded that the Admiral Makarov is the only one that matches this description in the Black Sea. The footage stops when the USV hits the vessel and explodes ... GeoConfirmed believes that all the available footage indicates that between six and eight USVs were deployed in the attack, hitting at least three Russian vessels ... GeoConfirmed said that Ukraine was operating the USVs.”

Not surprisingly, Russian propaganda machines are denying any such damage to the Makarov, which is very consistent with their knack for understating their losses throughout the conflict. Stay tuned, as it'll probably be at least a few more days before the full and accurate story comes to light.

How Russian soldiers ran a 'cleansing' operation in Bucha - The first man arrived at 7:27 a.m. Russian soldiers covered his head and marched him up the driveway toward a nondescript office building, AP reports.

Two minutes later, a pleading, gagged voice pierced the morning stillness. Then the merciless reply: “Talk! Talk, f----- mother-f-----!”

The women and children came later, gripping hastily packed bags, their pet dogs in tow.

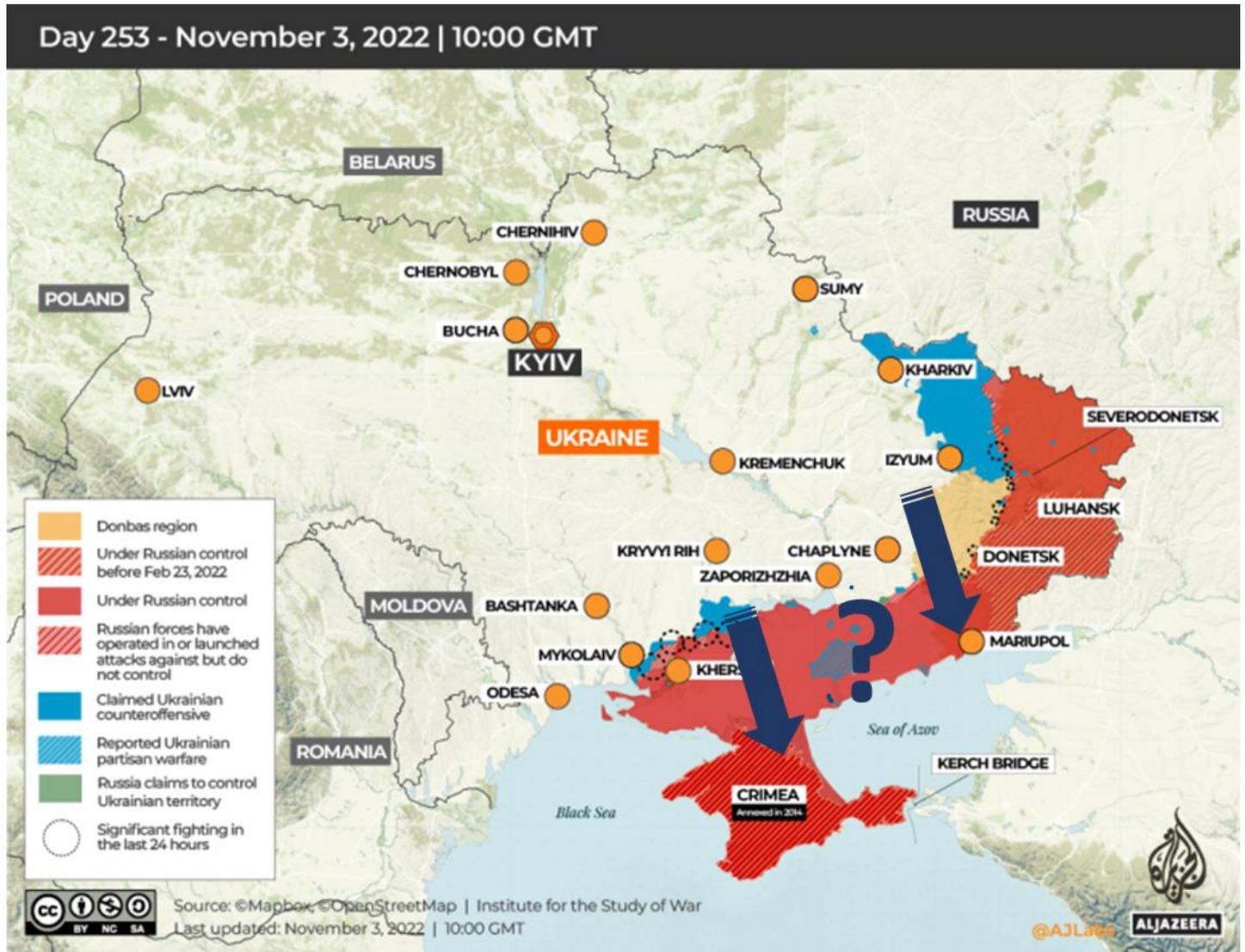
It was a cold, gray morning, March 4 in Bucha, Ukraine. Crows cawed. By nightfall, at least nine men would walk to their deaths at 144 Yablunska street, a building complex that Russians turned into a headquarters and the nerve center of violence that would shock the world.

Later, when all the bodies were found strewn along the streets and packed in hasty graves, it would be easy to think the carnage was random. Residents asking how this happened would be told to make their peace, because some questions just don't have answers.

Yet there was a method to the violence.

What happened that day in Bucha was what Russian soldiers on intercepted phone conversations called “zachistka” – cleansing. The Russians hunted people on lists prepared by their intelligence services and went door to door to identify potential threats. Those who didn't pass this filtration, including volunteer fighters and civilians suspected of assisting Ukrainian troops, were tortured and executed, surveillance video, audio intercepts and interviews show.

Ukrainian thrusts?



Is this where Ukraine is thrusting toward? Splitting the Russian force by reaching Mariupol in the southeast and Crimea in the southwest? That leaves the area in between in Zaporizhzhia vulnerable to re-occupation by Ukraine and Russia with the separatist Donetsk and Luhansk sections they controlled pre-February this year.

Further Russian recruiting – Russian schools are sending questionnaires home with students and addressed to their mothers, who are being asked (i) age, (ii) health, (iii) fitness and (iv) battle readiness amongst other points.

Previous reports suggested Russia was next aiming at women being drafted, which now appears to be becoming a reality. Should these drafts continue in any number, women being conscripted will more than likely be drafted into backroom and support positions currently held by men, who in turn will be sent to the front.

As said before, the Russian cat is truly out of the bag.

Russian forces seem to be preparing to retreat from portions of occupied Kherson, particularly from the west bank of Ukraine's Dnipro River, Reuters reported Thursday, citing Russian-installed occupation official Kirill Stremousov—and writing that, "if confirmed, [it] would be a major turning point in the war."

Russian occupation tactic: Kidnapping local leaders and forcing them to collaborate with invading troops, as the Russians did to Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov is a time-tested Russian occupation tactic. He's "one of over 50 local leaders who have been held in Russian captivity since the war began on Feb. 24 in an attempt to subdue cities and towns coming under Moscow's control," AP reported Thursday from Kyiv. "Ukrainian and Western historians say the tactic is used when invading forces are unable to subjugate the population."

Putin looks weak: Russia backs down on grain shipments - Russia has re-entered an agreement to allow Ukraine to safely export its grain via a designated shipping corridor, after having suspended the agreement a few days ago, but Ukraine's refusal to halt grain shipments, and vehement criticism from the international community, seem to have pushed Moscow to back down.

Russia left the agreement after accusing Ukraine of using the safety corridor, meant only for shipping grain, as an avenue for its drones to carry out an attack on Russian ships. Ukraine neither confirmed nor denied that they had conducted the attack they were accused of, but the incident was notable: Russia's Black Sea flagship, the Admiral Makarov, was damaged when Ukrainian drones swarmed the ship at port in Sevastopol. As many as three Russian ships were hit in the attack, although the extent of the damage is not clear. Reports suggest that the Admiral Makarov was crippled, its hull perhaps breached. Russian officials reported that the attack included nine air drones and seven sea drones. (Video from one of the sea drones can be found [here](#).)

Russia responded by reneging access to the safety corridors. But Ukraine continued to use the shipping corridors as usual, leaving Russia with a tough choice: Destroy civilian vessels loaded with food and bound for food-insecure regions, or allow Ukraine to openly defy Russian threats.

Germany was less than complimentary, however. "Russia has again tried to use hunger as a weapon, to use grain as a weapon," German Foreign Defense Minister Annalena Baerbock said. "The world community has made clear: No, we don't believe your lies, we will continue to send ships...so the poorest in the world do not have to suffer so massively from this war of aggression."

Comments – (i) Russia cannot cite this as a justification when they launch missiles into Ukraine from their Black Sea fleet moored in Sevastopol that overfly these same canals, (ii) Turkey took a strong stand by sending their frigates to escort the food convoys and (iii) The German statement is needed as it sends a clear message to 3rd World countries that it is Russia and not Ukraine that is the perpetrator of food shortages.

Russian flag disappears from Kherson administration in first signal of potential retreat - The Russian flag hanging in front of the regional administration in Ukraine's occupied Kherson region has been taken down, pro-Russian Telegram channels said Thursday.

The flag's removal is the first indication that the Russian military may be preparing to abandon the city of Kherson, the only regional capital that Moscow has captured in its eight-month invasion.

Medvedev backs death penalty for wartime saboteurs - Former Russian President Medvedev yesterday called on Russia to reinstate the death penalty for those suspected of wartime sabotage.

His comments came in response to the arrests of Russian and foreign citizens suspected of plotting to damage railroads and power lines and sabotage the country's war on Ukraine.

He also threatens EU nuclear plants - European leaders should be wary of "possible incidents" at nuclear power plants in their countries, Russia's former President Dmitry Medvedev said Friday.

Ukraine says has warned Iran of "absolutely ruthless" actions in response to alleged weapons sales to Russia - Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba says Iran has been informed through diplomatic channels of the consequences of Tehran "sending new weapons deliveries of attack drones and ballistic missiles to Russia."

Kuleba said at a news conference in Kyiv that "the threat is real" of reported new weapon deliveries from Iran.

On Tuesday, CNN reported that Iran is preparing to send approximately 1,000 additional weapons, including surface-to-surface short range ballistic missiles and more attack drones, to Russia to use in its war against Ukraine, according to officials from a Western country that closely monitors Iran's weapons program.

"I have said and will repeat again that when it comes to the complicity of any country in Russian aggression and the killing of our citizens, we will be absolutely ruthless in our actions in response, because it is about the protection of our state and our citizens," Kuleba noted.

Russian Military Shortages

The barren barrels - Russia's military industry has all sorts of problems: there are barely any details for tanks, aircraft electronics and newest missiles are in short supply.

Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's former president and currently the deputy chairman of the Security Council inspected Uralvagonzavod, one of Russia's leading military production facilities, on 25 October. As he said himself, he was inspecting tank production situation in particular.

On his Telegram channel, he wrote about the objectives that were set up during an offsite meeting:

- acceleration of equipment supplies to Russia's troops in Ukraine,
- strict execution of state defense order in all key parameters, and
- preventing supplies disruption.

Medvedev's main message after visiting the complex, however, was for foreign readers of his channel: "One more thing. Reading the enemy's analytics, I have come across multiple claims that Russia will soon be out of military equipment and essential weaponry. They say we've wasted all of it. Don't hold your breath. Our production of weaponry and special equipment is increasing many-fold in all domains: from tanks and artillery to high-precision missiles and drones. Just wait for it!" Almost 5 trillion rubles (€81.3 billion) invested into Russia's defense budget for 2023 are at stake here.

Novaya Gazeta Europe has analyzed whether Medvedev's words regarding the "many-fold" increase in the production of tanks and other military vehicles can be put into practice. Military experts and employees within Russia's military industry have helped us in doing so. Since such a co-operation would put them at risk, triggering "fake news" and "army discreditation" charges in the best possible scenario, we're forced to cite the sources still based in Russia on the condition of anonymity.

Unprepared for war

“The people who started the 'special military operation' have been trampling down Russia's defense sector for many years,” a source within the Russian military industry tells Novaya-Europe. “When Putin came to power, a redivision of the market started. The old top brass was eliminated and replaced by the new 'efficient management.' Those factories that had some of their manufacture exported to other countries managed to keep their affairs afloat. In fact, exports are the only thing that kept the military industry alive. The factories that lacked exports potential were either destroyed or sold off. Some of the buildings have been turned into shopping malls, others were simply abandoned.

The profit margin is minimal when it comes to state defense orders, Novaya-Europe's source says. This is Soviet legacy: back in the day, the product price was calculated as the prime cost plus a minor revenue mark-up, say, 5 to 15%. If a tank was sold to a different country for 2.5-3 million dollars, Russia's Defense Ministry would only return 1 million to the factory's budget on a good day. These circumstances meant that it was unprofitable for the factories to work with the state and the state defense order. Our source recalls Kurganmashzavod (a vehicle plant based in Kurgan, Russia, known for producing BMP infantry fighting vehicles — translator's note) failing to comply with the state defense order for several years straight but in the meantime dutifully selling its BMP-3 fighting vehicles to the UAE and Malaysia.

Some factories, specifically those manufacturing commercially viable products for exports, took out loans to buy equipment from banks in the West. However, after the Crimea annexation and Western sanctions that followed it, they were forced to switch to Russian banks, falling into debt bondage, some on the verge of bankruptcy. The matter is being addressed these days, and a debt restructuring program at the expense of the state budget is a possible option.

Military research, development and engineering also lacked state financing in Russia, as the source says.

“It is common practice in the US when their Defense Ministry pays money to the factories, expecting prototypes of certain products in return,” an employee within the Russian military industry says. “This might as well be a competition, and two companies would be working on one order at the same time. They both would then receive money from the Defense Ministry. The latter would test both and start serial production of the better one. It works the other way around here, they say: guys, go work at your own expense! Those few lucky ones who receive financing anyway are interested in wasting time deliberately, putting off the final result as long as they can to keep getting the money. Therefore, Russia's factories find it beneficial to keep manufacturing old but tried and tested produce, using the Soviet stocks and avoiding major production risks.”

There is no innovative science-driven production in Russia these days, and it should not be expected to appear anytime soon, the expert believes.

“It is obvious that Russia's army is in catastrophically short supplied of almost all types of equipment,” an employee for Rostec, a state-owned defense conglomerate, says. “This is why the government orders factories receive are so urgent. It seems as if the new priority now is all about quantity, not quality. In simpler words, it's unimportant which tanks are being sent to the frontlines: the newest T-90M models or the recommissioned T-62 ones.”

The Rostec employee says Uralvagonzavod received a state order of 400 tanks shortly after the Ukraine War started. As per the factory's public relations office, the production line there has a full load of work up until 2024. However, after Russia started massively losing its equipment on the frontlines, the deadlines must have been seriously tightened up.

However, even in the tank industry, instructions from the highest management cannot be executed immediately.

“Everyone was unprepared for a war. Launching any sort of production requires time. First and foremost, all suppliers, selectors and allied manufacturers should be dealt with,” the Rostec employee says. “Producing tanks requires metal, guns, engines, electronics, communication devices and all sorts of other complex mechanisms and integral units. All

those things were purchased based on the actual contracts and cannot be acquired in a snap of a finger. There were no stocks, too; we have a lean manufacturing policy.

Handmade tanks

Our source working for one of the state corporations in Russia estimates current Uralvagonzavod production capacity at 200–250 tanks a year. Footage of Medvedev's visit indicates that new tanks are being assembled manually, and old ones are being modernized on the stocks. Notably, the old Soviet assembly line provided an annual capacity of thousands of tanks each year. The workers at the factory make jokes that their tanks are handmade as they speak to the Novaya-Europe reporter unofficially.

Stepping up production requires assembly space expansion. However, those tens of billions of rubles allocated to build state-of-the-art workshops capable of automatically assembling Armata tanks have been “used up” already.

Uralvagonzavod pursues its contractors in court, and not a single square meter of new workspaces has been constructed. Purchased equipment and expensive imported machines lie rotting in crates for years. This is why no mass production of Armata tanks is expected in the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, Alexander Potapov, DG at Uralvagonzavod, has not been held accountable for scuttling one of the most ambitious projects of Russia's military industry. As a result, Armata's are being assembled in the same section of the factory as T-90s and T-72, fundamentally heavier and bigger models, although there is no relevant equipment for that.

It is unknown how many Armata's are in operation now, but it's safe to assume that about a dozen of them used for military displays at the Red Square, plus a few vehicles, were provided to certain units for training. For instance, an Armata tank was seen in Kazan's Higher Tank Command School.

Uralvagonzavod lacks trained assembling specialists to set up a new production line within the existing workspaces. To step up production, the factory needs to hire more people. These days, the factory's schedule is three shifts, seven days a week, same as most military industry facilities. (**Comment** – mobilization will hurt this recruitment drive).

Uralvagonzavod delivered tanks in dozens, but these days hands over batches of 5 or 10 tanks to the army. The factory is now focused on producing T-72B3M tanks, although a set of modern T-90M appeared on the Internet recently.

Ukraine's servicemen have already captured some of those. It's difficult to make up a worse marketing campaign than the newest Russian tanks getting put out of action using old rocket launchers and anti-tank missiles.

Russia's Defense Ministry might be in possession of up to eight thousand tanks of different models, from T-62 to T-80, preserved in storage, as per Volya reports. Volya tried to figure out how many tanks are in use and found that up to 90% of the de-preserved vehicles require mandatory modernization. According to calculations, Russia's tank industry is currently capable of producing up to 250 new vehicles and modernizing up to 600 old ones each year.

Terminators under repair

Ukraine is outweighing Russia more and more on the frontlines in terms of firepower owing to the NATO-supplied long-range gun systems capable of delivering fire at a distance of 30-40 km.

The 2S19 Msta, Russia's most advanced self-propelled howitzer, is only capable of firing a projectile at the distance of 24 km. Such a small distance (by today's terms) was designed because old projectiles were supposed to be used, and Russia had those galore. Therefore, the potential increase in shooting distance is limited by the weapon's ballistics. There is another one: the 2S35 Koalitsiya-SV is the newest Russian howitzer, capable of hitting a target of up to 70 km away from its location. Russia started designing it in the late 1990s, and it also has an autonomous turret with increased fire rate.

However, Novaya-Europe's source in Rostec says that the Armata and the 2S35 Koalitsiya-SV share the same problem regarding the gun system: Russia does not produce the required type of gun steel, with only two Russian factories producing blanks for parts of the receiver group: the Motovilikha Plants in Perm and Barrikady, a machine manufacturing plant in Volgograd.

"Russia's metal industry is dead," our source says. "When a competition for barrel blanks was announced, all the samples put up for it turned out to be defective. The special thing about the new barrels is that they must withstand greater pressure, that is, be more durable. This requires special alloys and melting modes, as well as small-sized furnaces. The thing is: Russia's metallurgy is focused on large volumes and mass grades of steel.

Back in the day, managers within the industry considered open-hearth smelting process had become inefficient, and all Russian furnaces were extinguished. However, only those furnaces could produce high-quality steel, including the one used to produce artillery.

Four of those vehicles were seen in Ukraine, which pleased Russia's patriotic public. However, in the next video, posted about a month later, the vehicles were filmed undergoing repair.

Iskanders not laughing anymore

It is generally believed Russia has a strategic stockpile of Iskanders, Kalibrs and other modern missiles.

"Russia's Defense Ministry does not provide any data on the number of equipment produced, used in the theater of operations or lost there," Pavel Aksyonov of BBC explains to Novaya Gazeta Europe. "For instance, we can only estimate how many missiles are manufactured in Russia by indirect signs: by the number of missiles launched and by the selection of missiles. During the massive missile attacks on Ukraine which followed the blowing up of the Crimean bridge, Tornado S, S-300, Kh-101, Kh-55, Kalibr and Iskander missiles were used, as well as UAVs, and so on. At the same time, there is still no data on the number of missiles of each type that were taken down or hit targets in Ukraine.

A contact for Novaya-Europe who works in the development of missiles reports that many types of missiles, such as Kalibr, are being immediately sent from the production lines to the launch points.

Russia's Defense Ministry reported that a total of 99 missiles had been launched on targets in Syria between 7 October 2015 and 3 November 2017.

"An ordinary US destroyer ship carries over 90 cruise missiles. And they have dozens of those," our source says. "Russia has nothing of this kind. They use corvettes and frigates, which only have 8 or 16 launchers. In a year's time, the nuclear cruiser Admiral Nakhimov (former Kalinin), which has been under modernisation since 1999, is expected to return to combat duty. It will be converted to launch modern missiles."

Another reason to doubt the sufficiency of Russia's high-precision missiles is the use of S-300 anti-aircraft systems against ground targets. Such missiles are guided quite imprecisely when used in the ground-to-ground mode. Moreover, a powerful fragmentation warhead leads to numerous casualties among the unprotected civilian population when it hits a residential area.

The Kinzhal missile system, which Putin used to scare the West with, is the same Iskander model attached to a MiG-31 fighter-interceptor jet. Russia has very few such missiles, our sources say, same as MiG-31 jets modified to carry those: there are only several planes, to be specific.

According to contacts, Russia does not have the production capacity to manufacture missiles to replace those used.

Back in 2018, the crew at the Dubna Machine Building Plant protested against management methods of AFK Sistema which owned the enterprise. Russia hauled away the equipment from Ukraine's Dnipro in the early 2000s and placed it

at the plant in Dubna, where the production of the Kh-series missiles was launched. According to sources, Almaz-Antey, which produces Kalibr, S-300 and S-400, has issues with the imported machines that have stopped working due to the sanctions.

Corruption is the cause

Since Soviet times, Russia's aviation design bureaus have had a surplus of fundamental research in aerodynamics. For instance, Russia's latest aircraft, the Su-57, has an excellent glider, but electronics are larger and less reliable, which increases the weight of the aircraft. The characteristics of radar stations, as well as communication systems, are significantly inferior to their Western counterparts.

Russia's radars have a smaller detection range, they can track fewer targets, have worse target recognition quality, and so on. The domestic engines are also weaker in terms of technical characteristics than Western ones. At the same time, our sources in the military industry say that only a few of these newest Su-57 fighters can be assembled each year.

The situation with helicopters is no better. America's modern rotorcraft are one and a half times smaller and much more efficient in terms of load and weapons and weight, size, and then operational characteristics leave Russian ones far behind.

Russian helicopters consume more fuel, and engines for most models were manufactured in Ukraine. Notably, Vyacheslav Boguslaev, head and co-owner of Ukraine's Motor Sich PJSC, was arrested for supplying engines and spare parts for Russian attack helicopters (As reported in an earlier Update). Russia has failed to set up their own production, and it is likely that in the foreseeable future, combat helicopters in Russia will simply cease to be produced.

Our sources say that the production of drones is a new way of stealing lots of money from Russia's defense industry.

“Command is very poorly versed in this area,” says the Rostec expert. “The entire experience of the effective use of UAVs came exclusively from below until recently. This is how it worked: a quadcopter bought with sponsors' money or fundraising fees appeared in operating units, and troops learnt how to use it, mastered strategy, tactics, piloting combat techniques and methods of effective use. The Defense Ministry does not have a separate department that collects, systematizes, and analyzes these practices. When the need arose, military officials were more concerned about how to steal and launder money rather than ensure combat effectiveness.

A source says many small firms appeared several years ago, pretending to be developing UAVs. Often, development would mean nothing but assembly of “a flying machine” based on a Chinese drone, which was then lobbied through people in the army command as the latest domestic development. Russia literally does not produce any low-power aircraft engines, be it reciprocating or jets.

Such engines have a special thing about them: a certain ratio of dead weight to useful power is required. Electric motors, like on Chinese copters, are also not produced in Russia. But the top brass were misled, which eventually forced them to buy drones off Iran and import large blocks and parts from China for their own promising models.

All sources agree Russia started the war with an industry that had failed to modernize, and money allocated for this modernization was spent inefficiently. Western sanctions leave zero chance for Russia to produce new developments.

“On the other hand, the T-62 is a tank that is easy to use, and it is much simpler for a mobilized person to learn how to operate it than with modern vehicles,” says our source from Rostec. “If Russia runs out of those, the T-34 can be taken from pedestals, there are many of those all across the country.”

Humanitarian

'We will not stop until there is accountability' for Russia's inhumanity - Ukrainian Ambassador to the US Oksana Markarova, said on MSNBC that Russian targeting of civilian targets "shows how inhumane this aggressive regime is, and how this war is about the values, democracy." She adds, "We will not stop until there is accountability."

Containment

American vets in Ukraine train front-line medics as war rages with Russia - In an old quarry around 10 miles from the front line, a group of former US servicemen trained Ukrainian soldiers on Wednesday. The five-day course teaches battlefield first aid and how to maneuver.

Many of the Ukrainians only signed up to fight after Russia's invasion, with some having next to no experience firing a gun. "Never point your weapon at anything you don't want to shoot," lead instructor Rob, who won't share his last name for security reasons, told the Ukrainians.

US Vets are also training Ukrainian medics in battle situations.

Microsoft extends aid for Ukraine's wartime tech innovation - Ukraine is counting on more Western technological support as its war against Russia drags on, with Microsoft pledging Thursday to extend its backing for Kyiv's "extraordinary" wartime innovation through the end of next year.

Microsoft's financial commitment of more than \$400 million enables the Ukraine government and other organizations to continue using the Microsoft cloud and its public data centers across Europe, the company's president, Brad Smith, announced at the annual Web Summit tech conference in Lisbon, Portugal.

Cloud technology offers resilience and security for Ukraine operations, Smith said, after Russia targeted Ukrainian data centers with air strikes when it invaded more than eight months ago.

The invasion triggered "extraordinary innovation" by the Ukrainian military, Smith said.

Ukraine and Russia are fighting "a new type of war," with cyberweapons and other types of digital technology playing a pivotal role, he said.

Russian mobilization

'We are all Putin's emigrants': The exodus of Russian war opponents - Long before the rush to the borders triggered by the 'partial mobilization,' tens of thousands of Russians from the educated middle class fled, opposed to Vladimir Putin's regime and his war in Ukraine. Many draw parallels to the early 20th-century mass emigration caused by the Bolshevik Revolution.

The camera turned on and Dmitry Chernyshev appeared remotely in front of his computer, ruffling his hair with one hand. "My story is quite simple," he began. "When the war broke out [on February 24], I spent all my time in front of my screen, barely sleeping two or three hours." A well-known blogger in Russia, this professional trainer never stopped condemning the "monstrous" invasion of Ukraine, until the police barged into his home on March 4, a first warning sign. He was then arrested in the middle of the street in Moscow near the metro station Mayakovskaya, where he was spotted by the facial recognition system ubiquitous in the capital. "The police handed me over to the FSB [Russian security services]. I told them that, for me, Putin was no longer president since 2008, when he usurped power. I added, 'I served two years in the paratroopers in Chernobyl, Ukraine, between 1984 and 1986, to protect a reactor, so don't bother trying to scare me.'"

Yet fear did creep in. "They started by threatening my children, then, after three hours of interrogation, a white-haired woman came and introduced herself as a general of the SVR [foreign intelligence service]. She demanded I put my loyalty to Putin in writing, a kind of oath. I refused. She then threatened to send me to the DNR [self-proclaimed republic of Donetsk] and to tie me to a post as an informer paid by Kyiv. I ended up writing a text saying I was giving up all internet activity." A few days later, on April 17, Mr. Chernyshev flew with his wife and two children to Israel, where he now resides.

Geopolitics

Commission declares Bosnian Serb leader Dodik winner after vote recount - The Central Election Commission of Bosnia and Herzegovina has declared Milorad Dodik as the winner of an election for the presidency of the country's Serbian entity, Republika Srpska, after a recount of ballots cast in the October 2 vote.

The commission said on October 27 that its members had voted 6-1 to approve the results of the recount launched because of questions about the integrity of the electoral process amid suspicions of electoral fraud that in some cases are backed by video evidence.

Dodik, who has denied the election fraud allegations, has been the most powerful politician in Republika Srpska for years. He has close relations with Putin, while the US and Britain have placed sanctions on him for allegedly trying to undermine peace and stability in the country.

Republika Srpska is one of the political entities that make up the sovereign state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The other political entity is the Bosniak-Croat Federation. Republika Srpska was established in 1992 and became a part of Bosnia and Herzegovina following the Dayton Agreement in December 1995.

The separatist area appears in the map alongside shaded in green.



North Korea fires more missiles, including a possible ICBM, after record day of launches - North Korea fired multiple ballistic missiles on Thursday, including a possible failed intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) that triggered an alert for residents in parts of central and northern Japan to seek shelter.

Erdogan threatens Greece: 'new missile has Athens in its range' - Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan threatened Greece again on Wednesday claiming that the newly-tested ballistic missile has "Athens within its range."

Speaking during a joint live broadcast on the ATV and Haber channels, Erdogan referred to the ballistic missile Tayfun (Typhoon) claiming that it has frightened Greece.

"The range of 348.56 miles is to be extended further... Of course, these 561 miles started to frighten the Greeks because Athens is completely within its range, they gave a red alert," the Daily Sabah quotes him as saying.

Amid renewed tension between the two Mediterranean neighbors, Erdogan also warned Greece that it must come to its senses. "Greece needs to come to its senses. They must learn that provocation and instigation will not get them anywhere," he was quoted as saying.

Are the Western Balkan countries headed for EU membership?

EU membership? - The Berlin Process, set up in 2013, aimed to bring the Western Balkans closer to the EU. So far, the format has mainly been a photo opportunity for politicians. That is about to change at a meeting in Berlin earlier today.

"We are talking about historic steps" - that is how German Foreign Minister Baerbock announced the planned signing of three agreements at the Western Balkans Conference, a summit in Berlin involving leading politicians from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and the European Union within the framework of the Berlin Process.

The Berlin Process was initiated in 2014 under Chancellor Angela Merkel to bring the six Western Balkan states closer to the EU.

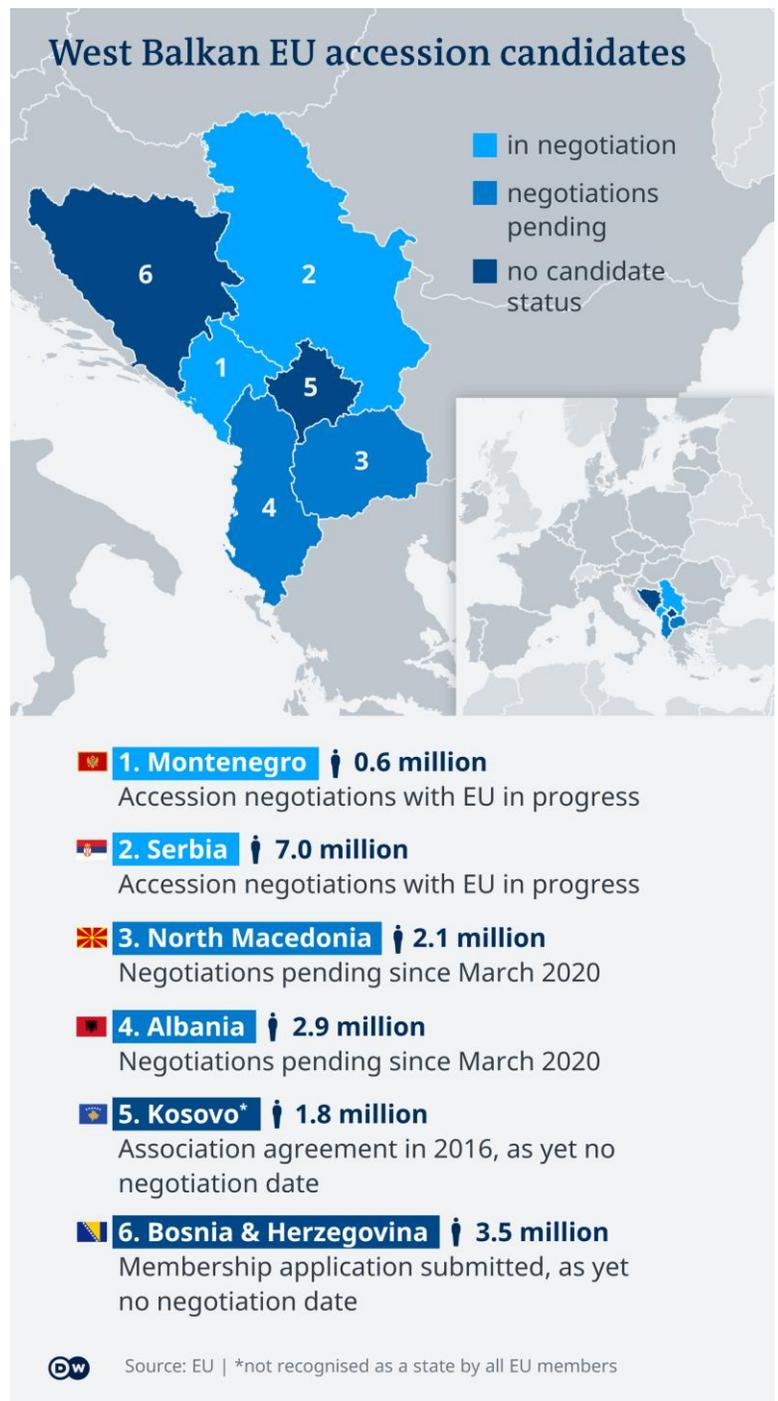
To date, the meetings have mainly been joint photo opportunities for politicians. This time, however, the focus will be on concrete issues including the mutual recognition of identity cards, university degrees and professional diplomas.

What sounds like a formality would be a step forward for the people of the Western Balkans, given that the signatories include countries like Serbia and Kosovo, which faced off in the 1999 Kosovo war and still have not formally recognized each other's independence.

At a preparatory conference on October 21 at the Berlin Foreign Ministry, Baerbock made it clear she regards the upcoming signatures as a credit to German diplomacy. Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke with all Western Balkans heads of government and state in the first months of his term in office and he also visited the region.

Interest in the Western Balkans has increased significantly in the EU since the Russian attack on Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Serbia, as well as Republika Srpska — the Serb-dominated part of Bosnia— do not or only half-heartedly support the EU's policy against the Putin regime. Moscow is trying to gain or increase its influence in other Western Balkan countries, too.

'Final destruction': Russia threatens Norway with ugly fallout - Russia announced yesterday it views Norway's work with other countries in NATO as provocative, warning Norway's efforts to bolster its military in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine this year will likely be the death knell for Oslo-Moscow relations moving forward.



“Oslo is now among the most active supporters of NATO's involvement in the Arctic,” Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova said Wednesday, according to TASS. “We consider such developments near Russian borders as Oslo's deliberate pursuit of a destructive course toward escalation of tensions in the Euro-Arctic region and the final destruction of Russian-Norwegian relations.”

In her statement, Zakharova also warned that any further “unfriendly actions will be followed by a timely and adequate response.”

The news of Russia's complaints about Norway comes just a day after Norway raised its military alert level in response to suspicious drone sightings. Norway has arrested several Russians, including one son of an associate of Russian President Vladimir Putin's, and accused them of illegally flying drones in Norwegian airspace or taking photos in restricted areas as concerns abound about potential Russian attacks on critical infrastructure. Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre warned Russia to cut it out, according to Norwegian broadcaster NRK.

NATO countries ought to be on alert to Russia's aggression in light of the war in Ukraine, Støre warned Monday.

“Today, we have no reason to believe that Russia will want to involve Norway or any other country directly in the war,” Støre said. “But the war in Ukraine makes it necessary for all NATO countries to be more vigilant.”

Putin

Leaked archive indicates large-scale election fraud – Meduza - An analysis of archive footage from polling stations in Russia recorded during parliamentary elections last year suggests over 17 million ballots were cast fraudulently, independent media outlet Meduza reported Friday.

At the time of the September elections, Russia's Central Elections Commission said it lacked money to provide online video streaming from all polling stations.

But Meduza said it obtained over a million hours of footage from more than 9,000 polling stations in 19 regions. The outlet said it then used artificial intelligence to analyze recordings from 3,505 polling stations.

The results, according to Meduza, showed that less than 2 million voters actually cast ballots at these polling stations — whereas official data recorded 3.2 million votes.

Meduza claimed this meant about a third of the ballots were fake and that — if this pattern was replicated across Russia — the total number of stuffed ballots in the State Duma elections was as high as 17.1 million.

According to the official results, the elections were won by the pro-Kremlin United Russia party with just over 28 million ballots cast for its candidates (49.8% of the vote).

UK says 'Russian actors' likely tried to disrupt 2019 election - Britain accused "Russian actors" of seeking to disrupt last year's general election by circulating leaked trade documents between London and Washington.

The government launched an investigation into the source of the leak, after details of talks with the United States on a possible post-Brexit trade deal were published on social media site Reddit.

"On the basis of extensive analysis, the government has concluded that it is almost certain that Russian actors sought to interfere with the 2019 general election through the online amplification of illicitly acquired and leaked government documents," he said in a written statement to parliament.

‘Ukraine keeps busting myths about the Russian fleet and army’ - The most significant development in the past few days is that the Ukrainian army demonstrated their new capacity to attack the Russian Black Sea fleet in the Crimea harbours and probably even further, including by using aerial drones, writes Roman Rukomeda.

After the sinking flagman of the Russian Black Sea fleet “Moskva,” the turn has come to its current substitution – the frigate “Admiral Makarov,” which is so damaged that it can no longer perform its functions. Last weekend Ukraine conducted an unprecedented attack on the Russian Black Sea fleet in the open sea and inside the protected harbours of Sevastopol in occupied Ukrainian Crimea.

On the fronts, the Ukrainian Army continues successfully but slowly to liberate Ukraine’s territories in the East and the South. The intensity of the fighting is fierce as the number of Russian casualties, and lost tanks/armored vehicles have almost doubled, resulting in around 800 Russian losses each day, according to Ukrainian General Staff.

Russians are trying to counterattack so far only on the East in Donetsk and Luhansk regions, with no significant success.

At the same time, Russian terrorists demonstrate no desire to leave Kherson and the right bank of Ukrainian lands in the Kherson region. Instead, they continue to rob the city, including houses and apartments of civilian Ukrainians. They also delivered more mobilised Russian troops to Kherson. Nevertheless, the chances for the Ukrainian Army to liberate Kherson by the end of this year are growing.

The most significant change during the last week was Ukraine’s use of air drones (UAVs) in the attack on the Russian Black Sea fleet in the open sea and the Sevastopol (Crimea) harbour. As a result, between three and nine Russian warships of different types were damaged. After Ukraine attacked the Russian Black Sea fleet, its capacity to launch missiles on Ukrainian cities and civilians significantly decreased.

Russian aggressors were shocked that the Ukrainian Army could attack Russian ships in the Sevastopol harbour – the best-protected Black Sea Russian navy base.

Having no success on the battlefields, the Russian army continues to perform massive attacks on Ukrainian cities, shooting at them with rockets, missiles, MLRS systems and Iranian drones.

Only this Monday, about 50 Russian rockets were launched against Ukraine, 44 being put down by the Ukrainian air-defence force. Russia’s primary goals are objects of Ukrainian critical civil infrastructure such as power stations, water dams, electricity grids etc. Such attacks amount to a crime against humanity because the Russians are trying to create inhumane conditions of living for the civilian Ukrainian population before the winter period and cold weather.

But far from the idea of surrendering, the Ukrainian people, 86% of the, according to recent sociological polls, prefer to fight until the final victory, despite all the difficulties.

About 40% of the Ukrainian energy system is seriously damaged now. It creates many problems for the national economy and the population. In all Ukrainian cities, towns and villages, we have blackouts and a lack of electricity for up to six hours. Sometimes it can happen several times per day. For each of us, it is very difficult to plan our day, as we never know when we will have electricity.

If you walk along the Kyiv streets now, you will hear a new sound – the electricity generators’ engines that are turned on in many small businesses during blackouts. The other feature of our lives is having to buy bottled drinking water, as there are recurring problems with the water supply after the Russian terrorist attacks on Ukraine’s critical infrastructure. But we do not give up and try to adapt to the current complicated situation.

Due to the problems in the energy sector because of Russian attacks, Ukraine needs extra assistance restoring its energy systems. The help from the EU and other partners is very much needed and brings us closer in our fight against Russian aggression.

Ukraine “skeptical” of ceasefire Russia could use to cement occupation - Ukrainians are very skeptical about accepting a ceasefire because they fear that Russia will pause hostilities, but it won't pull its troops back from the territories it's seized since February.

We are not much closer to a real end to this conflict. It is positive that Russia has rejoined the grain deal, but it only suspended participation for tactical, diplomatic reasons. But it remains fairly clear that Putin believes he can win this war, or at least do enough damage to Ukraine and to Ukraine's infrastructure to bring Kyiv to the table in a much weakened state.

There is also a risk that Putin agrees to a ceasefire and then takes a few months to improve his military position, rearm some of the units that have suffered quite badly on the battlefield and then go back to war.

The Russian history of destruction. From Ivan the Terrible to Vladimir Putin and back again - Each one of us can compile a long list of what Putin has destroyed over the long years of his rule. Democratic institutions, freedom of press, morality, international relations - you name it. But what has he built?

If we listen to him, it seems as if he has built an entire world from the ground up, like God himself. A new world order that arose from the chaos. Is that actually true, though?

He didn't succeed with the new world order - no one recognizes Putin as the leader of the anti-American world. Some thought that he had built an efficient army. But judging by the speed of Russia's looming shameful defeat in the war with Ukraine, the president has failed to create a good army, just like he has failed many other things.

However, he does have some achievements. And their nature reminds us not of Peter the Great, whom Putin likes to compare himself to, but of Ivan the Terrible, whom he also respects, to be fair. (**Comment** – He is rather like Dmitry the False than Peter the Great).

Putin has created a new state, just like Peter the Great and Ivan the Terrible did before him. Ivan's oprichnina (a state policy of mass repressions against the boyars, Russian aristocrats, in 1565-1572 - translator's note) wasn't just part of his madness. The tsar was not satisfied with the way the state and its decision-making mechanism worked, and so, Ivan the Terrible tried to build a new state, free of the weaknesses and shortcomings of the old one. To the best of his ability.

Peter did not like the state he inherited either. He gradually built a new one, at times leaving the old institutions to die out on their own, transferring their powers to the newly formed government bodies. He did not have oprichniki, officers of state oppression, like Ivan the Terrible did, but he had his guard, which wasn't just a military organization. Guard officers and even sergeants could be appointed to high-ranking civilian posts, which gave them more power than statesmen used to have before.

For his part, Putin really disliked the state he had inherited from Boris Yeltsin. But while he was building a new state, he did not close any of the old institutions: the Federal Assembly, the Constitutional Court, and many others, still technically function. But they do not actually work or influence anything, just like it happened under Peter the Great.

The parliament isn't just an imitation of one - no one even believes in this farce - it is simply decorative. It has no more to do with state governance than the Tsar Cannon has to do with the Russian Armed Forces. The Constitutional Court only exists because they forgot about it or thought shutting it down was unnecessary: it's not really in the way, and it doesn't cost that much. The same approach was taken when it comes to other institutions.

On the other hand, the Security Council, a murky institute with unclear functions, has grown like a mushroom cloud after the rain. It is unclear whether it has any real power: judging by the “open session” we were shown in the run-up to the war, it is full of buffoons cowering before their boss. But at least, it seems that they do, in fact, discuss important

matters there. There are no other institutions that can be considered bodies of state power in Putin's Russia. Perhaps, there is some kind of “private club,” but we don't know who is part of it, how often its members change, and whether there are any figures of Putin's imagination there, like one of his favorite historical figures, maybe, or God himself?

Putin did not move the capital to another place, like Peter the Great did: he chose a simpler path. Putin simply kicked everyone who was in his way out of Moscow. Some were banished, some were sent into unannounced exile: people just weren't seen anymore, as if they were exiled to a far-away estate. The Moscow officials of today are not the same at all as they used to be when Putin came into power. They are of different backgrounds and education.

The president also has his own guard. The FSB has forged scores of Putin's government officials. It is hard to find a recently appointed governor or minister under Putin who had not graduated from the FSB academy.

Nevertheless, Putin seems to stray away from Peter the Great and approach Ivan the Terrible instead. He did not kill his son, as he doesn't have one, but he already has his own oprichniki who want to be recognized as part of the state structure. Ramzan Kadyrov essentially fired Colonel General Alexander Lapin: at the very least, his dismissal followed Kadyrov's statements on the general's incompetence. Kadyrov's behavior does not seem like that of a concerned citizen. He was outraged by the fact that he had been unable to contact Lapin for three days straight. I do not want to defend General Lapin, but why would one of the highest-ranking generals in Russia contact the head of the region that is so far away from the combat zone? The answer is simple: Kadyrov isn't just a governor.

In Putin's Russia, he occupies a very high, albeit formally unannounced, rank. This allows him to wage his own war at the same time as the state, as the leader of his own feudal army. After several dozen of his fighters were killed in Ukraine, Kadyrov announced a “revenge operation.” That is, he announced military activity unrelated to the plans of the Russian higher command.

Another Putin's oprichnik, Yevgeny Prigozhin, behaves in the same way. His “private military company” is outside of Russia's legal framework, but this does not deter him from acting as head of the PMC, in particular, establishing an official PMC Wanger Center in St. Petersburg, Petersburg. He also demanded that YouTube be blocked, and Google be recognized as an undesired organization. We don't know whose orders Prigozhin's army follows but his own. Would they obey Putin? Or no one else except their boss?

Of course, obvious historical parallels do not imply that these figures are one and the same. Although judging by the damage inflicted upon his country, Putin seems closer to Ivan the Terrible and not Peter the Great, he did succeed at many things.

And yet, after Putin, the country will be left in ruins, held in disdain by the entire world. The state that Putin has created is only fit for him, and it will disappear together with Putin. And we will have to rebuild it from scratch.

Russian weaponization of migration – Putin has weaponized migration as we have previously discussed, by sending refugees from the Syrian conflict into Europe, mainly through Turkey and into the Western Balkans, and from there on to Europe proper.

Now he is trying to force a similar refugee crisis in Ukraine by bombing critical infrastructure and in the process stimulate movement into surrounding European countries like Poland and Hungary.

This way he hopes to spur protests by local populations against the inflow of foreign nationals, knowing full well that there will be resistance to an overwhelming insurge of human traffic seeking safety and subsistence.

Below is a schematic of the Syrian path to Central Europe through Turkey and then on through Romania and the West Balkans. Putin envisages Europe being inundated with refugee crises and then throwing their hands up and seeking a quick solution involving Ukraine heading to the negotiating table.



Nuclear

New and notable nuclear development: Russia said in a rare statement yesterday that "a nuclear war cannot be won and must never be fought." Some observers saw the release of that document as Putin's second "walk down" in a day - following Moscow's re-entry into the UN-brokered grain deal in the Black Sea. Another observer called the statement, "Imperfect language, but [an] important message."

Sanctions

Ukraine conflict, sanctions set to blow hole in Russia's finances - The cost of Russia's military mobilisation and the impact of Western sanctions are set to blow a hole in the government's budget forecasts and drain Moscow's reserves to their lowest level in years, according to analysts' latest calculations.

That will put an ever greater strain on the Kremlin's resources as Putin seeks to fund a conflict with no end in sight and prepares for a possible re-election bid in 2024.

After eight months of what it calls a "special military operation", Moscow has drawn up a 2023 budget that takes no account of the cost of the recent call-up of 300,000 reservists, the declared annexation of four Ukrainian regions - the Kremlin says the four joined Russia freely - and Western efforts to cap Russian energy export prices, analysts say.

While Russia's economy initially held up relatively well to the waves of Western sanctions imposed on it, the impact is beginning to show - in analysts' assessments, if not in those of the government.

"The macroeconomic forecast, upon which the budget is based, was calculated before mobilization," said Alexandra Suslina, an independent analyst. "It does not take into account new sanctions, and therefore is not reflecting reality."

Putin's current, 4th term as a president expires in 2024 and he is yet to say if he will run again - a process that, judging by past campaigns, would likely involve courting voters with promises to spend more on wages, welfare and pensions.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters on Wednesday that Putin had not yet decided whether to run in 2024 but added: "The social obligations of the state are an absolute priority."

Russian official forecasts estimate that GDP will fall 0.8% next year, while a Reuters poll of analysts sees the economy shrinking 2.5%. The World Bank expects a 3.6% contraction.

Russia's finance ministry expects the budget deficit next year to almost double from this year to 3 trillion roubles, or 2% of gross domestic product. Analysts at state bank VTB forecast the gap at an even wider 4-4.5 trillion roubles.

Moscow sees energy revenues at 9 trillion roubles next year, or a third of its total income - a projection analysts say is also too optimistic amid upcoming sanctions on Russian energy imports by the west.

"The finance ministry forecasts incredible things such as that energy income ... would remain as before, like Russia would continue to produce the same amount of oil with demand unchanged," an economist said.

As Europe cuts ties with Russia, Moscow risks losing a staggering 55% of its oil product exports, or over 80 million tonnes, next year, the government has estimated. Gazprom's gas exports already plunged 43% in January-October compared with the same period last year.

The finance ministry sees non-energy revenue, or that related to economic activity, at 11.5% of GDP in 2023, around 7% higher than this year and on par with pre-pandemic levels. But analysts say that this, too, is hardly realistic.

"Consumer demand will be falling, people will be buying less, cheaper, lower in quality - and then the non-energy income forecast... will have to be revised," said Suslina.

While Russia this week officially ended what it calls its "partial" mobilisation, some 300,000 reservists called up by the Kremlin for its campaign in Ukraine since September remain in military units, which also hurts economic activity.

Lower economic activity and weak imports may see Moscow collecting around 1 trillion roubles less per year from value-added tax, its main non-energy income, according to a joint study by the Russian Presidential Academy Ranepa and the Gaidar Institute.

Dmitry Polevoy, investment director at Moscow-based broker Locko Invest, estimates that payouts to those mobilized - including higher-than-average salaries and compensation in the event of injury or death - may come to between 900 billion roubles and 3 trillion roubles in the next half-year alone.

The finance ministry did not reply to a Reuters request for a comment.

Finance minister Anton Siluanov, without giving details, told Russian lawmakers last week that the budget "allows (us) to meet all social obligations without harming macroeconomic stability."

Comment – As reported yesterday, Swiss banks are blocking all transactions Russian, including credit cards and ordinary withdrawals. This, coupled with dwindling provisions and stocks in Russian retail stores, will hit home across the board, and that is where "Main Street" resistance builds from.

Russia, as we have previously reported, is a much younger country now than in 1991 when the Soviet Union imploded, and these younger citizen have grown accustomed to the "luxuries of their lives" and will not take kindly to being taken back into the consumer dark ages of the Soviet Union.

The Swiss actions, coupled with Main Street implications may well see an internal level of anti-war and anti-Putin resistance grow to the level where it starts manifesting in outcry and action.

Increasing reports are coming in of strategic dissatisfaction with Putin and the Kremlin, some forecasting Putin's demise in late-2022 early-2023.

Compound these with financial and personal dissatisfaction, and we may well be seeing a building groundswell of change in the air.

Changes

Beijing and Moscow's changing faces - Fresh off extending Xi Jinping's hold on power with a third term, China sent new signals that the Chinese leader could be looking to double down in his "no limits" partnership with Russian President Vladimir Putin as both countries deepen their rivalry with the West.

In an October 27 phone call, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi told his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, that China wants to deepen its relationship with the Kremlin "at all levels" and that Beijing firmly supports Putin's moves "to unite and lead the Russian people in overcoming difficulties" and "further establish Russia's status as a major power on the international stage."

In response, Lavrov congratulated Xi on his "utter success" at last month's Chinese Communist Party congress in Beijing, where Xi solidified his hold on power over the world's second-largest economy.

Speaking at the Valdai Club the same day, Putin said he respected Beijing's calls for a peaceful solution to the crisis but added that "China understands very well what the desire of the West to advance the infrastructure of the NATO bloc to our borders means for Russia."

Why It Matters: Beijing has walked a careful line with Moscow since the Kremlin invaded Ukraine in February and despite chatter and allusions to cracks behind-the-scenes, their partnership has proven to be durable.

However, some crucial gaps between the two countries are being created, especially on the technology front.

Chinese telecoms giant Huawei has already stopped direct deliveries of its smartphones, tablets, laptops, TVs, and other equipment to Russia due to fear of violating secondary U.S. sanctions and relocated its Russia-based staff to Central Asia. According to some recent reports from Russian media, the company could soon look to close its Russian operations altogether.

The social-media platform TikTok, which is owned by China's ByteDance, already opened up a new office in Kazakhstan this year and the Russian business daily RBK reported that the company had offered to relocate its Russian staff to Central Asia.

Putin's escalating nuclear saber-rattling is also not sitting well with Beijing, according to Zhou Bo, a retired senior People's Liberation Army officer.

In a recent op-ed penned for the Financial Times, Zhou said that Putin's rhetoric was "raising the stakes for Beijing" and argued that China has a responsibility to stop Moscow from using nuclear weapons.

"If Putin now opens a nuclear Pandora's box kept closed even during the Cold War, it would be a moment of infinite stupidity. China can help the world by simply telling Putin: don't use nuclear weapons, Mr. President," Zhou wrote.

China and Russia's military have much in common and Tai Ming Cheung, a professor at the University of California San Diego, argues in Foreign Policy that the invasion of Ukraine and Russia's poor showing have been a red flag for Beijing's own fighting force that could delay a potential invasion of Taiwan.

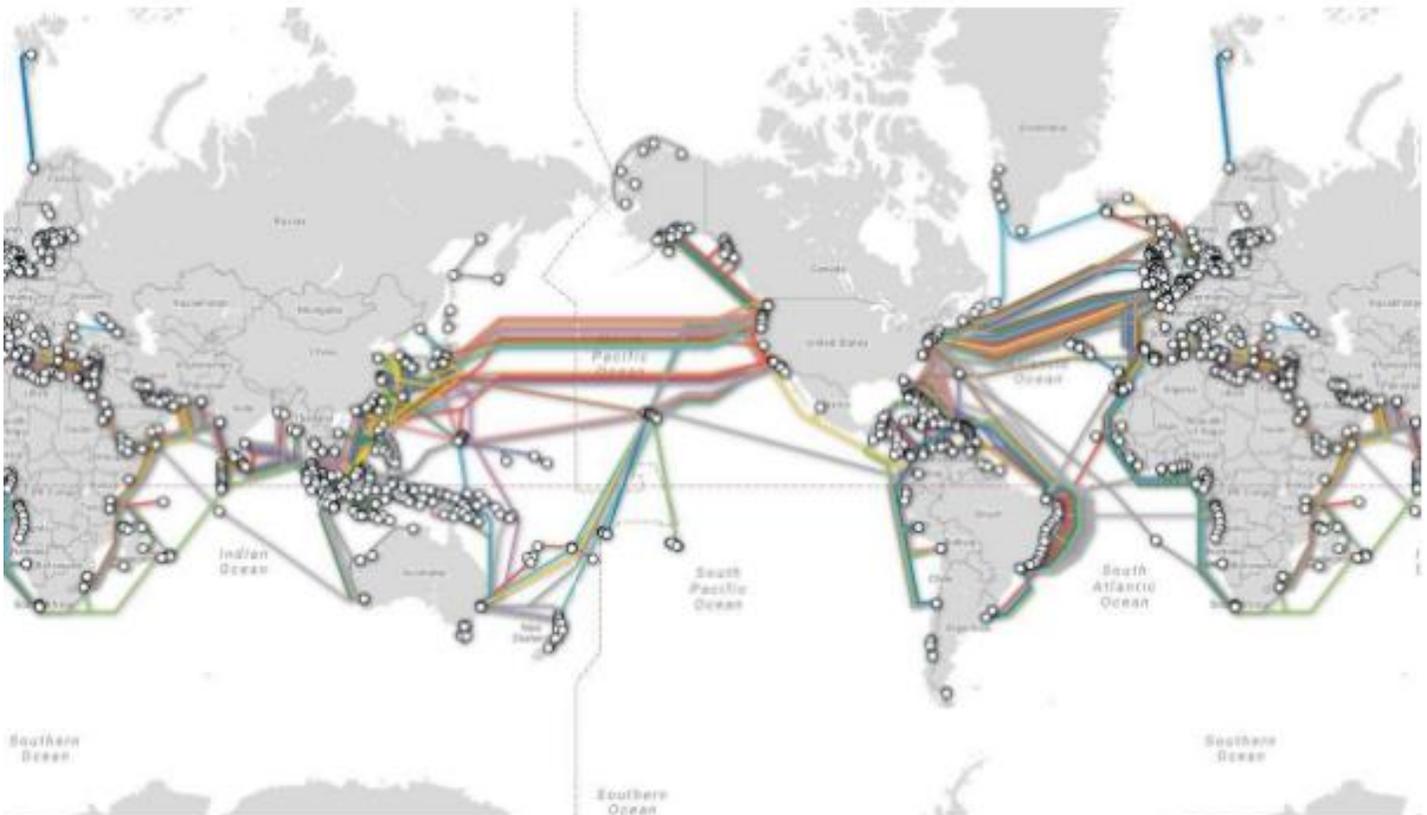
China's paradoxical stance on the Russia-Ukraine War underscores the difficulties that Beijing faces in carrying out sophisticated diplomacy. This has already had repercussions for China's national interests and ability to achieve its foreign policy objectives.

The Most Vulnerable Place on the Internet

The Asia-Africa-Europe-1 internet cable travels 15,500 miles along the seafloor, connecting Hong Kong to Marseille, France. As it snakes through the South China Sea and toward Europe, the cable helps provide internet connections to more than a dozen countries, from India to Greece. When the cable was cut on June 7, millions of people were plunged offline and faced temporary internet blackouts.

The cable, also known as AAE-1, was severed where it briefly passes across land through Egypt. One other cable was also damaged in the incident, with the cause of the damage unknown. However, the impact was immediate. "It affected about seven countries and a number of over-the-top services," says Rosalind Thomas, the managing director of SAEx International Management, which plans to create a new undersea cable connecting Africa, Asia, and the US. "The worst was Ethiopia, that lost 90 percent of its connectivity, and Somalia thereafter also 85 percent." Cloud services belonging to Google, Amazon, and Microsoft were all also disrupted, subsequent analysis revealed.

While connectivity was restored in a few hours, the disruption highlights the fragility of the world's 550-plus subsea internet cables, plus the outsized role Egypt and the nearby Red Sea have in the internet's infrastructure. The global network of underwater cables forms a large part of the internet's backbone, carrying the majority of data around the world and eventually linking up to the networks that power cell towers and Wi-Fi connections. Subsea cables connect New York to London and Australia to Los Angeles.



Sixteen of these submarine cables—which are often no thicker than a hosepipe and are vulnerable to damage from ships' anchors and earthquakes—pass 1,200 miles through the Red Sea before they hop over land in Egypt and get to the Mediterranean Sea, connecting Europe to Asia. The last two decades have seen the route emerge as one of the

world's largest internet chokepoints and, arguably, the internet's most vulnerable place on Earth. (The region, which also includes the Suez Canal, is also a global choke point for shipping and the movement of goods. Chaos ensued when the container ship Ever Given got wedged in the canal in 2021.)

Pyramid Scheme

Look at Egypt on a map of the world's subsea internet cables and it immediately becomes clear why internet experts have been concerned about the area for years. The 16 cables in the area are concentrated through the Red Sea and touch land in Egypt, where they make a 100-mile journey across the country to reach the Mediterranean Sea.

It has been estimated that around 17 percent of the world's internet traffic travels along these cables and passes through Egypt. Alan Mauldin, the research director of telecoms market research firm TeleGeography, says last year the region had 178 terabits of capacity, or 178,000,000 Mbps—the US has median home internet speeds of 167 Mbps.

Egypt has become one of the internet's most prominent chokepoints for a few reasons, says Doug Madory, director of internet analysis at monitoring firm Kentik. Primarily, its geography contributes to the concentration of cables in the area. Passing through the Red Sea and across Egypt is the shortest (mostly) underwater route between Asia and Europe. While some intercontinental internet cables travel across land, it is generally safer for them to be placed at the bottom of the sea where it is harder for them to be disrupted or snooped upon.

Going through Egypt is one of the only practical routes available. To the south, cables that pass around Africa are longer; while to the north, only one cable (the Polar Express) travels above Russia. "Every time someone tries to draw up an alternative route, you end up going through Syria or Iraq or Iran or Afghanistan—all these places have a lot of issues," Madory says. The JADI cable system that bypassed Egypt was shut down due to Syria's civil war, Madory says, and it has not been reactivated. In March this year, another cable avoiding Egypt was severed as a consequence of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

Disruption also happens around the Red Sea itself. "The Red Sea is a fairly shallow body of water, and there's been historically a lot of cable cuts there as a result," Madory says. In 2013, the Egyptian navy arrested three people who were allegedly cutting internet cables in the region. Other nearby cables also faced outages in the same year. The region isn't the only cable choke point around the world. The UK, Singapore, and France are all key internet connection points, with the Strait of Malacca, near Singapore, being another chokepoint. "The Malacca Strait is also a problem area, but I don't think it's as bad as Egypt," SAEx's Thomas says.

Mauldin says the Egyptian region can be considered a single point of failure due to the number of cables in one place. However, there are reasons beyond costs to have multiple cables pass through the Red Sea. "There are values in concentration because you want networks to connect to each other," Mauldin says. "At the same time, you have to balance that with the need to have diversity [in routes]."