

Conflict Update # 320

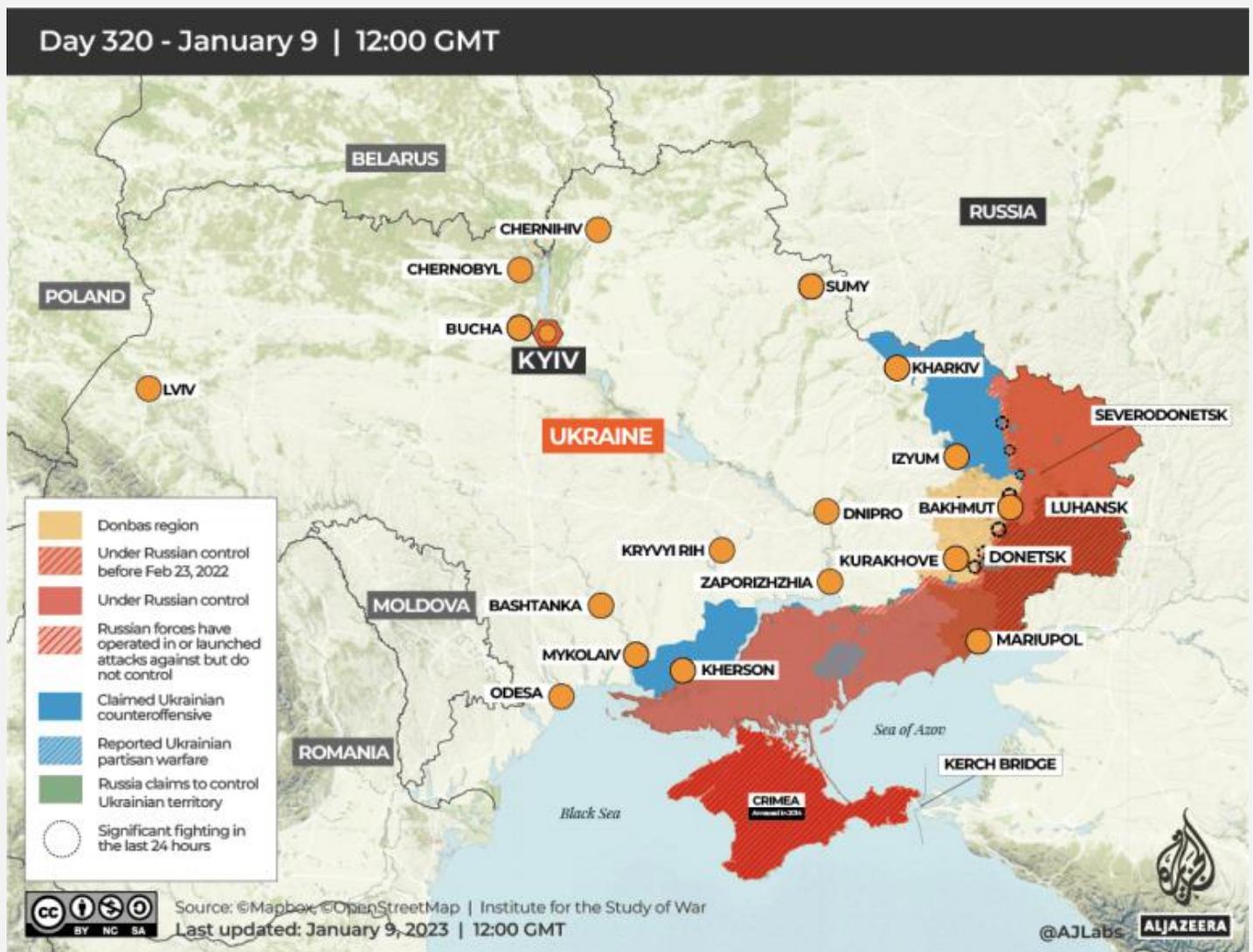
January 9th, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 111,760 (590) soldiers killed, 3,080 (+11) enemy tanks, 6,147 (+17) armored combat vehicles, 2,069 (+4) artillery systems, 434 (+3) MLRS systems, 217 (+0) air defense systems, 285 (+0) warplanes, 275 (+3) helicopters, 1,856 (+7) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 723 (+0) cruise missiles, 16 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,809 (+8) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 183 (+0) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways



Ex-NATO chief: Russian forces in Ukraine will be ‘burned through and exhausted’ by end of winter - Former NATO chief James Stavridis said in an interview that he believes Russian forces in Ukraine will be “burned

through and exhausted” by the end of the winter season as the Kremlin’s war against the neighboring country continues.

During an appearance on New York-based radio station WABC 770 morning show “Cats Roundtable,” Stavridis told host John Catsimatidis that he doesn’t see either side having a breakthrough moment during the winter.

“But I don’t see either side having a breakthrough moment — at least this winter,” Stavridis told Catsimatidis. “Unfortunately, the first chance we can get to a negotiation is going to be after the winter. The Russians will be burned through and exhausted, losing so many men, so much equipment.”

Stavridis also said he believes both sides will push for negotiations in the latter part of this year.

AFU down 3 Russian helicopters - Yesterday the Armed Forces of Ukraine shot down 3 Russian helicopters: a Mi-24, a Ka-52, and a third aircraft, model as yet to be defined.

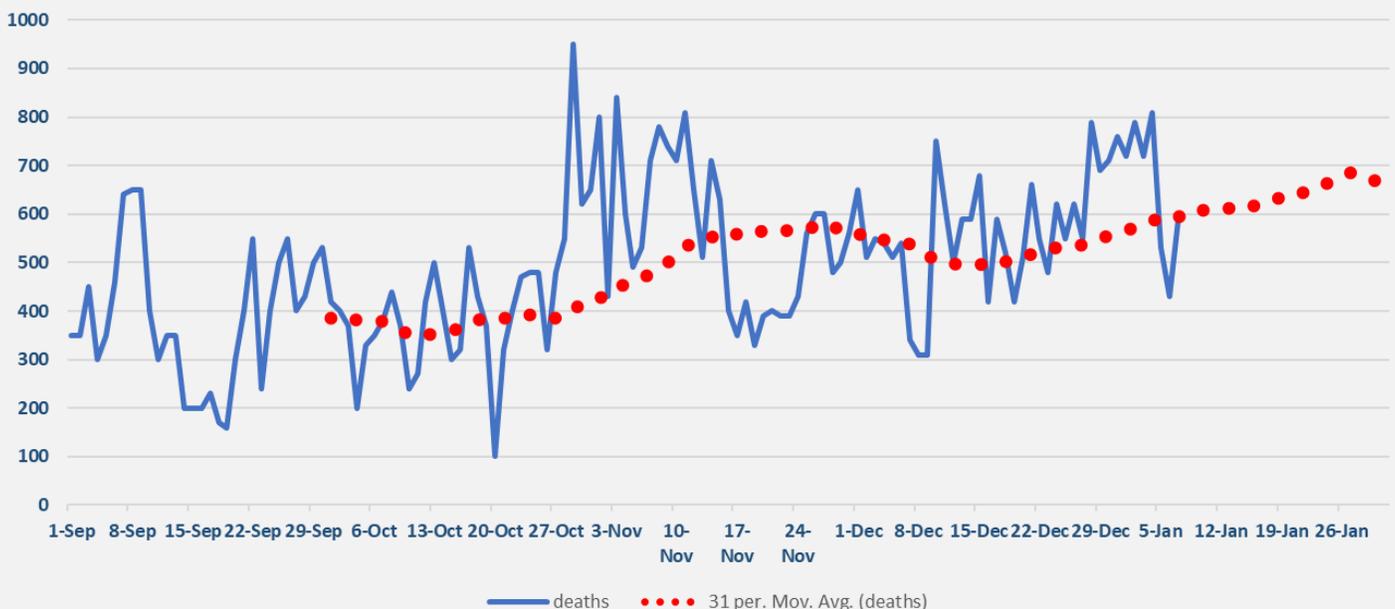
In addition, Ukrainian aviation launched 10 strikes on Russia’s personnel concentrations, as well as 2 strikes on the positions of its anti-aircraft missile systems.

In turn, units of the missile forces and artillery of the Ukrainian Armed Forces struck 2 concentrations of Russian manpower and a warehouse storing fuel and oil.

In order to maintain military discipline and prevent the spread of panic among the Russian personnel operating in the Zaporizhzhya direction, Russia has involved units of its National Guard.

Continuing losses – It is mind-boggling the daily number of Russian soldiers lost. As of yesterday there have been 111,760 killed, translating to another 223,520 injured (as per our calculation with the ratio 1:2 killed to injured), meaning that fully 335,280 Russian front line troops have been either killed or injured, and in FSB words, inoperable – they are not available for service.

Russian troop deaths by day



The Kremlin started the war with 190,000 soldiers, drafted another 100,000 during their traditional bi-annual conscription periods and then mobilized 300,000 of which approximately 150,000 have successfully been secured. That

totals 440,000 men in uniform, and allowing for another 20% brought in from prisons and far-flung oblasts and Russian Republics, brings the number up to 528,000 bodies allocated to battalion strength.

335,280 killed or injured is a 63.5 percent attrition rate, absolutely horrendous.

Small wonder Putin and the Kremlin are heading to a second mobilization with another 500,000 targeted for service. These conscripts will of necessity be drawn from the two main centers, Moscow and St. Petersburg, both up to now relatively unscathed by war casualties.

Given the Kremlin's recent re-positioning of S300 and S400 anti-aircraft batteries from various front line locations to these two cities' perimeter air defenses to protect them from anticipated aerial assault, and now with a looming second mobilization, the war message and threat of death is front and center Main Street news.

When starting his invasion, Putin concentrated on an armored attack. He and the Kremlin did not send in required troop strengths to rapidly subdue their neighbor. They are now struggling to revisit and balance this crucial element of assault, but it will take months to recruit and train so many draftees, and an extraordinary weapons manufacturing push to succeed in this endeavor.

Bakhmut is 'holding on' - Bakhmut and Soledar were "holding on," Zelenskyy said in his nightly video address, as Moscow-backed separatists claim to have captured Bakhmutske, an eastern village.

Ukraine's Armed Forces can destroy Russian military near Bakhmut after liberating Kreminna - Serhii Haidai, head of the Luhansk Regional Military Administration, believes the liberation of Kreminna will help Ukraine completely destroy Russia's troop groupings near Bakhmut.

"The Russians are trying to hold Kreminna with all their might. Since, after the liberation of Kreminna, Ukraine's Armed Forces can completely defeat the Russian troops under Bakhmut. Although Kreminna does not sound as often in the information field as Bakhmut, its liberation is motivation for us, and demotivation for the Russians," Haidai said.

The head of the Luhansk Regional Military Administration emphasized that the Russian army continues to suffer colossal losses on the battlefield.

"The Russians have no victories on the battlefield. They are happy when they can advance a few meters. They have very huge losses. The mobilized Russians are afraid of their own. They are afraid that they will be shot if they do not move forward, or they will run away," he added.

Only MiG31K among aircraft at military exercises in Belarus poses threat to Ukraine - MiG31K is the only aircraft among those at the joint Russian-Belarusian air and tactical exercises, starting from January 16, that poses threat to Ukraine, as it can carry Kinzhal missiles

Petro Chernyk, military expert, shared the information on Espresso TV.

"At the beginning of this war, Russia fully entered Ukraine's airspace with all types of aircraft, starting with its best Su-34, Su-35 and ending with Ka-52 and Mi-28 helicopters. Yet, it still could not change the situation in its favor. Back then, Ukraine's air defense was not at its best. I can't understand what Russia is expecting now," he said.

Chernyk added that Ukraine has significantly improved its air defense. It "has learned to intercept complex heavy aerodynamic targets, such as Kalibr and Kh-101 missiles."

"Aircraft and helicopters are much more convenient and easier targets. If they dare to turn their pilots into fertilizer and their aircraft into scrap, welcome to hell. The only truly dangerous aircraft is the MiG31K, which can carry Kinzhal

missiles. There are only 40 of them, it is a weapon of absolute defense. If Russia realizes that it is absolutely losing, it may launch a massive attack by these aircraft," the expert concluded.

Total number of Russian troops in Belarus is now about 12 thousand people - "Looking at last Friday, January 6, three echelons arrived from the Russian Federation into Belarus. Among them were two echelons with personnel representatives, as well as equipment. The Belarus MoD published photos of equipment and troops. I noticed on this technique winter camouflage with white paint, that is, they take into account the snow on the territory of Belarus or Ukraine. And this is a really old technique that they showed. Two echelons with military personnel numbered about 700-800 people in each, that is, a battalion. Accordingly, we can say that the total number of Russian troops on the territory of Belarus is about 12,000 people. They are not a strike group. They are mostly mobilized, who mostly live in large tent cities and train on training grounds," said the journalist.

Valery Kalinovsky added that on Friday, January 6, Lukashenko met with the Russian military and told them about the common cause that Russia and Belarus are doing. Accordingly, it was possible to see what the tents and the military looked like, but it was noticeable that the Russian military hid their faces during the meeting with Lukashenko.

300 Russian soldiers sent to Lysychansk hospital, Luhansk region, in first week of year - Invading Russian forces continue to suffer losses - 300 soldiers have been sent to the Lysychansk hospital, Luhansk region, in the first week of the new year.

The situation in the main directions is as follows:

- In the northeastern Ukrainian border in the Chernihiv, Sumy and Kharkiv regions, the Russian forces shelled the Ukrainian troops' positions and civilian objects in the areas of the settlements of Buchka, Starykova, Shalyhine, Volfyne, Basivka, Strilecha, Zelene, Ambarne, and Hatyshche.
- In the Kupiansk and Lyman directions, the enemy shelled the areas of 16 settlements with tanks, mortars, barrel and rocket artillery. Among them are Dvorichna, Kupiansk, Kislivka, Kotliarivka, Krokhmalne, Stelmakhivka, Makiivka, Ploshanka, and Dibrova.
- In the Bakhmut direction of the Donetsk region, more than 15 settlements were hit by fire. In particular, Spirne, Berestove, Bilohorivka, Soledar, and Bakhmut.
- In the Avdiivka direction of the Donetsk region, enemy fire was detected near Avdiivka, Vesele, Nevelske, Krasnohorivka, Mariinka, and Novomykhailivka.
- In the Vuhledar direction of the Donetsk region, Vremivka, Velyka Novosilka, and Vuhledar were shelled.
- In the Zaporizhzhia direction, areas of 13 settlements were affected by fire. Among them are Zelene Pole, Novopillia, Huliaipole, Charivne, Shcherbaky, and Stepove.
- In the Kherson direction, the civilian infrastructure of Chornobaivka, Antonivka, Kherson, and Zolota Balka was damaged by artillery shelling. There are casualties among civilians.
- Russian troops almost advance to Soledar's center but are repelled by AFU

Equipment and weapons removed from long-term storage is what Russia is transferring to Belarus - According to secure information, a significant number of weapons and military equipment arriving in Belarus for training of personnel has been removed from long-term storage in Russia and requires maintenance. Belarusian servicemen are involved in operating this equipment.

Russian army moves units to northern Crimea - According to the Ukrainian Main Intelligence Directorate, Russian forces are redeploying new military units to northern Crimea to hold the occupied territories

Andrii Cherniak, a representative of the Main Intelligence Directorate of Ukraine's Ministry of Defense, reported this.

According to Cherniak, the Russians seek to preserve the "land corridor" to Crimea: "This was their idea of capturing the Donetsk region, the coast of the Sea of Azov, and their plans also to cut off Ukraine from the Black Sea. But the invaders could not implement any plans in Ukraine. Given that our foreign partners are supplying us with new types of weapons, the so-called "land corridor" to Crimea is certainly not safe. Ukraine will strike Russian positions throughout the occupied territory."

Also, a representative of the Directorate of Ukraine's Ministry of Defense reported that the Russian army is withdrawing new military units to the north of the Crimean peninsula to maintain the territory. In particular, they are building defense structures both there and temporarily occupied Kherson.

"They will lose, that's why they create defensive structures where they can, realizing that they will have to conduct combat operations on these lines," Andrii Cherniak said.

Why the Optimists May Be Correct - By Dr. Philip Dandolov of Geopolitical Monitor - Almost a year has passed since the beginning of what experts have characterized as the largest military conflict in Europe since WWII, so it seems natural to ponder the viability of a number of potential scenarios that could bring about an end to the war in Ukraine. Bulgarian political scientist Ivan Krastev identifies three distinct camps with regard to the underlying philosophies in relation to the desired endpoint of the crisis. The realists generally express a belief that Russia's actions are attributable to valid security concerns and also raise the alarm pertaining to the prospect of an apocalyptic end game in Ukraine, possibly entailing a nuclear exchange, unless a quick diplomatic solution to the conflict is prioritized, even if it ultimately turns out to be at the expense of some core Ukrainian national interests.

Optimists profess that there are many signs of a decisive Ukrainian victory on the horizon, conceivably ending Putin's regime. The revisionists go a step further, apportioning blame for the war not only to the Putin administration but also to wider Russian society, and thus advocate for policies (in the aftermath of the war) that would knock Russia out of the ranks of the great powers and bring about a disintegration of the country.

While at this stage it would still be premature to make any definitive assessments or predictions, there seem to be solid grounds to assume that the scenario envisioned by the optimists (even though optimism can be a bit of a misnomer given the terrible price being paid in terms of human casualties by the Ukrainians) is likely to materialize.

The first reason to subscribe to the views of the optimists is due to the major players like the US and other Western countries appearing to still be very much on course in terms of their willingness to provide vital material and financial resources to Ukraine. Even Hungarian PM Orbán, who has since February 2022 been regarded as a pro-Putin outlier, is gradually changing his tune on the topic of the provision of aid to Ukraine, albeit largely for instrumental purposes.

At the same time, Russophile political organizations in Central & Eastern European states, such as those in Slovakia, have had to contend with a reduction in electoral support while parties with strong pro-Russian factions, to take the example of Bulgaria, have seen internal dissent, resulting in prominent members willing to break with the party line and even face expulsion due to their outspoken sympathy for Ukraine. All in all, the signs are clear that not only mainstream pro-EU parties, but also those considered to be anti-establishment and of right-wing populist persuasion, especially in Western Europe, have as a rule preferred to distance themselves from the Putin apologists.

An examination of political and social dynamics inside Russia itself also lends credence to the views of the optimists. Even though a number of opinion polls indicate most Russians are supportive of the "special military operation," viewing the conflict as a proxy war against the West, what is arguably a more nuanced recent study suggests that the 'doubters' (who are quite detached from the war and rather amenable to changing their minds, which makes it likely that at some stage they may join one of the other two camps) are more numerous than the supporters and opponents.

Thus, the Russian public's continued support for the war is by no means guaranteed, with further spillovers of the conflict into their country, as in the cases of Bryansk, Kursk and Belgorod oblasts that are located near Ukraine, possibly entrenching perception the Putin government is unable to guarantee security of its citizens inside Russia's own borders.

In contrast to the 2008 small and victorious Russo-Georgian war, during which the Russian public was largely shielded from the events, the lack of major successes in Ukraine actually forced Putin to tear up the unwritten Russian 'social contract,' according to which the people who do not involve themselves in politics are essentially guaranteed a peaceful and stable life. The partial mobilization highlighted how regular people's tacit approval of the Putin regime was no longer sufficient – most Russians could suddenly find themselves in a situation of having to prove their loyalty by taking up arms and risking their life and well-being in actual combat. Another mobilization, which could see most of the middle class in Moscow directly affected, may be an even greater threat to the regime in terms of its potential for protest mobilization.

Furthermore, criticism of the Russian military's approach to the war unleashed by pro-Putin figures such as Chechen Republic leader Kadyrov and Wagner Group founder Prigozhin has also been regarded as an indication that the Kremlin is no longer well-placed to maintain a single media space and subscribe to a common trope regarding the war, which could provide further openings to dissenting voices.

To compound matters, a number of statistics suggest crimes involving the use of weapons have risen in Russia for the period since the start of the invasion of Ukraine. While it remains to be seen whether these trends continue over through 2023, such reports will likely play a role in eroding the legitimacy of the Putin administration, which has for a long time taken pride in providing a high level of domestic security and predictability, especially in contrast to the crime-ridden and chaotic years associated with the Boris Yeltsin era during the 1990s. Past precedents need to be taken into account as well, with notorious crimes such as the 2010 Kushchyovskaya massacre serving to tarnish the image of the Putin regime.

In addition to becoming a harbinger of insecurity for Russian society as a whole, with one study suggesting that during the year 2022 anxiety about the war managed to override all other concerns for ordinary Russians, the sheer brutality of the conflict in Ukraine coupled with the stepping up of repression inside Russia against any forces expressing opposition to the government narrative, may also work against the Russian leader on another level.

Part of Putin's appeal to many Russians arguably stemmed from his ability to convey an image of a competent strongman while at the same time managing not to conjure up an association with a propensity for gratuitous violence in the popular mind, unlike Soviet era leaders such as Joseph Stalin.

Once the pendulum swings in the direction of excessive state coercion, this is often a sign that the authoritarian regime in question is entering a phase of greater vulnerability. American journalist David Remnick in his coverage of the August 1991 coup d'état attempt, which was organized by Soviet hardliners against then President of the USSR Gorbachev, hypothesized that Communist reactionaries orchestrating the events at the time had an aversion to some of the Stalinist excesses from the past and were not fully prepared to sacrifice the lives of too many Russian civilians for their cause. In reverse fashion, it is not inconceivable Putin's reabsorption of a number of elements of Stalinist totalitarianism, his prior gripes with Stalin notwithstanding, and his decision to revert to an anachronistic 'Soviet' archetype has caused even formerly loyal supporters to view him in a less magnanimous light compared to before.

Even though there is a significant overlap between the preferred scenarios of the optimists and those of the revisionists, there are a number of reasons to be more skeptical of the latter's vision. On the one hand, as alluded previously, the revisionists may be overestimating the degree to which regular Russians are supportive of the war as well as the chances for any ethnically-driven separatist movement to succeed in Russia, at least in short-term.

Furthermore, given Western countries' pronounced reluctance to make any moves that could be perceived as escalatory, which is one of the main reasons a direct NATO intervention in the conflict appears to be highly unlikely at this stage, encouraging protest movements that strive for greater territorial autonomy inside Russia may be deemed to be an overly risky endeavor due to the potential for such actions to be viewed as a "red line," even by an eventual successor of Putin who may hold less bellicose and more liberal views.

Thus, barring a monumental shift in the nature of the events on the ground, the optimists so far appear to be on track when it comes to their predictions for the eventual resolution of the war in Ukraine.

Containment

Russia's only aircraft carrier is in emergency condition: Russia can't "find the culprit" - The only Russian aircraft carrier, Admiral Kuznetsov, is in disabled condition and unable to set sail.

Ukrainian intelligence has discovered that Russia's only aircraft carrier, the Admiral Kuznetsov, is in a state of disrepair at the 35th shipyard in Murmansk. It was planned to be moved for repair.

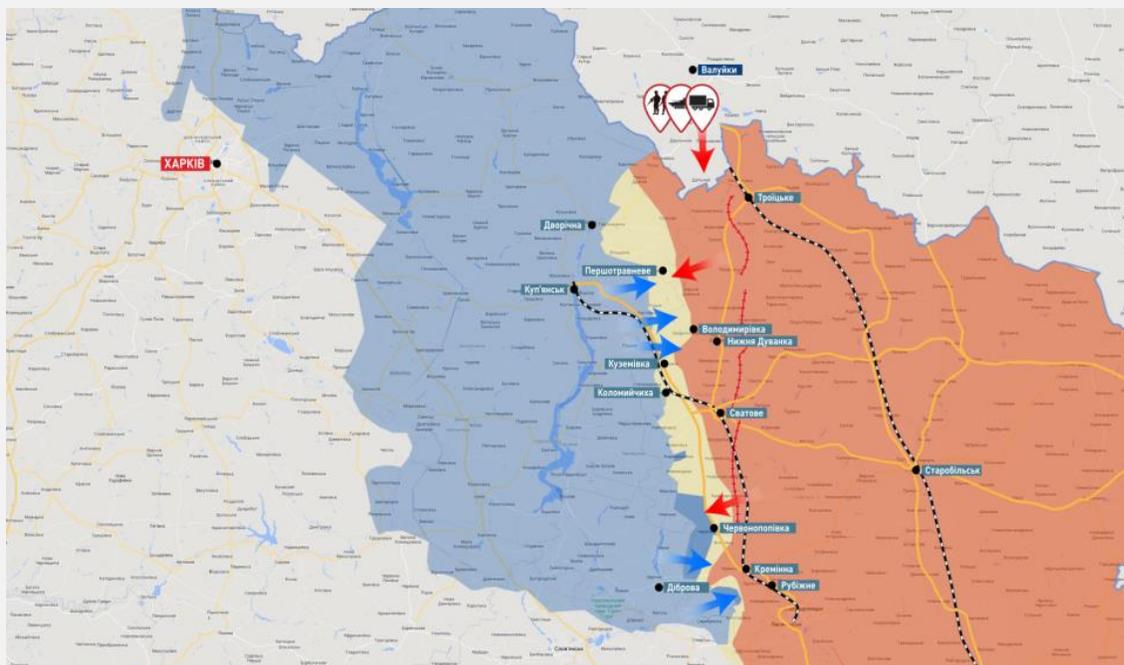
"However, as it was being prepared, it was found carrier was unable to move on its own., requiring instead a number of tug boats. However, this also proved unsuccessful due to the critical condition of the ship's hull," Ukrainian intelligence explained.

Ship repairmen warned that the condition of the carrier does not allow it to be launched, because it is highly likely to capsize. Naval divers discovered metal structures below the third deck were corroded. The holds are completely filled with muddy water, making it impossible to inspect the ship from the inside.

"Officials of the 35th ship repair plant and management of the fleet are trying to shift responsibility for the carrier's state of affairs to one other. Currently, it is impossible to even establish who exactly made the decision to move the ship," the press service writes.

Ukrainian Armed Forces put pressure on Russian troops in Luhansk direction - "In Sievierodonetsk district, the situation remains difficult. Active combat operations continue in the Kreminna area. In Svatove and Bilohorivka,

things have been more or less calm lately. Winter and frost have a positive effect on the movement of active combat operations. Our guys are pressing in Dibrova and Chervonopopivka areas. We are waiting for the continuation of the Ukrainian Armed Forces counteroffensive," Roman Vlasenko, head of Sievierodonetsk district military administration noted.



Volunteers seeking Russia revenge have Ukraine forces stocked - Those with an ax to grind and a distaste for Russia have been jumping in for Ukraine, fighting in a veritable proxy war to exact revenge, including Chechens, Crimean Tatars, and those from the former Soviet republics.

It has kept Ukraine's military effort well-stocked with willing fighters, especially with increasing lethal aid flowing in from NATO and Vladimir Putin struggling to find waves of conscripted fighters.

"We saw what was happening," Chechen battalion deputy commander Muslim Madiyev told The New York Times. "Ukraine has no shortage of men, but we have to join and be a part of this war."

"We have enough," he added, when pressed on how many.

In fact, the anti-Russia, anti-Putin sentiment is so strong and pervasive, Ukraine is needing to be diligent to make sure it is not taking in fighters who might be pro-Russian saboteurs, the Times reported.

"Our aim is the liberation of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, and to help all the nations who want it, to gain freedom," a Chechen fighter who only gave his code name, Maga, told the Times.

The Ukrainian Parliament in October recognized the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria as a territory occupied by Russia.

UK to consider sending Ukraine tanks: Sky News - The UK is considering supplying Ukraine with tanks for the first time, British broadcaster Sky News reports, citing a Western source.

Sky said that discussions have been taking place "for a few weeks" about delivering the British army's main battle tank, the Challenger 2, to Ukraine.

Western 'ammo supplies' will extend war: Russia - According to Maria Zakharova, spokeswoman for the Russian foreign ministry, additional Western weapons to Kyiv will delay the end of the conflict.

On Twitter, the Russian embassy in the UK wrote: "Zakharova: West's irresponsible actions & ammo supplies to Kyiv regime not only multiply victim numbers & delay the Ukraine conflict end, but could also draw NATO into direct military confrontation with Russia. Yet instead of stopping, Ukraine's Western sponsors build up their supplies."



fully aware of the impact of NATO and western on an ongoing basis, with immediate and increasingly advanced modern weapons ideally suited to ground offense warfare. This will seriously concern the Kremlin and Putin who are suffering a chronic shortage of weapons and soldiers, losing daily, on average, 1,050 soldiers killed and wounded, 36 pieces of heavy equipment, 2 aircraft and helicopters and a plethora of other critical losses, leading to a military force continually bleeding and weakening.

It is quite apparent that Russia is arms support Ukraine is receiving progressive addition of lethal and weaponry, including heavy armor warfare. This will seriously concern the Kremlin and Putin who are suffering a chronic shortage of weapons and soldiers, losing daily, on average, 1,050 soldiers killed and wounded, 36 pieces of heavy equipment, 2 aircraft and helicopters and a plethora of other critical losses, leading to a military force continually bleeding and weakening.

Germany won't rule out Leopard tanks to Ukraine: Minister Habeck - Germany will not rule out sending Leopard tanks to Ukraine in the future, the country's economy minister told German broadcaster ARD.

"Of course it can't be ruled out," Robert Habeck said.

His comments come two days after Germany said it wants to deliver about 40 Marder infantry fighting vehicles to Ukraine before the end of March, a decision Habeck said was good and long overdue.

US provides offensive weapons for first time - As columns of Russian troops began pouring into Ukraine nearly two months ago, the United States and its allies started supplying Kyiv with weapons and equipment for what many

expected to be a short war: sniper rifles, helmets, medical kits, encrypted communications, lots of bullets and the portable, shoulder-held Stinger and Javelin missiles that quickly became icons of the conflict.

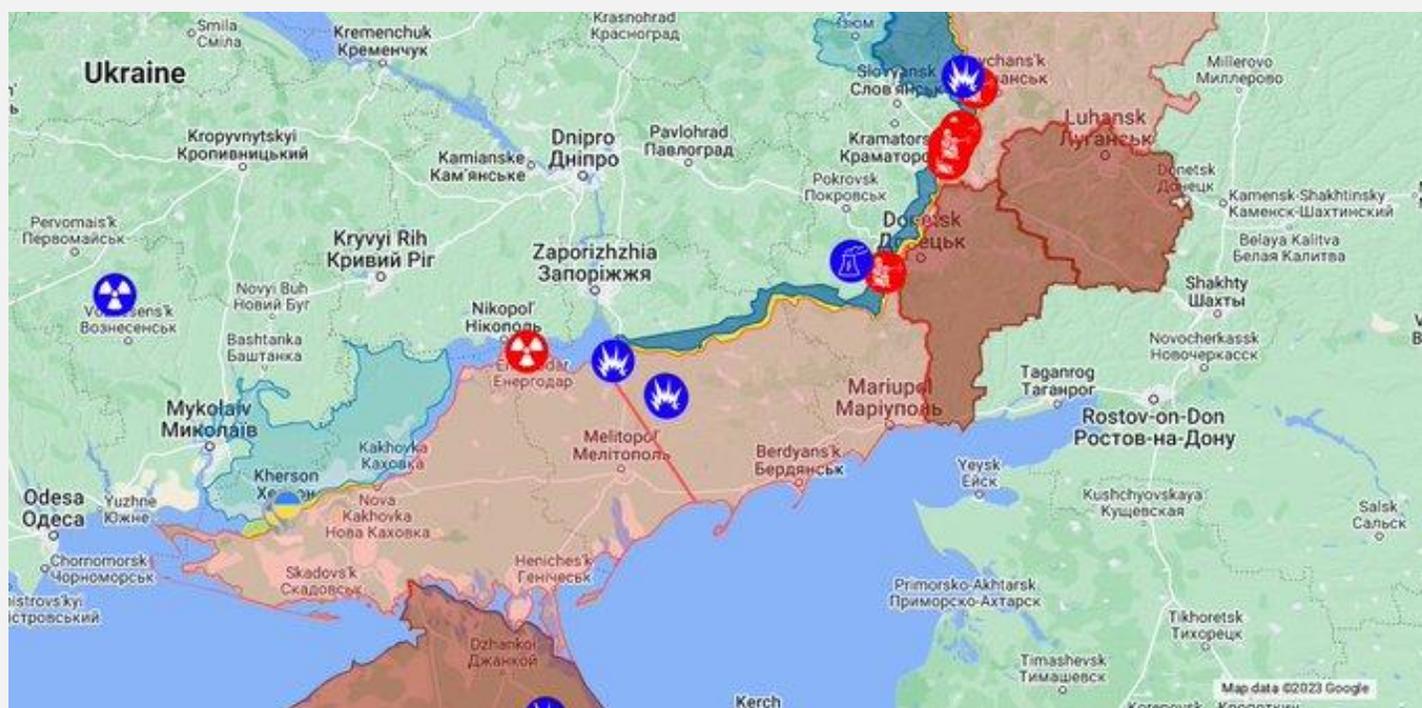
The US did not supply Ukrainian military with weapons that could be used to strike targets on Russia's territory.

This has now changed quite emphatically with tanks, extended-range artillery and training being supplied to Ukraine in ever-increasing quantity.

Coupled to this is the earlier statement by the White House, that they were “OK” with Ukraine striking military and staging targets within Russia itself. These two tactics are indicators of a strong change in NATO and western approach to the war and a response to the Russian pattern of targeting innocent civilians and critical infrastructure.

Impacts

Russia makes punishable maps in breach of ‘new territorial realities’ - Russia’s government extended support to a legislative amendment that would classify maps that dispute the country’s official “territorial integrity” as punishable extremist materials, the state-owned TASS news agency reported on Sunday (8 January).



The amendment to Russia’s anti-extremism legislation stipulates that “cartographic and other documents and images that dispute the territorial integrity of Russia” will be classified as extremist materials, the agency reported.

Russia’s sweepingly ambiguous anti-extremism legislation — it applies to religious organizations, journalists and their materials, as well as the activity of businesses, among others — has allowed the Kremlin to tighten its grip on opponents.

The new amendment, TASS reports without citing sources, emerged after its authors pointed out that some maps distributed in Russia dispute the “territorial affiliation” of the Crimean Peninsula and the Kuril Islands.

Ever since, Russia has called on the West to recognize the new ‘territorial realities’, despite the fact that the Russian army is unable to control any of the four provinces.

Russia and Japan have not formally ended World War Two hostilities because of their standoff over a group of islands just off Japan's northernmost island of Hokkaido. The Soviet Union seized those islands – known in Russia as the Kurils and in Japan as the Northern Territories – at the end of the war.

The amendment must be proposed to the State Duma, Russia's lower house of parliament, and after a review go through three readings. It is then sent to the Federation Council, the upper house, and to President Vladimir Putin for signing.

Separately, Russian politicians began debating punishment for Russians who oppose the war in Ukraine and who, as the former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said, "wish their fatherland to perish."

Sanctions

Around '76 percent' of foreign companies remain in Russia: Official - Around 76 percent of foreign companies continue to operate in Russia, the head of Russia's lower legislative chamber said.

Despite the exodus of dozens of foreign firms over the war in Ukraine, "75.9 percent of foreign companies stayed in Russia," State Duma speaker Vyacheslav Volodin said on Telegram.

"This decision speaks volumes: They believe in good prospects for the development of our country's economy, they are satisfied with the business climate. Those who left suffer billions of dollars in costs," said Volodin.

The senior lawmaker added that Russian companies replaced niches left open by foreign businesses and urged them to be "nationally oriented" so their earnings are spent on the development of Russia, underlining that it was a priority of the State Duma to provide legal support for such purposes.

Putin

Bosnian Serbs award Putin with medal of honor - The Bosnian Serb separatist leader has awarded Russian President Vladimir Putin with the highest medal of honor for his "patriotic concern and love" for the Republika Srpska entity, the Serb-controlled half of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"Putin is responsible for developing and friendly relations between RS (Republika Srpska) Milorad Dodik, said on Sunday at the awards

Dodik, who visited Putin in ties with the Russian president medal will be presented to between the two, Russian said.

"We believe that this award is determination of our relations friendship of our brotherly ceremony.



strengthening cooperation and political and and Russia," the Bosnian Serb president, ceremony in Banja Luka.

September in Moscow, has maintained close despite Russia's war in Ukraine. The Putin during the next meeting Ambassador Igor Kalbukhov

an affirmation of the strategic aimed at strengthening the people," he said at the

Comment – Putin keeps the Serbs close to him and has been known to interfere in regional politics on an ongoing basis, hoping to disrupt western policies and EU stability.

Serbia and Hungary are both known to favor maintaining ties with Putin and voting against EU sanctions.

Geopolitics

The World's Most Important Elections in 2023 “This year’s elections are less clear-cut – and instead overlap in surprising ways,” said Foreign Policy. “This may be in part because they are overwhelmingly parliamentary as opposed to presidential, which makes term limits much less of a factor.”

Fears of a global populist wave have receded somewhat, but “democracy is on the ballot in a number of nations” this year, said The Conversation, “while common themes – such as the handling of inflation and corruption – may determine how incumbent governments and presidents fare at the ballot box.”

Foreign Policy views the **Turkish** election as the **most important** of the year.

Thailand (7 May) - In Thailand “the military’s quotidian role in political life is due to face a reckoning” as the country’s autocratic leaders hope to consolidate power, said Foreign Policy.

The 7 May vote will be only the second since the military rewrote the constitution in 2017 to give it greater influence in selecting the legislature. With incumbent former army chief Prayuth Chan-ocha, from the pro-military Palang Pracharat Party, deeply unpopular, Pheu Thai, Thailand’s main opposition party with links to former premier Thaksin Shinawatra, is seen to have the best chance of forming the next government, according to the latest polls from Bloomberg.

Yet despite this, Foreign Policy said that “observers are not optimistic that they will prevail. Instead, they surmise that the most likely election scenario will involve the military-monarchy complex once again finding a way to further dilute the will of the people – and wrest power from those parties the majority of Thais support.”

Turkey (18 June) - “People in Turkey tend to call every presidential election historic – but the June 2023 election will truly be historic,” said Ahmet Kuru, professor of political science at San Diego State University, for The Conversation.

The lengthy rule of the increasingly autocratic president, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has governed Turkey since 2003 first as prime minister then since 2014 as president, “could be put to its toughest test” on 18 June, said Time magazine.

Erdoğan has lost support in recent years as his economic reforms have failed to turn the country around, leading to massive inflation and a collapse in the currency. This prompted a further crackdown on the opposition and press.

“The 2023 presidential election will be fought over politics, economics and religion,” said Kuru. “If Erdoğan wins, he will frame himself as the second founder of Turkey, after Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. If he loses, his political, business, and religious allies will face the risk of being expunged.” The stakes could not be higher.

“What happens in Turkey doesn’t just stay in Turkey,” says Ziya Meral, a senior associate fellow at the Royal United Services Institute for Defence and Security Studies. “Turkey may be a middle power, but the great powers have a stake in its election.”

Poland (expected October or November) - “Probably the most pivotal and important election of 2023 in emerging Europe” is Poland’s parliamentary vote, expected in October or November, said Craig Turp-Balazs in Emerging Europe.

The ruling Law and Justice Party (PiS) is expected to face its biggest opposition since retaking power in 2015 in the face of mounting public anger to its increasingly illiberal policies and economic stagnation. However, the government’s strong response to the war in neighboring Ukraine, including accepting millions of refugees, has won it support both internationally and at home.

“As usual, the extent to which the country’s opposition is able to unite and galvanize the anti-PiS vote behind a clear, coherent alternative will be crucial,” said Turp-Balazs. He noted that “in the previous two elections, in 2015 and 2019, the opposition appeared divided and weak, handing PiS easy victories.”

Pakistan (12 October at the latest) - Last year was a tumultuous one for Pakistan, which faced a perfect storm of political, economic and environmental crises.

In April 2022, the former cricketer turned populist prime minister Imran Khan was ousted in a no-confidence vote and replaced by Shehbaz Sharif of the centre-right Pakistan Muslim League (PML) until this year's elections, which have to be held by 12 October.

Opinion polls are hard to gauge "but it appears that Khan continues to be the darling of public opinion – and a thorn in the side of Pakistan's security establishment", said Foreign Policy. It cites his "unique" willingness to challenge the Pakistani military, which effectively rules the country.

Time magazine said "the big question-mark is when elections will take place – especially since Khan is pressuring the government to hold them earlier".

"Khan has been gaining a lot of popularity, so politically speaking, the sooner the elections happen, the better for him," said Michael Kugelman in the Time article.

Argentina (29 October) - The country may still be basking in World Cup glory, but 2023 promises to be a grueling year for Argentina in the run-up to elections in the autumn.

With sky-high inflation, low growth and one of the highest debt-per-capita ratios in Latin America, the economy looks set to dominate the campaign. President Alberto Fernández and his powerful vice-president, Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, have both been plagued by corruption scandals, with the later sentenced to six years in jail last month over bribery charges.

"Some are even predicting that the combination of mishandling the economy and the corruption scandal could bring an end to Peronism, the political philosophy that has governed Argentina for much of last 70 years," said Eduardo Gamarra, professor of politics and international relations at Florida International University, for The Conversation.

The opposition party of former president Mauricio Macri is similarly divided and struggling to agree on a candidate. "These political and economic circumstances may favour a third contender," suggested Gamarra, specifically Javier Milei, "a populist libertarian who has been rising in the polls and whose brusque style has drawn comparisons with Donald Trump."

Comment – A confidential Asian source of mine informs me that Argentina is drawing ever-closer to China, with frequent visits to Beijing by the Argentinian president over the past few years. He advised China has offered Argentina sufficient weapons to re-capture the Falklands Island from the UK, should the latter antagonize China.