

Conflict Update # 317

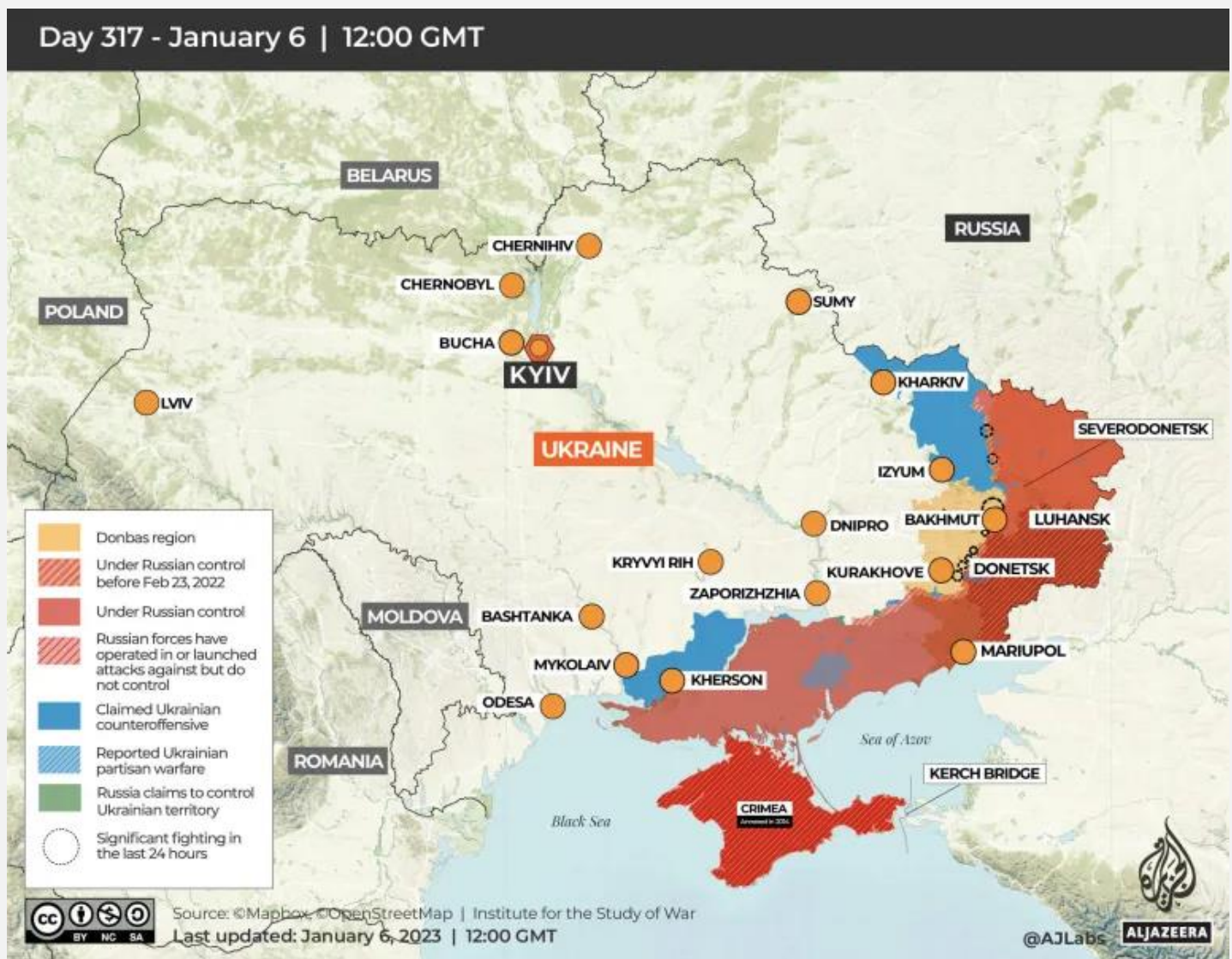
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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 110,250 (530) soldiers killed, 3,064 (+23) enemy tanks, 6,124 (+16) armored combat vehicles, 2,059 (+8) artillery systems, 431 (+5) MLRS systems, 215 (+0) air defense systems, 285 (+1) warplanes, 272 (+1) helicopters, 1,844 (+0) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 723 (+0) cruise missiles, 16 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,797 (+38) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 182 (+0) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways



Ukraine hits temporary Russian base in Kherson Oblast, up to 100 soldiers killed and injured – Yesterday Ukrainian forces conducted a strike on a temporary base of Russian troops in Havrylivka Druha, a village in Kherson Oblast near the Russia-occupied Crimean peninsula, the General Staff of Ukraine’s Armed Forces reported earlier today.

Currently, it is known that up to 100 wounded (Russian) soldiers were brought to local hospitals,” the General Staff said, adding that the number of killed Russian troops is being clarified.

Over the last 24 hours, the Ukrainian Air Force struck a Russian personnel base, while Ukraine’s rocket and artillery forces hit two other Russian personnel and military equipment concentration areas over the past day, the General Staff said, without providing further details.

Earlier on Jan. 5, the General Staff also said that Ukraine's forces launched 20 attacks on the areas of concentration of Russian troops. On Jan. 3, a Ukrainian strike on Russian-occupied Tokmak in Zaporizhzhia Oblast killed and wounded 80 Russian soldiers, according to the General Staff.

‘All they can expect here is death’: Ukrainian volunteers brace for Russian attack from Belarus - Russia has built up its forces in Belarus and released footage of military drills along the border with Ukraine, stoking fears of a renewed assault on Kyiv’s defences from the north. FRANCE 24’s team on the ground met Ukrainian volunteers in the Zhytomyr region who are preparing to face another Russian attack.

Russia has been increasing its forces in Belarus since last October, shifting units that were beaten back by Ukraine’s counter-offensive in the east and south. The build-up has heightened fears that Moscow is planning to use Belarus as a launch pad for a fresh offensive – as it did at the start of the war in February 2022.

This time, however, Ukraine's Territorial Defence Forces say they are ready to face down any attack.

“If the Russians come our way, they’ll try to divert our main force in another direction,” said Sergeant “Leshy”, a military instructor training Ukrainian volunteers near the Belarus border. “But all that they can expect here is death.”

Comment – The Kremlin has today sent a trainload of Russian conscriptees into Belarus, and Lukashenko has issued notice papers to all Belarussian reserves.

Russia says Ukraine shells its positions during Moscow's unilateral ceasefire - Russia said Ukraine shelled Russian military positions on Friday during a 36-hour ceasefire unilaterally declared by President Vladimir Putin, which Kyiv and its allies have dismissed as a sham.

The Russian defence ministry said that its positions had come under attack in the Luhansk, Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia regions, but that its troops were observing the ceasefire.

Comment – And Russia sent missiles into Ukraine over Christmas.

Who Are The 'Partisans' At War With The Kremlin? - Mystery fires that have broken out across Russia in recent months have been blamed on Ukrainian saboteurs and even Western intelligence operatives. But a new documentary by British filmmaker Jake Hanrahan suggests a "large-scale, active resistance inside Russia" is now being waged by Russia's own citizens. Hanrahan talked to RFE/RL about the spate of attacks on war-related infrastructure inside Russia.

Ukrainian counteroffensive - Kyrylo Budanov, head of Ukraine’s Main Intelligence Directorate, said in an interview with ABC News that Ukraine is planning a major offensive in spring. He expects the fighting to be the “hottest” in March.

“This is (when we will see more) liberation of territories and dealing the final defeats to the Russian Federation,” he said. “This will happen throughout Ukraine, from Crimea to the Donbas.

Comment – This is very unusual as Ukraine never alludes to any actions, both pre-and-post action. Maybe another decoy for the “feint of heart.”

But Russia appears to keep falling for these Ukrainian moves.

”Russo-Ukraine war equipment loss ten times that of Moscow’s Chechen conflicts - Ten months of fighting has resulted in thousands of equipment losses on both sides, as the war drags on into 2023.

The past ten months of combat operations in the ongoing Ukraine-Russia war has resulted in a level of equipment destruction not seen in Europe since the Second World War, with open-source data indicating a combined loss from the two combatants of more than 11,000 military platforms to date.

Ukraine’s hybrid equipment list

Prior to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February this year, the Ukrainian military comprised mainly of Russian-origin equipment, with some designs being adapted slightly for in-country manufacture. However, the provision of equipment from NATO members states, including guided rocket artillery, has seen the make-up change to a more mixed affair, comprising European, US, and Russian-origin systems.

On 21 December, Ukrainian President Zelensky, on a rare trip outside of Ukraine, met with US officials in Washington, DC, where it was announced that the US would provide the Patriot air defence missile system to Kyiv to aid in the fight against Russia. Including the latest round of equipment, the US has provided or promised to provide more than 11,000 military platforms for the land, sea, and air domains (crewed and uncrewed) and more than 105 million small arms, mortar, and artillery munitions, among an undisclosed number of other high-end missiles.

Platforms provided include Mi-17 helicopters and T-72 tanks, and western equipment such as the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, 155mm, 122mm, and 105mm artillery, and armoured mobility vehicles such as the M113, M1117, and Mine Resistant Protected Vehicles, also known as MRAPs.

The increased use of NATO-standard equipment, and the provision of required training by NATO forces in countries such as Germany and the UK, will see Ukraine’s military take on a more European-US bias moving forward. However, Russian-origin designs are likely to remain a prevalent part of Ukraine’s military structure for the foreseeable future, with the defence industrial base already producing air and land equipment from adapted Russian designs.

Russia sends more troops to Belarus as fears of new attack grow - Ukraine says Belarus could be used as a staging post by Moscow for an offensive from the north, opening up a new front.

A train carrying Russian troops and equipment has arrived in Belarus amid concerns that Moscow could use its ally’s territory to attack Ukraine from the north.

The Belarusian defence ministry confirmed the arrival of the contingent on Friday and said President Lukashenko had visited a military base where Russian troops are already stationed.

During the meeting, Lukashenko and an unnamed representative from the Russian army discussed the two countries’ joint military drills, it said.

Russian troops “are ready to carry out tasks as intended,” the representative said.

The developments came after Belarus, which has backed Russia over its war in Ukraine, said on Thursday that it will receive more weapons and equipment from its neighbour as the two continue to boost military cooperation.

The Belarusian defence ministry said the goal of creating a joint force was “strengthening the protection and defence of the Union State [of Russia and Belarus].”

Comment – This remains a concern of mine. There is too much activity taking place in Belarus for mere “training.” Putin desperately needs a diversion from the southeast, as we have illustrated in multiple previous Updates.

UK sends 280 power generators to Mykolaiv - Ukraine today reported the southern Ukrainian city of Mykolaiv has received 280 generators from the U.K.

“Under the constant shelling of the energy system, the generators guarantee the reliable work of medical institutions, critical infrastructure facilities and the Points of Invincibility,” the embassy wrote on Twitter.

After launching its full-scale invasion on Feb. 24, Russia unsuccessfully attempted to seize Mykolaiv and other cities in Mykolaiv Oblast, and bombarded the region regularly with rocket and missile strikes.

Media locate alleged training ground of Russian drone operators - Operators for the Iranian-made kamikaze drones that Russia has been using to attack Ukraine en masse in the recent weeks are allegedly being trained at a polygon in Kolomna near Moscow, according to an investigative report by Donbas.Realities, a project of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty.

The polygon is located 8 kms southeast of the State Center for Unmanned Aviation of the Russian Defense Ministry.

Four drone operators of this very center in Kolomna had allegedly undergone training in Iran in the summer of 2022 before Russia received its first batch of Iranian kamikaze drones, a joint investigation by Slidstvo.Info and Nashi Groshi Lviv revealed earlier this week. Russia has been using Iranian drones to attack residential areas and critical infrastructure in Ukraine since October, to compensate for its reportedly depleting missile stock.

The aviation center in Kolomna is the only one under Russia’s Defense Ministry that trains drone operators.

The journalists identified the polygon using the pictures the Russian Defense Ministry published between 2019 and 2021 from the military competition for drone operators held there.

Russia running out of arms? – A photo of a brought ridicule online. The images, Telegram in November, were shared Gerashchenko, an adviser to Ukraine's

"A photo of a Russian soldier from by Russian Telegram channels. He is has a rifle just in case. Is there a Gerashchenko tweeted.

According to local media Telegram Republic of Bashkortostan, which is located between the Volga River and

The Bashkirs are a non-Slavic ethnic primarily in Bashkortostan, with the Islam. Some of them have been enlisted in the Russian armed forces and are fighting in Ukraine.



Russian soldier using a bow and arrow in Ukraine has which first began circulating on on Twitter Tuesday by Anton minister of internal affairs.

Bashkiriya at war in Ukraine is shared armed with bow and arrows. He also cavalry riding somewhere?"

channels, the soldier is from the unofficially called Bashkiria, which is the Ural Mountains.

group within Russia and reside majority of the population practicing

Russia has this many strikes left as Kh-555 cruise missiles run out - ussia has enough missile supplies left for only two or three more of the mass strikes it has launched in recent months against Ukrainian cities and energy infrastructure, according to Ukrainian intelligence.

Vadym Skibitsky, the deputy head of Ukrainian military intelligence, told RBC-Ukraine in an interview published on Wednesday that Russia's supplies of high-precision missiles, including Kh-101, Kh-555 and Kalibr missiles, are running low.



"When we talk about the possibility of two to three strikes, we mean that there will be approximately 80 missiles [used] during [an] attack, and maybe more," he explained.

"For example, on December 31, [Russia] used only 20 cruise missiles, although before that they used about 70 or even more. Therefore, when we speak of two to three strikes, we mean a massive attack."

Russia has for months been bombarding Ukraine with strikes on its energy infrastructure, causing blackouts across the country.

Sanctions

Abramovich placed kids in control of billions in assets to avoid sanctions - Russian-Israeli oligarch Roman Abramovich is reported to have rapidly reorganized his assets in the early days of the war in Ukraine, making his children the beneficiaries of his trusts in an apparent effort to evade international sanctions.

A large cache of files shared anonymously with The Guardian showed how Abramovich — the former owner of England's Chelsea soccer club and once Israel's wealthiest individual — turned his seven children into billionaires nearly overnight in February 2022.

Sanctions experts told the paper in the report published Friday that the financial moves will make it more difficult for countries to sanction Abramovich, who is accused of having close ties with the Kremlin and has Moscow to thank for much of his wealth. Unlike international sanctions against Putin's aides, penalties against oligarchs have largely avoided targeting their families as well.

US hits Iranian drone execs with sanctions - The Biden administration today hit executives and board members of the Iranian company that has built military drones used by Russia in its invasion of Ukraine with sanctions.

The Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control said it is targeting six executives and board members of Qods Aviation Industries with the sanctions, calling it a key Iranian defense manufacturer responsible for designing and producing the drones.

McDonald's is set to abandon Kazakhstan as disruptions triggered by the Ukraine crisis have left the nation without a substitute for Russian meat supplies, Bloomberg News reported on Wednesday.

Impacts

Record-high winter temperatures swept across parts of Europe over the new year, bringing calls from activists for faster action against climate change while offering short-term respite to governments struggling with high gas prices, Reuters reported.

As reported yesterday this serves to minimize the negative impact of Russia shirting EU energy supplies.

Head of Russia's Wagner mercenaries has eyes on Bakhmut mines: US - White House official says Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin wants to control salt and gypsum from mines near Bakhmut.

The United States is of the view that Russian President Vladimir Putin's ally Yevgeny Prigozhin, the founder of Russia's Wagner Group, is interested in taking control of salt and gypsum from mines near the Ukrainian-held city of Bakhmut, a White House official said.

There are indications that monetary motives are driving Russia and Prigozhin's "obsession" with Bakhmut, the official told the Reuters news agency on Thursday.

The US has previously accused Russian mercenaries of exploiting natural resources in the Central African Republic (CAR), Mali, Sudan and elsewhere to help fund Moscow's war in Ukraine, a charge Russia has rejected as "anti-Russian rage."

Out of Wagner's force of nearly 50,000 mercenaries, more than 4,100 have been killed and 10,000 others wounded in Ukraine. Of them, more than 1,000 were killed between late November and early December near Bakhmut.

Comment – This may explain why he has remained in this area for some 6 months now, throwing hundreds of young men into battle and death.

Containment

Patriot missiles to Ukraine: US regaining escalation dominance? – What the transfer of Patriot missiles to Ukraine signifies for the delicate balancing act shaping the war with Russia.

After a meeting at the White House on 21 December between US President Biden and President Zelensky of Ukraine, the US administration announced that it will send one of the most advanced air defence systems in operation today, the Patriot missile system, to assist in the defence of Ukraine from the Russian invasion.

In a call on 21 December with reporters, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said "The supply of weapons continues and the range of supplied weapons is expanding. All of this, of course, leads to an aggravation of the conflict. This does not bode well for Ukraine," reported Reuters.

For months Russia has battered Ukraine's internal infrastructure with waves of Iranian supplied drones and loitering munitions, in addition to the considerable array of missiles it has deployed to interdict Ukrainian water, heating and power supplies. "Russia's unrelenting and brutal air attacks against critical infrastructure have only reinforced the need to provide Ukraine with sophisticated air defense capabilities," read the US DoD press release announcing the package.

The addition of the Patriot missile system will offer a long-range capability for defending Ukraine from cruise and ballistic missiles, intercepting missiles within a 100-mile radius and at heights up to 79,000ft. Like HIMARS, the Patriot is usually deployed from the flatbed of a lorry, offering similar mobility and the enhanced survivability of 'shoot-and-scoot' platforms.

Russia has already said that the Patriot system would be a "legitimate target" for attacks, and warned that the delivery of the system would be seen as an escalation. In strategic terms the addition of the system does not represent a game-changing move in the Ukrainian war, but it will preserve the status quo in terms of air superiority and prevent Russia from imposing more control over the airspace — a crucial objective of Ukrainian troops. Russia has made major efforts in recent weeks to degrade Ukrainian air defences, and although this system will go some way toward mitigating that, Ukraine will also need to make strategically critical decisions to optimize the system's efficacy.

The delivery of the Patriot Missiles come as part of a \$1.85bn package of military aid from the US to assist in the defence of Ukraine, one that includes additional HIMARS ammunition, High-speed Anti-Radiation Missiles, and Claymore anti-personnel munitions, all delivered from DoD stocks through a Presidential Drawdown facility valued at up to \$1bn, while \$850M in assistance from the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative will supply munitions, services

and SATCOM terminal. “In total, the United States has now committed more than \$21.9 billion in security assistance to Ukraine since the beginning of the Biden Administration,” continued the DoD press release.

The Patriots in the context of Ukraine’s armory

The appeal for superior air defences has been a consistent refrain for Zelensky across the duration of the war, with limited success. Donations of man-portable systems including Stingers have made a considerable impact in denying Russia air superiority, but against expendable autonomous systems these were not as effective a deterrent. More advanced contributions have been made recently, including two National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems (NASAMS) delivered last month, an earlier delivery of Homing all the way Killers (HAWKS), and Iris-T systems amongst an array of other air-defence options.

Compared to alternative systems like NASAMS, which the United States supplied in August, Patriots provide a substantially greater range, reaching up to 160km versus the 50km capability of NASAMS. Enhanced range grants enhanced defensive capabilities and airspace control. The Patriot missile offers improvements over the S-300 system, another air defence system already employed by Ukraine by offering a substantially more powerful radar system, resulting in enhanced target recognition capabilities. However, Ukraine is expected to receive only one battery, despite the fact that these systems are generally operated in battalions of four, restricting the applications of the system.

At \$4m for each fire, the Patriot missile defence system is not cost-effective when used against the drones or loitering weapons – costing as little as \$50,000 apiece – that have caused much of the recent devastation. Furthermore, the system necessitates up to 90 qualified personnel to maintain regular functioning. While Ukraine’s allies have been able to decrease training periods for other systems, training Ukrainian service members to operate these systems will come with a significant delay.

Though its employment against ballistic missiles and planes will be more cost-effective, the Ukrainians will need to deploy a number of other technologies currently in their control to better safeguard vital resources and battle a wide range of threats. The addition of the Patriot system to existing systems will equip Ukraine with a network of air defences with many layers to cover infrastructure and other civilian targets, but could still benefit from other air defence systems, including the Iron Dome technology that is effective against low altitude and low velocity targets, potentially including Iranian-made drones and loitering munitions.

As air-launched cruise missiles played a major role in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, the Patriot system could be used to target long-range bombers, posing a new and serious threat to Russian aircraft. According to the Ukrainian Air Force (UAF), Tu-95 and Tu22M3 aircraft have undertaken strikes in recent offensives, launching from the Russian Engels airfield, the focus of Ukrainian drone attacks in recent weeks. According to Ukraine, the missiles employed in the latest strikes were the Kh-55 and the Kalibr, which have ranges of 2,500km and 1,500km respectively, allowing them to be fired from deep inside Russian territory to hit Ukrainian objectives.

Escalation dominance as a goal

Before this announcement, criticism of the US and Western European efforts to arming Ukraine has considered the measured approach governments have taken to avoid deepening the crisis. “Escalation has become a sort of four-letter word in North American and European strategic parlance,” said Dr John Chipman, director general of the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS).

“Avoiding escalation has been a principal goal. Insufficient attention is being paid to how one would make Putin fear escalation and in that way deter some of the more extreme elements of his activity,” added Chipman, speaking at the launch of the IISS 2022 Strategic Survey, in London on 5 December

Chipman believes western governments have struggled to have a flexible response strategy to Russia's invasion of Ukraine: "Russia has more often than not been the one maintaining escalation dominance."

"An element of Cold War muscle memory has been unsatisfactorily recalled: 'Don't if you can avoid it, have a direct conflict with Moscow.' But Putin's Russia is very different from Brezhnev's Soviet Union. And another part of western Cold War muscle memory hasn't been sufficiently recalled, which is how do you conduct political-military strategy?"

Following the reports on 9 December from the Times of London that the US DoD had reversed its policy on Ukrainian attacks within the official borders of Russia, it is possible that US administration attitudes to escalation have evolved. Without US condemnation, Ukraine has targeted military sites within Russia that are located further from the Ukrainian border than the city of Moscow itself, indicating tacit approval of a provocative demonstration of offensive capabilities.

One explanation for the change in US attitudes looks at the Iranian involvement in the war. The BBC reported on 17 December that Justin Bronk, senior fellow at the defence think-tank RUSI, links the US decision to supply Patriot batteries to "Western concerns that Iran may supply Russia with longer-range ballistic missiles". On 21 December, the Financial Times has reported US and UK officials saying Moscow is attempting to procure hundreds of ballistic missiles from Iran in return for military support for Tehran.

A strictly tactical implication of this would be that the enhanced range of Iranian supplied missiles would require the increased capabilities of the Patriot missile system to offer effective defence. From a geopolitical standpoint, offering a counter to this offensive capability deters Iran from widening the conflict with its involvement, and narrow the reciprocal support for Iran from Russia. Any balanced consideration of US temperament to greater escalation in Ukraine should include a regard for the domestic political situation of the US pertaining to the shifting makeup of Congress and the Senate.

Analysts have predicted enthusiasm from Washington for the defence of Ukraine will dampen after winter, and the shift in the balance of power in both houses will provide obstacles for further requisitions. The 2022 congress offers more certainty that it will deliver military aide than can be expected when government reconvenes after the holidays, and a shift to US escalation do

Germany to send armored carriers, Patriot battery to Ukraine - Germany's decision comes after France said it will hold talks with Kyiv to arrange for the delivery of armored combat vehicles.

Germany will supply Ukraine with armored personnel carriers and a Patriot missile battery, the government has said.

The announcement came in a joint German-US statement after Chancellor Scholz spoke with US President Biden.

The US is joining France and Germany in sending armored vehicles to Ukraine's military, which is gearing up for likely counter offensives against Russian invasion forces in the months ahead. Whether or not you call these vehicles "tanks" - they include Germany's Marder Infantry Fighting Vehicle, France's AMX-10RC, and America's Bradley Fighting Vehicles.

Just as important: "All three countries are now more concretely committing to Ukraine's goal of a military victory, by starting to supply Kyiv with the tools to achieve it," Horowitz said.

According to the Pentagon, "In terms of what the Bradleys bring, it is obviously an armored capability that can transport mechanized infantry into battle in support of both offensive and defensive operations, providing a level of firepower and armor that will bring advantages on the battlefield as Ukraine continues to defend their homeland," spokesman Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters Thursday.

A third opinion: "The Bradley Fighting Vehicles are a significant improvement compared to what the U.S. has already provided," according to Bradley no-relation Bowman of the DC-based Foundation for Defense of Democracies. The Bradleys "will help infantry forces accompany fast-moving armored forces, providing the infantry additional protection, agility, and firepower," he said, and added that their use "will make both [Ukrainian] armor and infantry forces more effective and put additional pressure on invading Russian forces."



Comment – One has to wonder what is expected ahead given France, Canada, the US, Germany, Czech Republic and the UK are all sending light tanks and armored vehicles into Ukraine.

Tanks on the way to Ukraine? – An open question now is when rather than if western tanks will be sent to Ukraine to ward off Russian numerical superiority, but with superior quality equipment, Ukraine can push them back and reach a decisive stage of the war confidently and rapidly.

Germany is being pressured to send them Leopard tanks, with the US and other NATO Allies following suit with modern vehicles equipped with satellite technology and network target capability – where Ops, tracking and satellites coordinate geolocation points and guide missiles and armored strikes to within 5 feet of the target.

Over the horizon consideration: Ukraine will likely soon find its military with more weaponry familiar to U.S. and allied soldiers than anyone thought possible just one year ago. "The basic realities of attritional warfare and limits of Soviet-era stockpiles in Europe mean that Ukraine will inevitably have to transition to NATO-standard heavy weapons in the medium term," wrote Berlin-based analyst Tobias Schneider. "There is no plan C," he added.

Bradleys, self-propelled howitzers head to Ukraine as more difficult fight in the South awaits - The Defense Department on Friday announced its largest aid package to Ukraine to date, a reflection in scale and content of Ukrainian advances in proficiency and territory.

Valued at more than \$3 billion, the package includes 50 Bradley fighting vehicles, 100 M113 armored personnel carriers, 18 self-propelled howitzers, missiles, munitions and more.

U.S. President Biden previewed the announcement Thursday during remarks at a White House cabinet meeting.

“We’re going to provide the Bradley infantry fighting vehicles—the United States—to the Ukrainians, and the Germans are going to provide the Marder infantry fighting vehicles that they have to the Ukrainians,” Biden said.

The announcement comes the same week as a promise from France to provide AMX-10 RC armored fighting vehicles.

The Bradleys in particular represent a step up in the sorts of equipment that the United States has said it will provide. They come with 500 TOW anti-tank missiles and 250,000 rounds of 25mm ammunition, but they aren’t quite as capable as the U.S. M1 Abrams tank, which the U.S. is still reluctant to send to Ukraine.

Laura Cooper, deputy assistant defense secretary for Russian, Ukrainian, and Eurasian affairs, told reporters at the Pentagon on Friday that the donation of the Bradleys reflects the progress that Ukraine has made in maintaining and equipping its forces. It also reflects the current state of the conflict, which has seen Ukrainian forces press toward deeply reinforced Russian positions in the south and eastern portions of the country.

“This is the right time for Ukraine to take advantage of its capabilities to change the dynamic on the battlefield,” Cooper said. “And from a maintenance and sustainment standpoint—and this is really important—the Ukrainians have demonstrated a lot of growing proficiency in maintenance and sustainment both within Ukraine and relying on new systems that we have set up with our allies and partners to provide what we call tele-maintenance in many instances. So at this point, the Ukrainians really are set up for success once we are able to train them on the system.”

The biggest-ever aid package reflects changing Western attitudes toward arming Ukraine and the new realities of the battlefield. Russia, having lost more than half of the territory it seized at the start of the war, is now hunkered down along the southeastern coast of the country and the Donbas. This week, a senior White House official said that “the Russians have dug in, really dug in, down towards the south. They have taken much more defensive, much more focused [positions] more on defensive lines and defense...in depth down in the south than they have in the northeast.”

The Biden administration’s hope is that more intense joint maneuver and combined arms operations will erode those reinforced positions at minimal loss to the Ukrainians.

Some additional munitions in the package announced Friday include RIM-7 “Seasparrow” air-defense missiles, and 4,000 Zuni aircraft rockets that can be mounted on fixed- or rotary-wing aircraft. Cooper emphasized that the Zunis are specifically for short-range air-to-ground operations.

Ukraine says recent pledges show that key weapons are no longer ‘taboo’ for its allies - Ukraine says Allies no longer view giving key weapons as ‘taboo’ - The NYT Ukraine says recent pledges show that key weapons are no longer ‘taboo’ for its allies. The foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba, welcomed pledges this week from France, Germany and the United States of military aid that his government had been seeking for months.

Lindsey Graham calls on Biden to supply 'heavy modern tanks' to Ukraine for war against Russia - SC Sen. Graham called on President Biden to send tanks to Ukraine, as requested by Ukrainian President Zelenskyy.

The Republican lawmaker urged Biden to act following an announcement that France would send the first western tanks to Ukraine to aid the fight against Russia's invasion. France will supply AMX-10 RC light tanks to Ukraine, an aide to French President Emmanuel Macron told reporters Thursday, according to French news agency AFP.

"I appreciate France agreeing to provide light armored combat vehicles to Ukraine – but this is not enough," Graham tweeted. "The goal for 2023 is to give the Ukrainians the weapons they need to militarily defeat the Russian invaders. This requires heavy modern tanks.

Ukraine welcomes agile armour it says will give it a fighting edge - On the roads leading to Ukraine’s frontlines, a striking change has become visible in recent months.

Where once the armored vehicles being ferried in were familiar from the Soviet era – T-model tanks, BMPs and post-Soviet Ukrainian-built BTRs – they have in recent months been joined by a growing array of western-supplied vehicles.

Bushmasters from Australia can be seen alongside Polish Dziks and British-made Spartans, soon joined by scores of even more impressive vehicles: US Bradley and German Marder infantry fighting vehicles and French AMX-10 tank destroyers.

Russian Mobilization

Russia reportedly hiring mercenaries in the Balkans - The Balkans are the main source of mercenary fighters for Russia, according to the National Resistance Center, an organization operated by Ukraine's Special Forces.

According to the center, a key figures in the recruitment process is veteran Serbian mercenary sniper, Deyan Berich, who fought for Russia against Ukraine in 2014. And a Serb mercenary Zika Radoic, who is currently fighting for Russia.

Russia is increasingly relying on mercenaries in Ukraine, according to British government officials, who said that there are now 20,000 Wagner Group fighters in the country.

Estonian intelligence: Russia never stopped mobilization drive - Estonia's Intelligence Chief Margo Grosberg believes that Russia is about to announce a new mobilization drive after the Jan. 7 Orthodox Christmas holiday. However, Grosberg said that since the first wave in the fall, mobilization in Russia has never actually stopped.

About 300,000 Russian men have already been conscripted and are already being deployed to the front lines. If the second wave sees comparable results, the new conscripts should arrive in Ukraine by March or April.

Zelenskyy says Russia was planning to call up more troops for a major new offensive, even as Moscow was facing some of its biggest internal criticism of the war over a strike that killed scores of fresh conscripts, according to Reuters.

Kyiv has been saying for weeks that Russian President Vladimir Putin plans to order another mass conscription drive and shut his borders to prevent men from escaping the draft.

Russian armed forces on steroids - Since January 1, the ceiling of military personnel in the Russian Armed Forces has been increased from 1,013,628 to 1,150,628 service members, which exceeds the ceiling for 2006–2016 of 1,134,800 people. This is the nominal number as the true number of personnel within the Russian Armed Forces usually tends to be lower. For instance, the officially stated quantity in 2016 was 770,000 and did not change much before February 2022 (Sc.mil.ru, January 2017). Moreover, the real number inevitably decreased after Russia launched its all-out aggression against Ukraine and Russian forces started suffering from heavy losses, increased discharges and a lack of new recruits, as Moscow involved almost all available combat-capable and support forces in the war, about 250,000 service members.

In this way, the Russian leadership announced the potential increase of the personnel ceiling in August 2022 and began the so-called “partial mobilization” in September 2022. The main purposes here were: (a) preventing the discharge of tens of thousands of contracted soldiers whose short-term (starting at three months) and standard (starting at two years) contracts were closer to expiration; (b) partially restoring manpower through the mobilization of reservists; and (c) reserving more money in the defense budget for additional combat salaries, equipment and compensation for dead and wounded military personnel by adding 137,000 new positions for military personnel.

Furthermore, on December 21, 2022, Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu announced a plan to increase the maximum number of military personnel in the Russian Armed Forces to 1.5 million in the coming years, increasing the number of contracted soldiers to 695,000 (planned to reach 521,000 by the end of 2023) (Mil.ru, December 21, 2022).

The problem here is that the number of contracted soldiers on the eve of February 2022 hardly exceeded 405,000, and it was originally planned to grow to only 500,000 by 2027 (Rg.ru, March 25, 2020). Therefore, such a rapid increase would only be hypothetically possible through the massive coercion of Russian society into military service.

The measures of this coercion are clear: (a) another wave (or waves) of mobilization that increases the number of contracted soldiers, despite the official denial of such plans (Publication.pravo.gov, November 2, 2022); (b) expanded efforts to increase the number of drafted soldiers who sign contracts from the very beginning of their military service; and (c) a heightened focus on decreasing the number of Russian young men fleeing conscription through education programs in colleges and universities, as the age range for conscription is planned to increase from between the ages of 18 and 27 to between 21 and 30. The possible extension of conscription military terms from one year to between one and a half and two years cannot be excluded as well, despite the fact that it would be a highly unpopular measure. Also, the Russian military has been extending a network of military education centers within Russian universities, where, in 2021, 63,000 students were engaged in four-year military training programs. The alumni of such centers may be mobilized and forced to sign contracts as well.

However, the Russian Armed Forces continue to suffer from long-term troubles in their command-and-control system, and these troubles are being further aggravated by a growing deficit of junior officers (Kremlin.ru, December 21, 2022). Consequently, it is difficult to say how precisely the number of personnel in the Russian military can be increased significantly and how all the planned new divisions would function in practice.

Geopolitics

EU-Africa relations: Counting the spillover costs from Russia's war - Last February's EU-African Union summit in Brussels, delayed for a year by the COVID-19 pandemic, was supposed to herald the start of a renewed push towards a 'partnership of equals' between the two blocs.

However, it was immediately overshadowed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which has made EU-Africa relations even more complicated and its spillover effects will continue to dominate EU-Africa ties over the coming months.

There are no such set-piece summits planned for 2023.

At a follow-up meeting between the EU and the AU in November, the two sides agreed that the EU would start to allocate funds for infrastructure investment from its Global Gateway programme and provide support for an African Medicines Agency, alongside the creation of a "high-level dialogue on economic integration with a view to strengthen trade relations and sustainable investment."

These promises hint at much lower ambition. The Global Gateway programme, intended to be the EU's answer to China's Belt and Road initiative, will start paying out €750 million over the coming year. Compared to the tens of billions offered by Beijing, it is a drop in the ocean.

In the meantime, the fallout from Russia's war will continue to spill over into EU-Africa relations.

African states have been paying a high price from the resulting disruption to wheat and grain imports and key agricultural inputs such as fertilizers. Coupled with high inflation – another effect of Russia's war – these have pushed the likes of Ghana, Egypt, and Kenya to agree bailouts with the International Monetary Fund in recent months.

Russian lobbying in Africa, meanwhile, is increasing, with reports that Andrey Melnichenko, the founder of fertiliser giant Eurochem, has been courting African National Congress officials in South Africa in a bid to ease the sanctions regimes and the resulting tensions will only get worse in the coming months if the war continues.

Earlier this week, EU foreign affairs high representative Josep Borrell made his first trip of the new year to Morocco.

The North African state is one of the EU's most important partners on the continent, particularly on migration, security and trade. However, like many African countries, Morocco has also sought to retain good diplomatic relations with Russia and refused to condemn its invasion of Ukraine.

The shadow of Russian influence also hangs over the EU's embattled diplomatic and security agenda in the Sahel.

EU chief diplomat Borrell stated last year that the EU "is not abandoning the Sahel" but is instead "restructuring our presence" in the region, but the announcement of troop withdrawals by France and Germany last year and over the coming twelve months points to difficult months ahead.

Last year, the German government stated that it would start pulling out troops by mid-2023 and completely withdraw its soldiers by May 2024,

The increasing anti-French and, more broadly, anti-Western sentiment, in the Sahel region was underscored by Burkina Faso's military junta moving to expel France's ambassador, Luc Hallade, earlier this week, months after its neighbour Mali did the same.

It also comes less than two weeks after the UN's humanitarian coordinator in Burkina Faso, Barbara Manzi, was also declared persona non grata.

The military regimes in Mali and Burkina Faso have both stepped up their diplomatic contacts with Russia, and the Russian mercenary organization, the Wagner Group, is increasingly influential. It is likely that Chad, Niger, and other countries in the Sahel and neighboring regions will also be targeted by the Kremlin.

The EU has recently launched programs aimed at tackling what the European Commission describes as Russian 'disinformation' on social media in the Sahel. Officials in Brussels are also keenly aware that Russia wants to expand its presence via the Wagner group in the region. Less clear is whether they can do anything to stop it.

US-Japan Talks - U.S. President Biden will hold talks with Japanese PM Kishida at the White House on January 13 covering North Korea, Ukraine, China's tensions with Taiwan, and a "free and open Indo-Pacific," the White House said on Tuesday.

The two leaders will discuss "a range of regional and global issues including the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's unlawful weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missile programs, Russia's brutal war against Ukraine, and maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," the White House said.

Coming apart at the seams? for Russia's ethnic minorities, Ukraine war is a chance to press for independence from Moscow - In October, Chechen native Rustam Azhiyev – known by the nom de guerre Abdul-Khakim Shishani – traveled to Ukraine and joined an all-Chechen unit fighting with Kyiv against the Russian invasion. Now 41, he has been waging war against Russia since he was 19, and he views the conflict in Ukraine as just a continuation of the cause he took up then.

"In 1999, the war began," Azhiyev said, referring to the Second Chechen War, during which he rose to become commander of the central front for the unrecognized separatist state of Ichkeria – and Vladimir Putin, then Russia's little-known new prime minister, played the leading role in Moscow. "And in 2000, at 19, I joined the popular resistance. All my life has been tied to the confrontation with Russia.

Azhiyev is far from the only one from Russia who sees the war in Ukraine as a chance for ethnic minorities inside the country to push for greater autonomy or even independence.

"The Erzya people have been occupied by the empire for 800 years," Erzyan elder Syres Boleyan told a meeting of the League of Free Nations, an organization uniting representatives of minority groups inside Russia that are seeking to

secede, in July. His said his ethnic group of some 800,000 people, whose historical homeland is in what is now the Russian Republic of Mordovia, was also sending volunteers to fight for Ukraine.

Putin's war in Ukraine has already lasted far longer and proven far more costly than Moscow anticipated in many ways. As it continues with no sign of an end, many observers say centrifugal forces are growing in the vast and highly centralized Russian Federation. These forces, they argue, will strengthen as the pressures of the war and unprecedented economic sanctions erode Moscow's leverage over Russia's regions, from the Baltic and Black seas to the Pacific.

Opinions vary wildly on how likely such a scenario might be. Many analysts agree that the war is shaking the centralized power structure Putin has created over nearly a quarter-century as president or prime minister. Western estimates indicate at least 20,000 Russian soldiers have been killed, with tens of thousands more wounded, captured, or missing.

Comment – This figure – 20,000 – is nearly double that which Ukraine confirms as Russians killed, but they take time to confirm with ID documents and name tags where at all possible. Ukraine's numbers in October were also well below a number obtained from within the FSB in Russia.

Hundreds of thousands of people – many of them in their prime earning years – have fled the country. The international community has imposed sweeping sanctions against Russia, with tough measures targeting Moscow's vital oil and gas revenues just beginning to be felt.

"I see a certain disorder in the governing system," said political analyst Dmitry Oreshkin. "The power vertical they have been building...is beginning to shake at a critical moment.

"If Putin loses the war – and that is a very realistic possibility – then I don't see any legal means to change the government. As a result, the siloviki will settle things among themselves," he said, referring to the leaders of the military and security agencies.

There's a crucial caveat.

Paul Goble, a retired analyst for the CIA, the U.S. State Department, and RFE/RL, pointed out that many observers failed to predict the breakup of the Soviet Union "even a few months or weeks" before it happened.

Putin, Goble argued, has accelerated the potential collapse of Russia because **"his actions don't represent the resurrection of the Soviet Union but the re-creation of the conditions leading to its collapse** – including the antagonism of minorities and Russia's estrangement from the world."

'Genocide Against The National Minorities'

The resentments of Russia's ethnic minorities were aroused from the beginning of the February invasion and intensified when Moscow, having failed to take Kyiv and subjugate Ukraine in the first weeks, began throwing more and more manpower into battle. Increasingly, they felt the men from their communities were being disproportionately singled out to do the fighting and dying for Moscow's ambitions.

Citing what he said was "rather complete documentation on the number of casualties by region" published by the BBC, analyst Oreshkin said that "any geographer can immediately compare this information with the population figures from those regions and see the catastrophic results.

"For instance, in Tyva, there has been one soldier killed for every 3,300 adults, while in Moscow that figure is one to 480,000 adults," he said. "That is a difference of more than 100 times."

The impetus for the independence movements grew dramatically in September, when Putin announced military mobilization. Despite the repression in Russia, protests against mobilization had to be put down in southern Russia and

the North Caucasus. More than a dozen recruitment offices across the country have experienced arson attacks. As many as 700,000 young Russian men left the country, Forbes wrote in October, citing a Kremlin source.

Moscow seems to be taking the threat of the secessionist movements seriously, cracking down on minority political and social organizations and persecuting activists. That activity was stepped up considerably in the period just before the Ukraine invasion and has continued over the 10 months since. In July, Moscow declared the Free Idel-Ural civic movement that advocates an independent state in the mid-Volga region an “undesirable organization.” A month earlier, the All-Tatar Public Center was shut down and tarred “extremist.”