

# Conflict Update # 24

April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## Conflict Assessment

**Ukrainian forces retain control** - of defensive positions in eastern and southwestern Mariupol, despite Russian claims to have captured most of the city. ISW was able to confirm the specific locations of ongoing Russian assaults on April 8 for the first time in several days. Russian forces continue to attempt to regroup and redeploy units withdrawn from northeastern Ukraine to support an offensive in eastern Ukraine, but these units are unlikely to enable a Russian breakthrough and face poor morale. Russian forces along the Izyum-Sloviansk axis did not make any territorial gains in the last 24 hours. Ukrainian counterattacks toward Kherson continue to threaten Russian positions around the city.

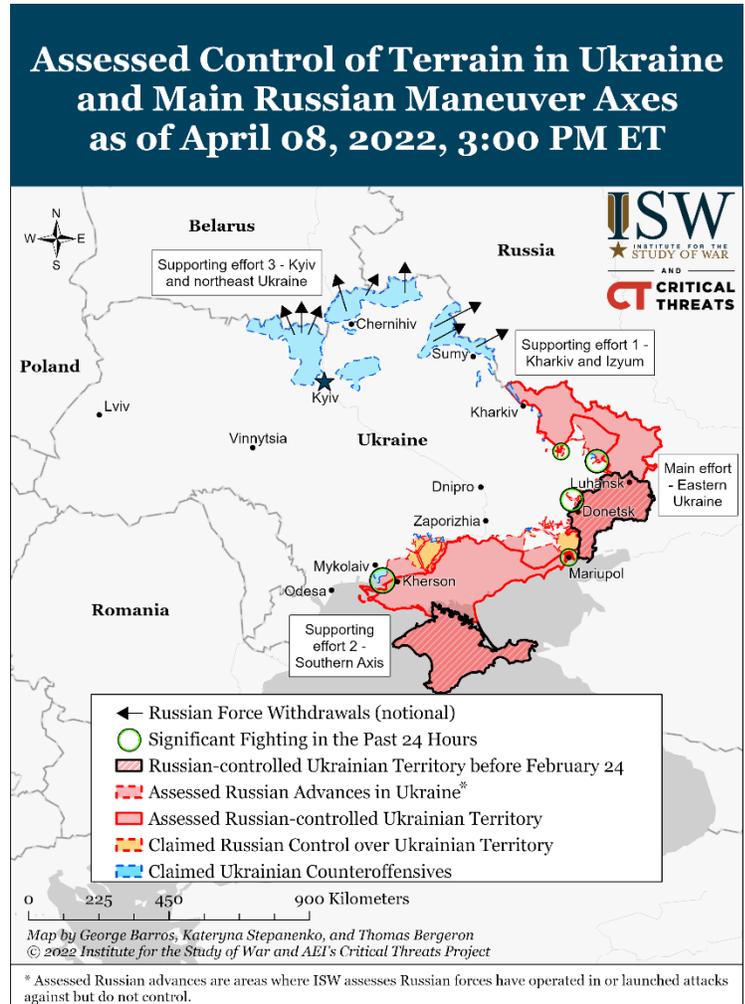
**Russian atrocities in Ukraine** - Kremlin efforts to falsely blame Ukraine for these atrocities and continuing Ukrainian battlefield successes have reduced the willingness of the Ukrainian government and society to reach a peace agreement less than total Russian defeat.

**Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky** - specified for the first time that Ukraine's desired "security guarantees" in lieu of NATO membership are written commitments from several states to provide Ukraine with immediate military aid and enact sanctions on Russia in the event of further Russian aggression.

**The Kremlin is blaming the United States** - for Russian atrocities against civilians in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha, where Russian troops killed around 400 Ukrainian civilians. Western states imposed additional sanctions and expelled Russian diplomats in response to the Russian atrocities.

**The Kremlin is setting conditions** - to blame Ukraine for Russian atrocities in occupied areas and may be intentionally doing so in areas where the Kremlin knows Russian forces have already killed civilians to disguise Russian culpability.

**Russian forces are accelerating operations** - to install governance structures in occupied Ukraine and are detaining or killing Ukrainian mayors.



**Kremlin media increasingly seeks** - to justify Russian atrocities and the intentional targeting of Ukrainian civilians to a Russian domestic audience.

**The Kremlin is attempting to frame** - the global economic consequences of its invasion of Ukraine as a result of Western sanctions to call for their removal.

**Newly announced weapons shipments** - from the United Kingdom and the United States will supplement Ukrainian supplies and expand Ukrainian capabilities to target Russian forces massed in southern Ukraine and in the Black Sea.

**The Norman Move #2?** – Is Russia trying another “Norman Move”? Are they removing forces and feinting to the east – so as to draw Ukrainian forces to that theater of war – and then unleash 30,000 Belarussian soldiers with 300 tanks back into northern Ukraine to capture Kyiv?

**Russia’s recruitment dilemma** – as of 2021, all Russians between 18 and 27 are mandated to serve a 1-year conscription period in the armed forces. The anniversary thereof is April 1<sup>st</sup> every year.

April 1<sup>st</sup> has arrived, and the Russian government is contract-bound to withdraw the previous year’s conscripts. That is now. Does that explain partly the withdrawal from around Ukraine?

But it delivers another dilemma – replacing them with new recruits? – these will all be raw and untrained folk, but does Russia really care?

Reports are now surfacing that they are mobilizing 60,000 reservists to supplement eastern forces.

With their apparent lack of smart weaponry, Russia is committed to either (i) mass advance – as has been witnessed thus far, with its indiscriminate shelling or (ii) weapons of mass destruction.

The 60,000 enlistments, together with the massing of troops and equipment to the east, speaks that is still currently the former tactic. NATO is sending in huge amounts of weaponry, with anti-tank, anti-aircraft and anti-ship missiles “leading the charge.” It is reported from the Pentagon that they have provided Ukraine with an anti-tank missile arsenal of 10 missiles to every Russian tank.

The US is also sending in the Switchblade 600 unmanned models. These are for anti-tank use and have a devastating impact.

From this, it appears that NATO and Ukraine have recognized Russian strategy and tactics and are moving rapidly to prepare Ukrainian defenses accordingly.

This has the makings of a huge conflict along the lines of WWII battles.

**Import of Ukrainian Success** – the import of a successful Ukrainian defense cannot be underestimated. Should Russia succeed in overrunning Ukraine forces, it will not stop there.

Should Ukrainian forces withstand a Russian onslaught it will stop Russia in its tracks and deter its overall strategy.

The West is keenly aware of this and is reacting to match any Russian threat or advance.

**April 1<sup>st</sup> message to Russian mothers** – with the recruitment switch as mentioned above, the time has now arrived for the Russian military to account for the conscripts they sent into Ukraine, ostensibly after they told them this would not happen. It is also reported that contractually, conscripts would not be entered into “hot” zones.”

As mentioned previously, Putin was forced to address this issue on national TV to pacify mothers of Russian conscripts who feared for their sons and daughters. It is a Russian Achilles Heel and a constant fear of Putin and the system.

Now that conscripts are being switched, and with a reported 18,000 fatalities in the 2021/22 batch, the time has arrived to either send them home, or declare what happened to them. Dmitry Petrov's admission earlier this week that Russia has suffered "significant losses" may be a forerunner to this dilemma.

A (conventional) military ratio exists of 3:1 - injured versus killed in war. If this manifests in Russian casualties, then 18,000 killed translates into a further 54,000 injured. This comprises a **38%** casualty rate – in 6 weeks of war. Those maimed or injured similarly need to be moved home. And they will carry stories about the conflict with them. See the following headline regarding returning Russian soldiers refusing to reenter the war.

**Refusing to enter combat** - Russian forces are increasingly refusing to reenter combat, and the Kremlin remains unlikely to quickly redeploy effective forces from northeastern Ukraine to operations in Donbas. The Ukrainian General Staff reported that more than **80%** of personnel in some unspecified Russian units previously involved in combat operations are refusing to return to the front. Russian commanders are reportedly refusing to release soldiers whose service contracts have expired, forcing them to stay with their units.

### **Russian "Elite" Brigades being decimated**

**331<sup>st</sup> Brigade** - In any war, there are units that distinguish themselves and others that become symbolic of failure. The 331st Guards Parachute Regiment had high hopes of being the first, but now represents the disintegration of Russia's plan for a quick war.

The men in the 331st regarded themselves as the pick of Russia's army. In a video posted online last May, a general tells soldiers of the 331st Parachute Regiment that they are "the best of the best". The unit served in the Balkans, Chechnya, and the 2014 Russian intervention in the Donbas region of Ukraine, and regularly took part in Red Square parades in Moscow. They were also a showcase for Russia's policy of replacing national service soldiers with kontraktniki - professionals under contract. It is understandable why the generals should have given it an important role in the invasion.

The men were part of a column that advanced into Ukraine from Belarus, led by Russia's airborne forces. Their presence underlined the **priority of their objective - advancing on the capital, Kyiv.**

From early March, reports began to circulate of deaths in the 331st. It took time for bodies to be returned to Kostroma, the community where it is based, 300km north-east of Moscow.

As the funerals started, an anguished conversation began playing out on social media. Memorial walls on V'kontakte - the Russian equivalent of Facebook - pledge "eternal memory" and feature pictures of candles.

On the memorial wall for Sergeant Sergei Duganov, one woman wrote: "Nobody knows anything. The 331st regiment is disappearing. Almost every day, photos of our Kostroma boys get published. It sends shivers down my spine. What's happening? When will this end? When will people stop dying?"

Her post was followed by another, which exclaimed: "Kostroma has lost so many young men, what a tragedy". Another pleaded: "God, how many more death notifications shall we receive? Please have mercy on our boys, help them survive, return them back home to their wives and mothers. I'm begging you!"

It is reported that the entire regiment was wiped out in the first week of the war by Ukrainian forces.

**38th OMSBr zs rf [38th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade]** - The Ukrainian military account shared photos of several destroyed vehicles in a wooded area, as well as a patch bearing the Russian 38th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade's insignia.

It is not clear how many Russian troops may have been killed or how many Russian vehicles were destroyed in the battle with the 38th Separate Guards Motorized Rifle Brigade but reports indicate it too was wiped out by Ukrainian forces. SOFREP reported the entire Russian unit never made it to Belgorod and the Ukrainian military's description of the unit as "scrap metal" could suggest the unit's near-total destruction.

**141 motorized regiment of the Chechnya National Guard.** - Ukrainian military forces destroyed a Chechen special forces column of 56 tanks near the capital of Kyiv in late-February. These were elite Chechnyan forces and a source of pride to Putin personally. They were completely wiped out, including their commanding general. This unit was supposed to have headed into Kyiv in double-quick time and as the vanguard of Russian forces following behind.

Completely routed, it is reported that Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov was furious with Kremlin commanders whom he apparently lambasted for sending his prize battalion "to its death" and the death of top Chechen general Magomed Tushayev.

This unit was reportedly deployed by Russia to "capture and kill" Ukrainian leaders, including Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. The Daily Mail claimed that every soldier in the Chechen force was given a deck of cards displaying pictures of Ukrainian officials the Kremlin had deemed high valuable targets, a tool infamously deployed by the United States while hunting down targets in Iraq.

However, the convoy of 56 tanks was targeted by Ukrainian missile fire near the town of Hostomel, just northeast of Kyiv, and obliterated only a couple of days into its mission, according to reports. The death toll caused by the attack was unknown but alleged to reach the hundreds.

## Financial

**Targeting Russia's funding** - When it comes to sanctions against Russia, the West is using an "everything but" strategy — doing all they can to cut the country off from the global economy, while still allowing it to make lucrative energy sales to Europe.

Against that backdrop, a few of the steps the U.S. and Europe took this week are designed to — at least on the margins — blunt Russia's ability to plow energy revenues into funding its conquest of Ukraine.

The Treasury Department on Monday said Russia can't use its dollar reserves, held in U.S. bank accounts, to make payments on its government bonds. Then on Tuesday, the E.U. proposed banning Russian coal imports.

The first action puts to the test Russia's resolve to not default on its debt in the international markets (more on why Russia might care about that).

- Up until Monday, the Treasury had been allowing Russia to tap those reserves — which the agency had otherwise frozen — if the funds were being used to pay U.S. holders of Russian sovereign debt.
- Now: If Russia wants to avoid a default, it will have to decide between draining its remaining dollar reserves parked elsewhere, or spending new revenue that comes in.

**Black Sea Basin** - Russian war on Ukraine is wreaking havoc on commercial maritime trade across Black Sea basin.

## EU

**Ursula von der Leyen offers speedy response to Ukraine's bid to join EU** - European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said the civilian deaths in the Ukrainian town of Bucha showed the "cruel face" of Russia's army and pledged to try to speed Ukraine's bid to become a member of the European Union.

# NATO

**Finland preparing for Russian ‘consequences’ if it joins NATO** - By all signs, Finland is heading towards a decision on joining the NATO alliance within the next few months, if not weeks. And in the process, a top Finnish defense official tells Breaking Defense, the country has to prepare for the reality of a furious, but unpredictable response from Moscow.

## Widening of Conflict

**Diversion tactics?** – In order to divert global attention to the Russian situation, is there a diversion being planned – such as Serbia going up against Bosnia?

When Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had been part of Yugoslavia, was declared an independent nation in 1992, it was made up of ethnic Serbs, Bosniaks, and Croats. Bosnian Serbs, who were outnumbered in the new nation, resisted Bosnian independence, however. They were supported by ethnic Serbs in other parts of the former Yugoslavia, including the neighboring nations of Serbia and Croatia.

Soon after Bosnia and Herzegovina was recognized as an independent nation, Bosnian Serbs began attacking towns and cities with large Bosniak populations. Within weeks, nearly two thirds of Bosnian territory was under Serb control. More than 1 million Bosniaks and Croats were forced from their homes and roughly 100,000 people killed in what became a proven case of genocide by the Bosnian Serb army.



Late last year, Bosnian Serb leader Milorad Dodik sparked fears of a secession bid when he said Republika Srpska (shown in dark blue in the map) would pull out of three key Bosnia Herzegovina state institutions — the armed forces, the top judiciary body and the tax agency.

Serbia and Russia have maintained a freindship and the latter may see a long-festering issue in the Balkans as a prime opportunity to instigate dissent and distraction leading to an escalation of Serbian rhetoric to action.

**Georgia** - South Ossetia is signaling readiness to be absorbed by Russia, but Abkhazia rejects annexation.

**South Ossetia**, as reported in a previous War Update, has for an extended period been the focus of a breakaway from the State of Georgia, declaring independence from Georgia in 1991, although Georgia does not acknowledge this claim.

Russia recognised South Ossetia, a Georgian province of 53,000, as an independent state in 2008 after fighting a short war with Georgia. It has provided the separatist region with extensive financial support, offered Russian citizenship to its population and stationed thousands of Russian troops there.



Anatoly Bibilov, the separatist leader of South Ossetia's spokeswoman told Russia's RIA Novosti news agency that the region planned to hold a referendum and the decision was "linked with the window of opportunity that opened in the current situation," referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Paata Zakareishvili, who served as Georgia's state minister for reconciliation and civil equality from 2012 to 2016, underscored that Bibilov could hardly have dared to announce such a referendum without Moscow's prior sanction.

Reportedly, in March, around a thousand ethnic Ossetians serving at the Russian military base in Tskhinvali (the capital of South Ossetia) were sent into combat near Kyiv and in eastern Ukraine. Dozens of the Ossetian troops died in subsequent battles, and most of the South Ossetian military force fled from Ukraine back home. Upon their return, these soldiers professed they had been "in hell" and sharply criticized the authorities of the breakaway republic for agreeing to Russian demands to send them to war.

**Abkhazia**, as also reported on previously, is another breakaway province of Georgia, but has not indicated any preference to join Russia.

**Into Russia?** - Ex-Russian Military Leader Warns Ukraine War Could Move Into Russia - During an appearance on the Russian television program Radar, Igor Girkin, a former Russian military leader who prefers to go by Igor Strelkov, said that if Russia doesn't mobilize its military forces, its war with Ukraine could cross over into Russia.

"Many Russian units withdrawing from northern Ukraine are likely to require significant re-equipping and refurbishment before being available to redeploy for operations in eastern Ukraine."

## Containment

**US to send Patriot system to Slovakia to offset S-300 transfer to Ukraine** – Slovakia is transferring its S300 anti-aircraft systems to Ukraine. They would only do so should the US replace them with a new defense system, this the US has now done. The S-300 is regarded as one of the most potent anti-aircraft missile systems currently fielded.

Russia has the more advanced S400 system and is reportedly ready with a S500 prototype. The S400 system was recently acquired by Turkey from Russia, much to the angst of the US. The fear being that Turkey's latest US-supplied aircraft could be compromised by matching the two.

Although the UN lifted the arms embargo on Iran late last year and de facto untied Tehran's hands to buy Russian and Chinese weapons, there is no official information so far that the Iranians will "operate or acquire" the S-400.

## Sanctions

**European Union envoys are set to approve a ban on Russian coal** - that would take full effect from mid-August, a month later than initially planned, two EU sources told Reuters, following pressure from Germany to delay the measure. Here's how EU countries are hunting for global coal stocks.

**New EU sanctions have direct impact on transport, rail excluded** - A fifth package of sanctions has been announced by the EU. Among others, the EU wants to ban Russian and Belarusian road transport operators, as well as Russian vessels and Russian-operated vessels from accessing EU ports. Rail freight operations from Russia to Europe will remain possible.

The ban on Russian vessels road shipments excludes the transport of essentials, such as agricultural and food products, humanitarian aid as well pharmaceuticals, as these are in the interest of the EU.

However, the inclusion of the transport sector in the new list of sanctions is expected to “drastically limit the options for the Russian industry to obtain key goods,” the European Commission said. It is the first time that the transport sector is explicitly targeted in the sanctions of the EU against Russia.

**Central Asia and Russia Sanctions** - International sanctions imposed on Russia in the wake of its massive re-invasion of Ukraine present both challenges and opportunities for Central Asian economies, which are spread asymmetrically across the region. Three decades since the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia remains an important economic partner for the Central Asian republics, being the second-largest export and import destination for each of them.

**Firstly**, remittances from Russia account of a significant share of the GDP of three Central Asian countries: 28 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 30 percent in Tajikistan, and 12 percent in Uzbekistan.

The **second** negative effect was related to a slowdown in Russia’s economic activity and a drop in remittances. The expected loss of jobs by Central Asian guest workers in Russia is expected to cause a further decrease in wages sent back home—negatively impacting their countries’ GDPs.

The **third** negative effect is the prospect of sovereign default in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. These countries have accumulated significant sovereign debt (mostly to China) and have already been struggling to repay it. (Sri Lanka is also finding out the hard way about repaying Chinese debt and may similarly shortly default on its obligations.

The **fourth** negative consequence is the prospect of secondary sanctions as well as reputational risks. Traders reported that the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), which ships 1.2 percent of the world’s oil from Kazakhstan to global markets, has already faced difficulties. Buyers are now avoiding its oil because of its mixture with Russian volumes and difficulties with insuring the ships transporting the petroleum from the Russian port of Novorossiisk.

**Moral sanctions** - Experts say the shipping industry's 'moral sanctions' against Russian trade are unlike anything 'in the history of mankind.' Companies up and down the supply chain have severed ties with Russia over the past month, citing everything from safety concerns to financial sanctions.

"Companies like Nike or Apple or IKEA pulled out of Russia, saying it's immoral to make money with Russia and support Putin's work," he said. "We've never seen that. Nobody's ever seen that."

The term "moral sanctions" implies that companies are going beyond the letter of the law purely for ethical reasons. But as seen in the Shell example, reputational risk is also at play.

**Human Rights Council sanction** - UN General Assembly voted to suspend Russia from the Human Rights Council, Russia promptly resigned from the Council.

**Japan announces expulsion of 8 Russian officials, imposes new sanctions** - Japan announced Friday it is expelling eight Russian diplomats and trade officials and will phase out imports of Russian coal and oil, with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida saying Moscow must be held accountable for “war crimes” in Ukraine.

Kishida said Japan will also ban imports of Russian lumber, vodka and other goods, and will prohibit new Japanese investment in Russia.

It will also step up financial sanctions against Russian banks and freeze assets of about 400 more individuals and groups, including military-linked organizations, Kishida said at a news conference.

**Wealthy Russians and oligarchs** are reportedly buying as many as 4 apartments at once in Turkey in attempt to earn 'golden passports'. Wealthy Russians, "some of them oligarchs," are buying as many as four apartments at once in Turkey in order to qualify for citizenship there, the CEO of Istanbul based real-estate company Golden Sign told The Wall Street Journal.

Gül Gül, the Golden Sign CEO, previously told Reuters that her company sells seven to eight units to Russians "every day," and said they often pay in cash or "bring gold."

## Impacts

**Ukraine's rail link to the west is EU's top priority** - The rail transportation links from Ukraine to Europe are now more important than ever. These links are not only a channel of refugee for those fleeing the country, but also the most important channel for Ukrainian export. This export is essential for global food security, as well as the economy of Ukraine itself.

**North Sea Oil** - The UK is planning to bolster offshore oil and gas production and offshore wind as part of an all-of-the-above energy security strategy, the administration of Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced Thursday.

"We're going to make better use of the oil and gas in our own backyard by giving the energy fields of the North Sea a new lease of life," said Johnson in a statement. "For years, governments have dodged the big decisions on energy, but not this one."

About half of the UK's gas demand is imported, but the government would like to cut that proportion. An estimated 560 billion cubic meters of gas remains in the UK North Sea, and the government will promote its use.

**Food prices** - Food prices soar to record levels on Ukraine war disruptions. The United Nations says prices for world food commodities like grains and vegetable oils have reached their highest levels ever because of Russia's war in Ukraine