

# Conflict Update Day 374

March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** – 151,370 (765) soldiers killed, 3,409 (+4) enemy tanks, 6,683 (+10) armored combat vehicles, 2,414 (+12) artillery systems, 487 (3) MLRS systems, 244 (+0) air defense systems, 302 (+1) warplanes, 289 (+0) helicopters, 2,066 (+5) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 873 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,289 (+8) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 230 (+0) units of equipment.

A Russian ex-pilot has been trying to track soldiers who have fallen in Kremlin BTGs,

having been arrested for publishing photographs and commentaries. He said on Telegram – *“There are so many obituaries and social media postings, that he says they had to recruit additional volunteers to help. The journalists post infographics to help illustrate some of their findings, like the fact that 121 Russian pilots have been killed in Ukraine, and nearly 200 officers with the rank of lieutenant colonel and above.”*

However, they are not currently publishing the names of the soldiers.

Another Russian reporter - Maxim Litavrin – stated *“We believe the Russian invasion is illegal and cruel, but we are not ready to reveal the names of the soldiers,” he said. “We don't think that is correct right now. We should do it when the war is over.”*

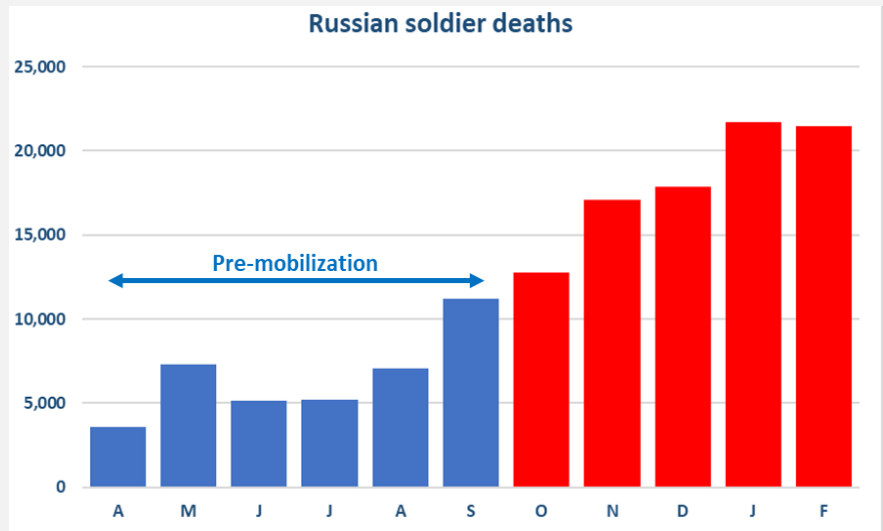
Despite the escalating death toll, Litavrin doesn't think the numbers are enough to sway public opinion about the war in Russia. He says *“Russian propaganda is working”* and in most of the social media posts he is reading, people aren't angry, but see the deaths as a necessity and part of a greater fight.

**Comment** – In a separate report it was revealed by German magazine Der Spiegel that over 1,800 Russian officers of all ranks have thus far been killed in Ukraine.

## Key Takeaways

**Tank loss in Vuhledar reveals Russia is repeating key mistakes: Expert** - Ukraine destroyed dozens of Russian tanks in Vuhledar, showing that Putin's army keeps on making key mistakes in the ongoing war, a military expert told Newsweek.

The New York Times reported this week that following the battle in Vuhledar in the Donetsk region, Ukraine claimed that it destroyed at least 130 Russian tanks and armored vehicles.



Retired U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Davis told Newsweek on Wednesday that Russia's reported loss shows a number of "tactical errors and mistakes...in ways that they should already know don't work."

Davis, who also serves as a senior fellow and military expert at Defense Priorities, said that the losses reported by Ukraine are "painful" for Russia and noted that they show a level of "inadequate capacity they should now possess."

Mark Cancian, a senior adviser with the Center for Strategic & International Studies International Security Program made similar comments to Newsweek and said that Russia's losses are "significant."

"In a sense it shows that the Russians are not able to effectively attack the Ukrainians, that they are at the tactical level, still not coordinating very well," Cancian said. "[Russia] has not been able to employ what's called combined arms. That is getting your infantry, tanks, artillery and air and engineers all working together."

**Russian occupation authorities are readying to flee settlements in Kherson** - Russian occupation authorities are preparing to flee from Kherson Oblast to Crimea, and local collaborators have also started leaving to the peninsula.

Ukrainian UGS's message further noted that the Kremlin's proxy officials who had departed the Kherson cities had begun leaving for the Crimean cities of Bakhchysarai, Simferopol and Kerch on February 21.

"To transport collaborators, the enemy deployed military trucks [and] only hand luggage is allowed to be taken," the General Staff of Ukraine's Armed Forces wrote on Facebook.

**Comment** – These transfers can be a prelude to a looming Russian offensive, moving their folk out of the way.

**Civilians flee Ukraine's Bakhmut as battle rages for eastern city** - Kyiv's forces try to help residents flee as Russian fighters press to capture city in eastern Ukraine.

Pressure is mounting on Ukrainian troops and civilians hunkering down in Bakhmut, as Kyiv's forces try to help residents flee the beleaguered eastern city.

A woman was killed and two men were badly wounded by shelling while trying to cross a makeshift bridge out of Bakhmut on Saturday, according to Ukrainian troops who were assisting them.

**Ukrainian commander says there are more Russians attacking the city of Bakhmut than there is ammo to kill them** - A Ukrainian commander said the situation in Bakhmut, a city in eastern Ukraine, is "critical" and that there are more Russian troops surrounding the city than there is ammunition to kill them all.

Volodymyr Nazarenko, a deputy commander in the National Guard of Ukraine, told Ukrainian NV Radio fighting is currently going on "round the clock" as Russians relentlessly push to capture the city.

"They take no account of their losses in trying to take the city by assault," Nazarenko said, adding that Ukrainian troops are trying to "inflict as many losses on the enemy as possible."

**Russian Army's 'Military Manual' to win the highly contested region 'seized' by Ukraine** - Russian military appears to be adopting a new tactical-level organizational structure to break through the Ukrainian defensive lines in eastern Ukraine, as per a Russian Army manual 'captured' by Ukraine's military.

The documents were shared by a famous Twitter handle named @Tatarigami\_UA, belonging to a Ukrainian Army reserve officer. He is known to be deployed near the frontlines in Vuhledar.

The documents, according to @Tatarigami\_UA, describe a new organizational structure called the Assault Detachments, which involve infantry advancing on foot, supported by armored vehicles on their flanks.

Theoretically, such an organizational structure is believed to offer lower-level officials more means to carry out battlefield tasks instead of depending on assets controlled by higher-echelon leaders.

**Zaporizhzhia attack death toll rises to 11, victims include 8-month-old girl and her family.** According to the State Emergency Services, the 11 people killed in a missile attack on Zaporizhzhia on March 2 included an 8-month-old girl and her entire family. A Russian S-300 missile hit a residential building in the early hours of March 2.

**A resistance group landed a drone on top of a Russian jet** - We still don't know for 100 percent sure if a Belarussian opposition group managed to damage a valuable Russian A-50 Mainstay aircraft using explosive-laden commercial drones to blast its fuselage and huge pancake-shaped radar antennas.

But it's looking more likely now that the Belarussian resistance group, known as BYPOL, has released footage of it landing a copter-drone directly on the aircraft's huge Vega Shmel-M ("Bumblee") radar dish, while parked near the Belarussian capital of Minsk, without anyone appearing to notice.

The video shows a quadcopter drone as it approaches the airbase on a sunny winter day, its rotors whining, and leisurely comes to a landing atop the radar dome of an A-50. The intrusion produces no apparent reaction, and the drone eventually lift off and flies away.

**Explosion reported by locals in Moscow region city Kolomna, Russian media say source could have been a drone** - Russia's Ministry of Emergency Situations has not found any "visual signs" of an explosion in the Moscow region city of Kolomna, located 114 km away from the Russian capital, where in the evening of 2 March the sounds of an explosion were heard by local residents, Russia's news agency Interfax reports, citing the press service of the regional directorate of the ministry.

Russia's state news agency TASS writes, citing law enforcement sources, that the explosion took place in the air. It could have been a drone, however, it is impossible to say with certainty, seeing as its fragments have not been located yet, the agency's interlocutor said.

**Most of Russian draftees from Irkutsk region who complained about being threatened by 'DPR' commanders and asked for Putin's help killed during assault on Avdiivka fortified area** - Most of the draftees from the Irkutsk region of Russia, members of regiment 1439, who previously complained about being threatened by their own DPR commanders, have been killed during the assault on the Avdiivka fortified area, relatives of two soldiers tell media outlet SibReal.

"My [husband] called me — wounded by shrapnel, he's in a hospital. He says that nothing was left of the regiment. So far, there is only information about two injured, the rest [of the regiment] were either killed or abandoned there in hard conditions. He will only be given a week [off]! Then he will be deployed to the front again," the wife of one of the draftees said.

Mobilised servicemen from the Irkutsk region appealed to Russian President Vladimir Putin thrice: they recorded two video messages asking for his help; the third time, their wives filed an official inquiry with the online-reception of the Chief Military Prosecutor's Office.

**Russia preparing key occupied city for 'siege'** - Russian troops occupying the southern city of Melitopol—touted by military experts as the gateway to the Crimea peninsula—are already digging in and preparing for a Ukrainian siege, according to the exiled mayor of the city.

Ivan Fedorov, who was briefly captured by invading Russian troops before being freed in a prisoner exchange, told journalists at a Media Center Ukraine briefing on Wednesday that locals had been passing information about Russian activities to Ukrainian forces, who sit on the other side of the front line bisecting the Zaporizhzhia region.

"They prepare the city for siege and defense," Fedorov said of Russian troops in and around Melitopol, which is one of the few major cities to have been taken by the invading forces in a year of fighting.

Melitopol is the second largest city in the Zaporizhzhia region and has become a key administrative and logistics center for the Russian occupation forces. Fedorov said locals are suffering under increasingly tight restrictions, partially in response to intense partisan activity that has claimed the lives of several high-profile pro-Russian collaborators.

## Containment

**US Commits \$400b to Ukraine in new package** - The \$400m military aid package for Ukraine announced yesterday adds to the nearly \$32bn in aid the US has sent Ukraine to help it defend itself against Russia.

"This military assistance package includes more ammunition for US-provided HIMARS and howitzers, which Ukraine is using so effectively to defend itself, as well as ammunition for Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles, Armored Vehicle Launched Bridges, demolitions munitions and equipment, and other maintenance, training, and support," US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in announcing the aid.

Anatoly Antonov, Russia's ambassador to the US, said that in providing increased military aid to Ukraine, Washington wanted to inflict a strategic defeat on Moscow but had no chance of succeeding, Russia's state TASS news agency said.

"All foreign weapons that fall into Ukrainian hands on the battlefield will be ground up and destroyed," TASS quoted Antonov as saying.

**The US is hosting war planning exercises in Germany for Ukrainian military officers** to help them think through battlefield decisions in the next phase of the conflict, officials have said.

**Nearly 10,000 Russians have contacted surrender hotline in 6 months** - Nearly 10,000 Russians have contacted the Ukrainian hotline set up for the Russian soldiers looking to surrender themselves to Ukrainian forces, Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War reported. Among those contacting the hotline were Russian soldiers and members of their families.

Launched in September 2022 by Ukraine's Main Directorate of Intelligence, the 24-hour "I Want to Live" hotline helps Russians to willingly surrender themselves or their units to the Ukrainian army. Russians are promised that after surrender, they will be held in compliance with the Geneva Conventions.

In addition to the hotline, there is also a chatbot and a website in Russian run by Ukraine's Defense Ministry with information about the program.

According to the report, 14 million people have visited the website since it was launched. Eighty-four percent of the site visits came from the territory of Russia, according to the report.

In December 2022, the Defense Ministry's Intelligence Directorate's representative Andriy Yusov said that the surrender hotline and its associated chat bot are contacted by over 100 people per day.

**Ambassador: UK to provide twice the promised Challenger 2 tanks to Ukraine** - The UK will give 28 Challenger 2 main battle tanks instead of the earlier promised 14, Ukrainian Ambassador to the U.K. Vadym Prystaiko told Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty in an interview.

"If we were promised 14 tanks, then as a result of Zelenskyy's visit, that number will double," Prystaiko said.

Prystaiko said that the U.K. is talking to Ukraine, not in terms of what specific platforms it needs, but what battlefield challenges it intends to solve.

The UK pledged the Challenger 2s as part of the Western allies' assistance package. Multiple countries promised to send dozens of German-made Leopard 2 tanks, and the U.S. promised to send 31 Abrams tanks later this year.

**Rheinmetall in talks to build 200 million euro tank factory in Ukraine.** German industrial factory Rheinmetall is in talks with Ukraine about building a 200 million euro tank factory on Ukrainian soil, German publication Rheinische Post reported on March 4. The plant would be able to produce up to 400 newly created Panther tanks per year. Air defense systems would ensure the plant's security, Rheinmetall chairman Armin Papperger told Rheinische Post in an interview.

**Germany asks Switzerland to sell mothballed Leopard 2 tanks** - Germany has asked Switzerland to sell it some of its mothballed Leopard 2 tanks, the Swiss government said on Friday, in a deal that could allow Germany and other countries to increase military aid to Ukraine.

Germany wants Switzerland to sell some of the tanks back to manufacturer Rheinmetall, which would allow the company to backfill gaps in the armaments of European Union and NATO members.

Germany, Poland, Portugal, Finland and Sweden are among countries sending Leopard tanks to help Ukraine defend itself against Russian attack, creating gaps in their own arsenals.

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius and Economics Minister Robert Habeck informed Swiss Defence Minister Viola Amherd about the project in a letter dated Feb. 23, the defence ministry told Reuters on Friday.

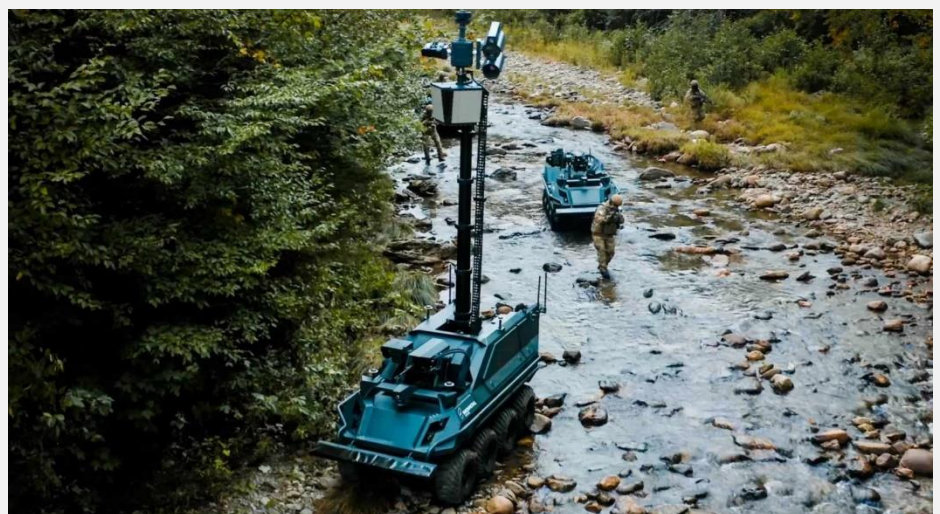
The story was first reported by Swiss newspaper Blick.

The Swiss military currently has 134 Leopard 2 tanks in service and a further 96 in storage. The government did not say how many Germany had requested to buy, but the VSB spokesman said the military had said it would be possible to dispense with a limited number of tanks.

**After Leopard 2 tanks, IRIS-T, Germany gives Ukraine SurveilSPIRE systems to track Russian forces -**

Germany is reportedly arming Ukraine with automated reconnaissance systems to 'keep an eye out' on Russian troops. On February 28, Rheinmetall announced it has begun supplying Ukraine with SurveilSPIRE automated reconnaissance systems.

The system includes wireless links (4G and Starlink) for video transmission to a mobile command post. Solar panels enable sustained operation without power cables or a fuel source.



In addition, according to the concern, the system relies on autopiloted reconnaissance drones that conduct patrols and mission-specific flights. This enables the inspection of detected threats and lets the operator initiate any necessary countermeasures.

**The USAF is building a giant panopticon to protect American nuclear missile silos** – The USAF’s Global Strike Command is trying to make an idealized security system only a supervillain could foil a bit closer to reality by awarding a new \$75.5 million contract to Persistent Systems, a small company based in New York. The goal: to unify the security umbrella over America’s arsenal of 400 operational Minuteman III intercontinental-range nuclear missile silos, spread in fields across remote areas of Colorado, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, and Wyoming.

All told, the new security network will cover of 25,000 square miles, making it the world’s largest wireless ad-hoc network by Persistent’s reckoning.

Presently, those nukes are divvied up between three Missile Wings with different main bases and separate security apparatuses:

- Francis E. Warren AFB, base of the 90th Missile Wing next to Cheyenne, Wyoming
- Malmstrom AFB and the 341st Missile Wing in Cascade County, Montana
- Minot AFB, base of the 91st Missile Wing near Minot, North Dakota

The company’s solution, dubbed the Infrastructure-based Regional Operation Network or IRON, is intended to provide the hardware to fulfill the Air Force’s ambition for a sort of shared panopticon called the Regional Operating Picture (ROP). The network should allow comprehensive updates on the positions of patrols, sightings of intruders, and so forth, thereby preventing Loki-style attacks and hijackings from befalling America’s land-based nuclear missile facilities, which themselves are slated for replacement by forthcoming new Sentinel missiles.



**A private company is using social media to track down Russian soldiers** - Six years ago, Payam Banazadeh was a Stanford student only theorizing about how to monitor the world 24/7. We can do global coverage all the time, night and day, all weather, with satellites looking at everywhere on Earth he said.

His Capella Space start-up has seven satellites orbiting in space, equipped with compact X-ray imaging cameras, taking surveillance pictures day and night, through clouds and bad weather, like Ukraine in winter.

For example he had X-ray images of Russian assault vehicles assembling on the Ukrainian border the night of February 23 signaled the actual invasion before it was officially announced.

*“Our third-party analysts use this imagery to then get tips to look at Google Maps and see essentially a traffic jam of military vehicles getting ready to move in.”*

Once the exclusive domain of the military and intelligence communities, tech start-ups like Capella Space and Planet Labs, also in San Francisco, launched a new cottage industry of smaller, cheaper satellites, some the size of a loaf of bread, to do commercial satellite surveillance for clients ranging from financial institutions to farmers.

And that's exactly what we're seeing right now as the events unfold in Ukraine - a bunch of new actors making their data available to decision-makers to really understand situational awareness, how things have been transgressing in a relatively short period of time.

Planet Labs, like Capella Space, got some of their initial contract funding from the Defense Innovation Unit, the Defense Department's start-up in the Silicon Valley for fast-tracking mission-critical technologies faster than the government's traditional procurement system, like it needed during the 2017 North Korean missile crisis.

“If you go back 20 years, they were literally parachuting film from space, and the Defense Department would pick it up somewhere in Kansas and develop the film and look at that. Now we have satellites literally looking at the whole Earth every day.”

James Crawford started Orbital Insight, one of the first commercial companies using artificial intelligence and machine learning for analyzing the millions of images from these new satellite sources to determine what the surveillance industry calls patterns of light, in Ukraine's case, the civilian exodus, which Orbital Insight's Jens Tellefsen started tracking soon after the invasion in late February.

Orbital Insight's CEO, Kevin O'Brien, came from the financial sector, which initially use satellite surveillance for tracking leading economic indicators, like shopping center parking lot activity for predicting retail sales.

**The “New Army”** – In line with the preceding article, I was watching battle front geofootage of Ukrainian ground units setting up to advance. Each unit has an operator with a drone and a minute portable screen, linking them to satellite coverage and communication.

Before advancing, they send out a drone out for aerial footage and scouting of enemy locations, strengths and movement. This provides them unique battlefield advantage over adversaries, allowing them to finely hone in and attack Russian positions.

New tanks arriving in Ukraine have a similar advantage in that they are electronically linked to ground surveillance – like the ground units mentioned here - and satellite coverage, automatically simulating positions and then directing fire to identified enemy coordinates. Russian vehicles do not have such advanced technology and in most instances at present, are actually drawn from 1960's Soviet-era tank storage sites – because they have not only lost a huge number of vehicles, but also destroyed some of their largest tanks supplier factories in Ukraine when initially invading last year.

## Sanctions

**Russia's oil and gas revenue reportedly tanked in February as price caps and sanctions ate into export earnings** - Russia's energy revenues almost halved last month as gas exports to Europe fell and price caps and sanctions imposed by Western countries eroded Moscow's earnings.

The tax revenue the country collects from selling its oil and gas sank 46% to \$7b in February from a year earlier, according to a Friday report by Bloomberg, citing the country's finance minister.

Two-thirds of the country's energy tax revenue in February came from sales of Russia's crude oil and petroleum products, which plunged by 48% to \$4.8b, per Bloomberg estimates.

The drop in oil and gas contributions to Russia's budget comes after Urals crude prices fell significantly over the past year versus the global Brent benchmark, slipping from \$95 a barrel on the day of Moscow's Ukraine invasion to levels less than \$60 at last check.

It's a sign Western sanctions are having their intended impact on Russia's economy. The G7 group of countries imposed a \$60 per barrel price cap on Russian crude last year, in a bid to reduce Moscow's energy revenues that could be used to fund the war in Ukraine.

**Comment** – Another reason China is moving in to support Russia?

## Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

Someone has to have the courage to face the Russian bully, or the bully will continue to antagonize and terrorize everyone around them. Someone has to tell the bully that oppression and terror is unacceptable, and it will be held accountable. That's what Ukraine is doing right now. Zelenskyy stayed in Ukraine and stood up to the bully. Brave Ukrainian soldiers (men and women) have paid an incredibly heavy price defending Ukraine and the dignity of all human beings. Civilians all over Ukraine, and some from different nations, have sacrificed their time, money—even their lives—to defend freedom from the threat of the Soviet-Russian regime.

Fear does not define the Ukrainian spirit. All over Ukraine, the overwhelming sentiment is defiance and courage. There's no going back to the way things used to be. Ukrainians will never again be enslaved by the Soviet Union or by the Russian Federation. Ukraine will not be defeated.

If military analysts are correct, the situation will likely become harder, and bloodier, before it improves. Ukraine needs our prayers and tangible support. Ongoing military aid and humanitarian aid is critical. Every government that values democracy and every human being who values the dignity of human life must stand with Ukraine.

We are stronger together. Bullies and terrorists can intimidate us, but they will not defeat us. Not when we stand together.

Ukrainians are showing us what is possible when there's unity against evil and injustice. Let's use our collective resources, and collective influence, to be ambassadors for justice in Ukraine and let's mirror Ukrainian courage in the fight against injustice all over the world.

*Andrew Moroz is a Ukrainian-American pastor in Lynchburg, Virginia and born in the Soviet Union.*

**Russian official warns western diplomats of 'catastrophic consequences'** – A top Russian official said two days ago U.S. and NATO involvement in the war in Ukraine could lead to "catastrophic consequences."

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov made the comment during a speech to diplomats gathered at the United Nations Human Rights Council and Conference on Disarmament session in Geneva, according to the Agence France-Presse (AFP) and Russian news outlets.

RT, a Russian state-operated outlet, wrote that Ryabkov said that "the most acute strategic threat" in the Ukraine conflict comes from U.S. and NATO policies. He added that those policies seek to "further stoke the conflict in Ukraine and [tensions] around it which they deliberately initiated."



According to RT, Ryabkov said that U.S. and NATO policies went against that declaration and could bring about a nuclear standoff.

"Their growing involvement in an armed confrontation is fraught with a direct military clash of nuclear powers with catastrophic consequences," Ryabkov said.

**U.S. intel on China considering lethal aid for Putin's war was gleaned from Russian officials** - Initial U.S. intelligence suggesting that China is considering supplying lethal aid to Russia for its war in Ukraine was gleaned from Russian government officials, according to one current and one former U.S. official familiar with the intelligence.

U.S. officials then spent weeks corroborating the information from other sources of intelligence, the current and former officials said, and with allies who also brought additional streams of information.

**Biden, Scholz pledge to punish Russia over Ukraine war** - An EU official also said China providing arms to Russia would be an 'absolute red line' and lead to sanctions: Report.

They have committed to continue imposing high costs on Russia for its war in Ukraine, while a European Union official said any arms provided by China to Russia would lead to sanctions.

Biden and Scholz met on Friday in Washington, DC as the United States announced a new military aid package for Ukraine worth \$400m that includes ammunition and tactical bridges to move tanks and armored vehicles. The additional ammunition is being sent to help boost stocks in anticipation of Ukraine's spring offensive.

A senior EU official also told a separate briefing on Friday that Beijing giving Moscow weapons would be an "absolute red line" and the EU would respond with sanctions, Reuters reported.

Germany has typically taken a much less hawkish stance than the US on China, its top trading partner, but Scholz sent a strong warning to China on Thursday not to give Moscow weapons. He also appealed to Beijing to pressure Russia to pull back its forces.

"Don't deliver any weapons to the aggressor Russia," Scholz said in a speech to the German parliament ahead of his meeting with Biden.

**Foreign ministers of the so-called Quad group denounced Russia's threat to use nuclear weapons** in the Ukraine war as unacceptable, according to a statement issued after a meeting on Friday. The ministers also said they opposed any unilateral actions to increase tensions in the South China Sea, and expressed concerns about the "militarization" of disputed territories, in a thinly veiled reference to China. The Quad group includes India, Australia, Japan and the United States.

**Furious Argentina accuses Britain of ignoring international law as it rips up Falklands pact** with the UK and demands 'renegotiations on the islands' sovereignty.'

Argentina has furiously accused Britain of ignoring international law after it ripped up a co-operation pact with the UK and demanded new talks over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands.

But in response, Britain's Foreign Minister James Cleverly insisted 'the Falkland Islands are British.'

The Falklands, known as the Malvinas in Argentina, were the subject of a short but brutal war in 1982.

Britain drove out the invaders after dispatching a naval armada, but the issue has never been considered settled in Buenos Aires.

In 2016, the two sides agreed to disagree about sovereignty, but to cooperate on issues such as energy, shipping and fishing, and on identifying the remains of unknown Argentine soldiers killed in battle.

But at G20 talks in New Delhi, Argentina's foreign minister Santiago Cafiero delivered a note to Cleverly stating that his government was abandoning the pact.

**Further** – A colleague of mine, born in and still very closely linked to Chinese power structures, recently mentioned to me that Beijing, in its approach to Argentina to solicit them in aligning with China's envisioned new bi-polar world order, had promised them sufficient weaponry and support to re-take the Falkland Islands – should the UK object to a Chinese takeover of Taiwan. And now, some months later, the Argentinian FM issues a statement in line with a new-found confidence. Wouldn't surprise me but well need to wait and see.

**Lukashenko won't commit to Russia's war in Ukraine because 'he fears the people', Belarus's exiled leader says** - Lukashenko is Mr Putin's staunchest ally, and he let Russian troops pass through his country last year so they could attack Ukraine from the north. He has not committed soldiers of his own to the war, and for good reason, Ms Tsikhanouskaya says. "The only reason he is not doing it is because he fears the people," she says.

**Zelenskyy meets with US AG, prosecutors from allied countries to discuss Russian war crimes** - During his visit to Lviv Oblast yesterday, Zelenskyy met with US AG Merrick Garland and other prosecutors from allied states and international institutions to discuss prosecuting Russian war crimes, the president's office reported.

In addition to Garland, the meeting also included U.S. Ambassador for Global Criminal Justice Beth van Schaack, EU Commissioner for Justice Didier Reynders, ICC Prosecutor Karim Khan, Head of the EU Prosecutor's Office Laura Kovesi, Spanish Attorney General Alvaro Garcia Ortiz, UK Attorney General Victoria Prentis, among others.

Emphasizing the importance of holding Russian war criminals accountable for their crimes, Zelenskyy spoke about the message it would convey not just to Ukrainians, but to the entire world, about the triumph of justice. It would also serve as a warning to any potential aggressors that such actions would not be tolerated in the future.

"That's why we need justice, we need a tribunal to see all guilty people behind bars," Zelensky said.

On Feb. 28, Zelensky met with Khan in Kyiv to discuss the ICC's investigation into Russian war crimes and ways to expedite the repatriation process for Ukrainians who were forcibly relocated to Russia.

**Comment** – As mentioned in previous Updates, Bosnian and Serb commanders indicted of war crimes took years to apprehend and bring to trial – but despite this, they were arrested years later and still held to account for their crimes. Senior Russians will be keenly aware of this and in fear of years of clandestine movement ahead in order to evade detection and apprehension. Someone like Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, who reportedly owns property in the US and EU and whose daughters school in the UK, will be hard-pressed to remain under the apprehension radar screen.

## Putin & Russia

**Infighting in Russia as Wagner head publicly shames Putin's military leadership** - Infighting between Prigozhin and Kremlin Generals continues with him blaming them for the disasters experienced and in failing to adequately supply sufficient ammunition and general provisions.

**Russia envoy denies atrocities, blames West for Ukraine's misery** - Russian ambassador to UK Andrey Kelin said the killing of civilians in Ukraine's Bucha was 'staged' by Ukrainian forces.

Russia's ambassador to the UK denied Moscow's forces committed atrocities in Ukraine, blaming instead the West for the destruction of the country and, in particular, the UK for promising to provide Kyiv with long-range weapons.

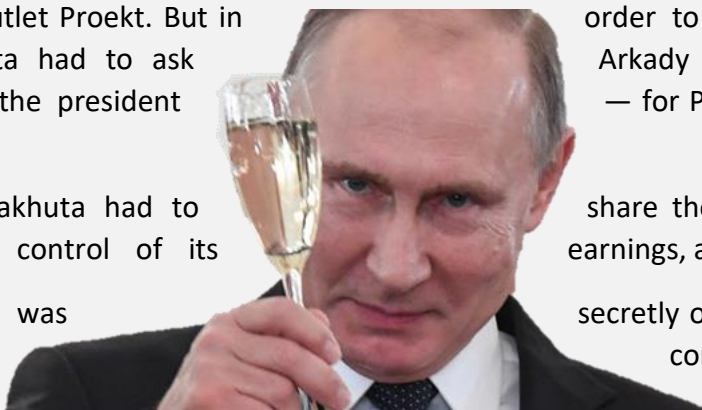
Russian ambassador Andrey Kelin also said long-range weapons were a threat to Russians and people in the pro-Russian territory in Ukraine, which required Russia's forces to push deeper into Ukraine to protect civilians from the extended range of Western weaponry, particularly those promised by London.

**Putin has secretly made millions from a brand of cheap vodka named after himself, report says** - Putin has apparently been raking in a fortune from a vodka brand named after him, according to a new report.

Launched in 2002 by alcohol company Winexim, Putinka vodka quickly became a market leader, according to independent Russian outlet Proekt. But in co-owner Oleg Plakhuta had to ask strong connections to the president source told Proekt.

There was a price. Plakhuta had to share the business with the two men, who ended up with control of its earnings, according to Proekt.

In fact, the company was secretly owned between 2014 and 2020 by a subsidiary of a company whose ultimate owner is Putin, Proekt reports.



The vodka brand brought in vast sums, with some distributors showing up with bags full of cash to get permission to sell it. Some of that cash was "always intended for Putin," an unnamed source told Proekt.

"You have no idea how much money this is," the source added.

Between 2004 and 2019, Putinka made between \$400 and \$500 million, the outlet estimated. It is unclear how much of that money went to Putin.

**Putin 'is more furious than ever' over leaks claiming he lives in luxury mansion with his gymnast lover and recent Ukrainian drone strikes, claim 'insiders'** - Putin is reportedly 'more furious than ever' over leaks that allege he and his gymnast lover Alina Kabaeva live like a tsar and tsarina with their children in a luxury mansion. (Comment – the medical doctor reported to have delivered Putin's children with his mistress, died this week).

He is also seething over recent Ukrainian drone strikes that have targeted areas in southern and western Russia, forcing authorities to close the airspace over St Petersburg.

Putin, who blamed his defence and security chiefs for failing to protect him, was left so furious over the drone strikes and the leaks about his life with Kabaeva that a doctor had to be called, it has been claimed.

The president's alleged reaction was revealed by General SVR, an account on the social media site Telegram that claims inside knowledge of Putin's circle without providing proof of its access or the accuracy of its reports.

'No-one has seen the president so furious,' the General SVR account said, claiming Putin had angry exchanges with his top 'power' apparatchiks and a row with Kabaeva.

**Russian minister's claim Ukraine war 'launched against us' met with laughter** - Comments by Russia's foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, were met with laughter at an international conference in India, when he said that the Ukraine war had been "launched against" his home country.

Speaking at the Raisina Dialogue, a politics and economics event in Delhi, Lavrov also claimed that Russia was trying to stop the war.

“The war, which we are trying to stop, which was launched against us using Ukrainian people, of course, influenced the policy of Russia, including energy policy,” he said, briefly stumbling over his words as people in the audience laughed.

Lavrov continued: “And the blunt way to describe what changed: we would not any more rely on any partners in the west. We would not allow them to blow the pipelines again,” in a reference to the explosions that damaged the Nord Stream pipeline in the Baltic Sea in September.

**Russia says little about its soldiers dying, so an open-source team is trying to keep track** - For months, Vitaly Votanovsky has been walking through rows of freshly dug graves in Russia's Krasnodar region, filming and photographing evidence of the country's mounting military deaths, which he accuses the Kremlin of trying to conceal.

His images, which Votanovsky has posted to his Telegram channel, show some cemeteries lined with plots honoring what Russia's calls its fallen heroes.

Many mounds are adorned with large bouquets of flowers, colored portraits of soldiers and regimental flags.

Others are only marked by a wooden cross sticking out of the dirt, with no name even on it.



What angers Votanovsky the most are graves where soldiers killed were only 19 or 20, barely older than his daughter.

"They are healthy men of childbearing age who could benefit the state, build houses, factories and raise children."

"They end up lying in the ground now."

The former air force officer-turned-activist is part of a small network of volunteers and journalists working to document Russia's war dead by visiting cemeteries, talking to family members and scanning social media and news publications for obituaries.

## **The Key to Victory Against Russian and Chinese Autocracy Is Aluminum**

Opinion by Mike Esper, former Secretary of Defense in Newsweek

Russia's unjust war against Ukraine recently marked its one-year anniversary. The brutality of the onslaught, and atrocities committed by Moscow over the last 12 months, are a grim reminder of the world in which we now live. Halfway around the globe, Russia's strategic partner, China, routinely bullies its neighbors and threatens democratic Taiwan. Meanwhile, Beijing continues to steal intellectual property, break international rules to dominate key economic sectors, and conduct unfettered espionage—marked recently by the brazen flyover of the U.S. by a spy balloon.

We may not be in a cold war with Moscow and Beijing, but relations are cooling. Washington and its allies are girding themselves for the tough times ahead, recognizing that Russia and China aim to upset the global order to benefit their own dark aims. There is much we must do to protect U.S. economic and national security, and that begins with safeguarding our access to key resources.

COVID showed us the importance of having reliable providers of medical supplies. Global supply chain disruptions revealed the critical nature of semiconductors. And last year's sanctions on Russia reminded us to remain energy independent. Yet in all these cases, the U.S. response wasn't timely enough to avoid harm to our people, economy, or security.

To begin, we cannot rely on adversaries for critical resources, let alone give them this leverage to use against us. One area that stands out is our dependence on Russia and China for strategic minerals. Lithium, cobalt, and a variety of rare earth elements are in this category. So are metals such as titanium and aluminum. Beijing and Moscow are two of the world's top three producers of both metals, with China distancing everyone else and producing ten times more aluminum than Russia and 40 times more than the U.S.

While most Americans are familiar with aluminum utensils and other consumer goods, primary aluminum is essential to several critical industries. Because it is lightweight, corrosion resistant, and extremely versatile, it is used extensively in shipbuilding, energy transmission, spacecraft, and airplanes. Its importance to our economic and national security, prosperity, and independence is obvious.

The United States used to be the largest producer of primary aluminum; today, it ranks ninth. Russia is tied for third. China now owns over half the global market. Additionally, the U.S. went from having 23 operational aluminum smelters in 1993 to just five now. Worse, only one of the remaining facilities makes the high-purity aluminum needed for fighter jets, lightweight armor plating, and military electronics. And certain missile and munition systems depend on the high-performance alloys derived from this special aluminum.

Not surprisingly, the Department of Homeland Security has designated "critical manufacturing"—which includes domestic production of primary metals such as aluminum—as one of America's 16 critical sectors.

This is an area China is working to dominate, with Russia close behind, and make no mistake about it: Beijing and Russia will cut us off when the need arises. While multiple sectors in Russia have been targeted with sanctions as a result of Moscow's illegal and brutal invasion, aluminum and other key metals were not included.

Former President Trump imposed stiff tariffs on these items, a move that was long overdue yet is still not sufficient. Profits from aluminum production continue to fuel Moscow's war machine.

Similar business operations in China are funding the CCP's genocide against the Uyghurs, supporting Russia's war, and underwriting Beijing's strategic plan to supplant Western leadership. Noted economists, meanwhile, have reported that China's subsidies and other market-distorting practices have hurt global competition when it comes to aluminum and other goods. It has been a price paid heavily by American workers and companies for years.

To stay ahead of our adversaries, the U.S. and its allies must disentangle themselves from Russia and China when it comes to strategic resources like rare earth elements and primary aluminum, and find a way to succeed independent of the whims of two autocratic nations.

Doing so will put a brake on both countries' malevolent plans and allow us to safeguard our national and economic security. It will give us the opportunity to strengthen domestic production and supply chains so that we are not reliant on regimes that don't share our values or interests. And it will send the right messages to Beijing and Moscow that we are prepared to make the tough choices necessary to ensure a Western victory in this long contest now underway between the world's autocracies and democracies.

## End of the Age of Tanks?

In fact, the destruction of so many Russian tanks, including large numbers of the Cold War-era T-72 and even more advanced T-90s, has led to the conclusion that the age of the tank could be coming to an end.

However, there are a few important considerations.

As the Modern War Institute at West Point noted in a March 2020 study, “Infantry’s advantage isn’t permanent. As tanks with new capabilities are fielded, infantry forces will have to respond, and cannot wait for a new generation of capabilities to provide battlefield solutions. Instead, infantry units should begin conceptualizing, refining, and training new tactics, techniques, and procedures.”

That was of course written before the role of man-portable anti-tank weapons such as the British NLAW, Swedish AT4 and notably the American FGM-148 Javelin were given their moment to shine.

Those weapons have been used with devastating results.

But the other half of the equation is that infantry still needs to have the right weapons to take out a tank.

Without such weapons, infantry can often be rolled over – just as the British Mk1s were able to do to the Germans nearly 107 years ago in the mud-soaked fields of the Western Front.

That fact was noted in a video that was shared on social media last month.

### Charging Into Action

The 45-second clip showed a Ukrainian T-72B3 – an upgraded model of the Soviet Union’s Cold War-era main battle tank (MBT) charging forward across a frozen field outside of the besieged city of Bakhmut.

The tank appeared to engage the Russian forces at near-point-blank range.

It was a bold move, and not all that different from the armored tactics repeatedly made by Russian tank crews with disastrous results.

But in this case, perhaps the Ukrainian tankers knew something not seen in the video; namely that the Russian forces **had no anti-tank weapons**.

There have been reports that the Kremlin is struggling to keep its forces adequately equipped and that has included a variety of ordnance.

Or, it could have a case of a very bold tank crew that had luck on its side. A lesson now is that tankers are like pilots – as in there are bold pilots and old pilots, but very few old bold pilots.

A bold tank crew is likely a dead tank crew. And the Ukrainians seen in the video might not want to press their luck.

**Comment** – The above ignores the advantage of having tanks in support of ground crews rapidly traversing enemy terrain in APCs in order to secure territory. This is the primary reason behind the huge number of armored vehicles entering Ukrainian service as we speak – to enable Kievan forces to advance and re-take Russian-occupied territories. To do so, they need main battle tanks and armored personnel carriers.

Presently they do not have sufficient armored vehicle strength to succeed in this vital maneuver requirement.

So, tanks, in and of themselves, provide the critical armored element in successful ground troop advancement into enemy territory. What will need to happen is more than likely newly-developed remotely-controlled tanks supported by drones operating ahead and over them and long-range artillery behind them.

Tanks will also need to be insulated against anti-tank weaponry as no doubt will happen – in both Russian and western tank deployment.

But tanks, as we see today's warfare unfold, are needed in support of overall military tactics and troop protection.