

# Conflict Update # 241

October 24th, 2022

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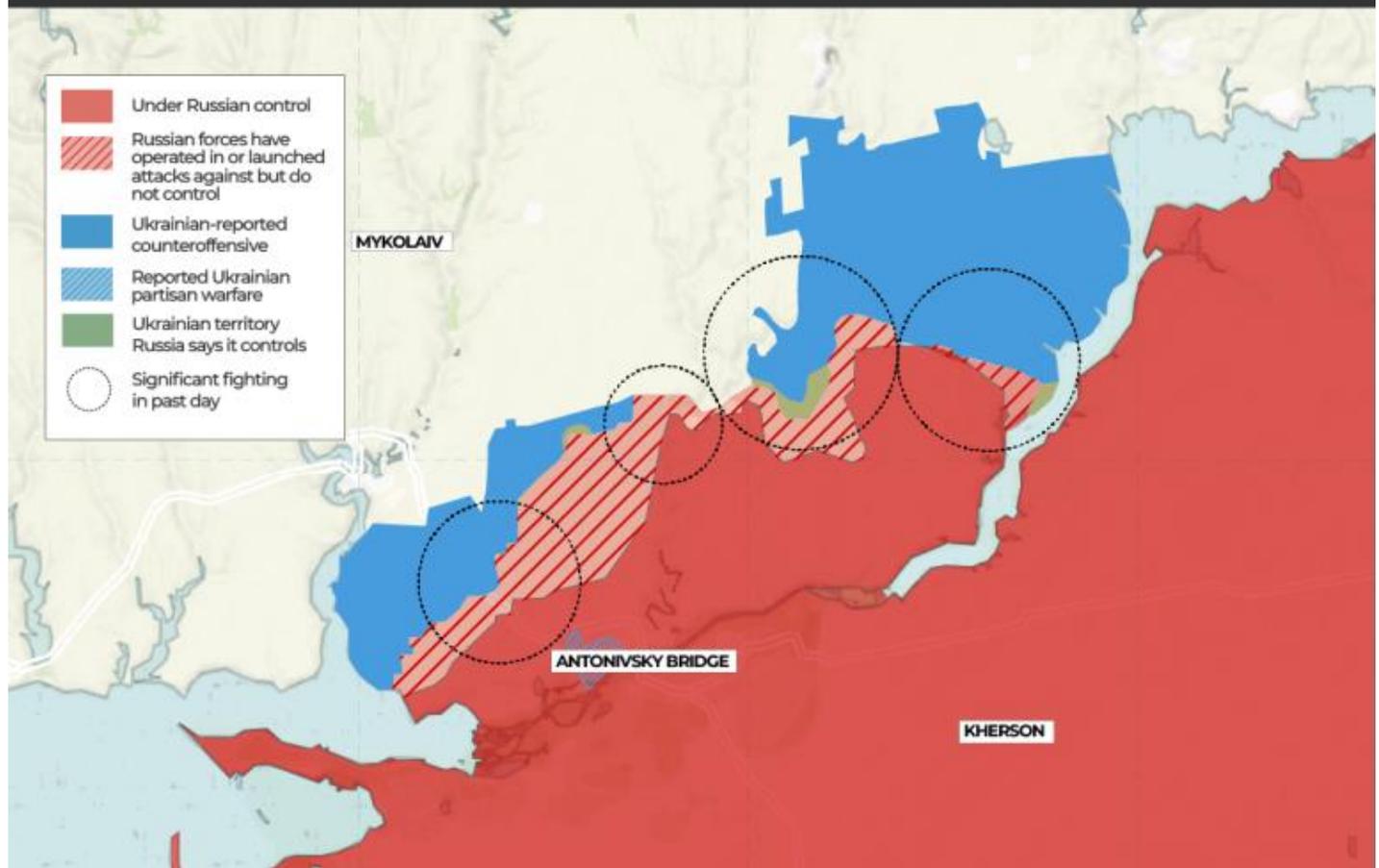
## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** - 67,940 (470) soldiers killed, 2,590 (6) enemy tanks, 5,295 (+11) armored combat vehicles, 1,673 (+6) artillery systems, 375 (+1) MLRS systems, 189 (+0) air defense systems, 270 (+1) warplanes, 245 (+2) helicopters, 1,370 (+9) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 350 (+21) cruise missiles, 15 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,044 (+5) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 76 fuel bowsers (+0) and 149 (+1) units of specialized equipment.

## Key Takeaways

**Russian withdrawal in Kherson** - Faced with an estimated 4-1 overmatch of approaching Ukrainian troops compared to Moscow's occupying elements in western Kherson, Russian military bloggers spent late last week preparing their readers for a "very, very hard" month ahead for one writer, while another predicted "there will be no good news in the next two months, that's for sure." By Saturday, Ukraine said that Russian elements had "completely abandoned their positions in Charivne and Chkalove...and Russian officers and medics have reportedly evacuated from Beryslav," ISW reported. The British military also said this weekend that Russia had begun using a "barge bridge" to cross the Dnipro river eastward in retreat.

Day 243 - October 24, 2022 | 10:00 GMT



**Putin has a new Ukraine problem: his forces can't retreat?** - Russian forces are pulling out from many parts of Kherson province on day 242 of the war in Ukraine, withdrawing from the western bank of the Dnipro River in Kherson Oblast, their positions unattainable under constant pressure of the Ukrainian counteroffensive.

But to cross the Dnipro, one kilometer wide, they need bridges. Antonovskiy Bridge, the major vehicular bridge in the region, is partially destroyed by the Ukrainian long-range fires interdiction campaign.



To bypass that restriction of movement, they built a pontoon bridge adjacent to the severely damaged bridge. But doesn't necessarily ensure that their forces on the western bank will be able to evacuate in time and in good order with all of the weapon systems.

"Although the use of heavy barge bridges was almost certainly included in Soviet-era planning for operations in Europe, it is likely this is the first time the Russian military have [sic] needed to utilize this type of bridge for decades," the British Military Intelligence assessed in its latest estimate of the war.

"Using civilian barges likely provides Russia additional material and logistics benefits, having lost significant quantities of military bridging equipment and engineering personnel during its invasion," the British Military Intelligence added.

“If the barge bridge sustains damage, it is almost certain Russia will seek to repair or replace damaged sections quickly, as their forces and crossing points over the Dnipro river come under increasing pressure in Kherson,” the British Military Intelligence assessed.

But Ukrainian forces have already targeted and attacked Russian makeshift pontoon bridges. The fact that the pontoon bridge is right next to the Antonovskiy Bridge makes targeting that much harder, even if the M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) or M270 Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) are used.

**Comment** – We have been describing Ukrainian armed force actions in this region for approximately two months. Ukraine has effectively isolated Russian troops in Kherson, so much so that, around a month ago, the Kremlin extracted all senior and commanding officers from the northern to southern flank of the River Dnipro.

By successfully assaulting the three bridges providing relief to these Russian battalions, and by destroying upcountry re-supply roads and hubs, Ukraine has tactically corralled occupation soldiers to a defined area. Over the past three weeks they (Ukrainian forces) have been re-grouping, re-supplying and waiting for the command to advance further. Their front lines do not want to outrun their supply lines.

Enjoying a 4:1 superiority in troops numbers, they have spooked the Russians, now scrambling to evacuate.

As mentioned in yesterday’s Update, should Ukraine go slowly slowly in this task, then Russia will be reluctant to destroy the dam upriver from Kherson City. It pays to ensure Russian troops and civilians are in the flood-path.

**Ukrainian armed forces liberate 4 settlements in Donbas**- Ukraine today pushed Russian forces out of 4 settlements in Donbas, bringing the total thus far to over 90 settlements in Kherson Oblast during the counteroffensive.

Yet, Defense Ministry's Intelligence Directorate Chief Kyrylo Budanov said Russia prepares to fight for Kherson, not to retreat.

**Ukrainians want to defend their country** - Over 85% of Ukrainians believe that the military should continue to fight Russia, even if Moscow doesn't stop attacking civilians, the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology survey shows.

**Russian forces face 'rout' in Kherson** - Russian military leadership in the occupied city of Kherson fled across the Dnieper River, leaving behind new recruits to stall the Ukrainian military's push to recapture the city, a Washington-based think tank says.

"Using such inexperienced forces to conduct a delaying action could prompt a Russian rout if Ukrainian forces choose to press the attack," the Institute for the Study of War says in its latest assessment of the war.

The institute says that at least one Russian war blogger noted the situation in Kherson is dire for frontline Russian troops who could find it “virtually impossible” to evacuate. How to get those troops out and how to explain the flight from Kherson – which the Kremlin says it has annexed – to the Russian populace remain crucial issues for Russian leadership, the assessment says.

**Ukraine 'increasingly successful' shooting down Iranian-made drones, U.K. says** - Ukrainian efforts to shoot down the Shahed-136 unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are “increasingly successful” as Russia continues to use the Iranian-made drones against targets across Ukraine, the British Defense Ministry said on October 24.

In its regular updates, the ministry said the UAVs are slow, noisy, and fly at low altitudes, making lone aircraft easy to target by conventional air defenses. The bulletin cited official Ukrainian sources, including President Zelenskyy, who claimed that "up to 85% of attacks are being intercepted."

**Comment** – Putin announced earlier today that Russia has ordered another 2,000 Iranian Shahed-136 drones.

**Soldiers drafted to fight in Ukraine have no ammo** - Putin's invasion of Ukraine seems to become more and more like a historic mistake by the day. And now, it seems he and the Kremlin did not give newly drafted troops any ammo for the weapons they would need to fight. How much worse could things get?

Russian soldiers drafted to fight in Ukraine say they have no ammo, no commanders, and don't know what they are doing on the battlefield.

The claim came from a six recently-drafted men in a video circulated on Telegram, which featured in a report by the independent Russian outlet The Insider. (**Comment** – this is the video referred to in our earlier Update). After training, the men said, "it turns out that we're somewhere in the fields of Ukraine and they just threw us out into the field like dogs," according to The Insider. They also said they were only equipped with uniforms and were given some AK-47s and bayonets – but no ammunition.

"There is no information, no command, we're on pins and needles, as we don't know where our people are and where [the enemy] is," one man said in the video, The Insider reported.

"No radio, no ammo, not a f----- thing. No medical supplies either," he added. "I'd like to show this to our authorities ... Do you consider this normal?"

**Russian conscripts to be equipped with Iranian-made helmets, body armor.** About 1,500 bulletproof vests and 1,500 helmets produced in Iran are already in storage in Russia, ready to be supplied to the Russian army, reports Ukraine's Defence Ministry. According to it, the supply of body armor from Iran is response to a severe shortage of basic personal military equipment with which to supply hundreds of thousands of conscripts mobilized by Russia in the past month.

**Comment** – We commented on Russia soliciting goods from Iran late last week. Procuring Iranian-made body armor speaks to how severely the Russian economy and manufacturing base is reduced through sanctions.

Producing body armor is a simple process, and one that Russia has been completing for centuries. Now they cannot even manufacture basic clothing and protective equipment – this from a country that put the first human in outer space. First it was drones and now protective equipment – sanctions, mobilization and crippling corruption are taking their toll.

**Starlink to work in Ukraine regardless of Pentagon funding.** SpaceX CEO Elon Musk said that, before the US Department of Defense came back with an answer regarding taking over funding for Ukraine's use of Starlink satellites, he told Ukraine's Deputy Prime Minister Fedorov that "SpaceX would not turn off Starlink even if (the Pentagon) refused to provide funding," according to his Oct. 24 tweet. Fedorov confirmed his claim, adding that the technology was "critically important for Ukraine."

**Comment** – Well done Elon.

**Ukraine Needs to Prioritize Three Things to Survive Winter War: WHO** - The World Health Organization (WHO) recently detailed three things that Ukrainian civilians must prioritize to survive the upcoming winter, as the nation's war with Russia continues to rage.

"In just 10 days from now, we will mark 8 months of relentless war in Ukraine," WHO Regional Director for Europe Dr. Kluge said on Friday. "The escalation of the humanitarian emergency requires an escalation of the humanitarian response. Let me clearly state: WHO is there to stay—to stay and support the Ministry of Health, under the leadership of Health Minister Dr. Viktor Liashko, and to stay and support our more than 150 health partners on the ground."

The remarks by Kluge come amid the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine where fighting has continued in numerous different parts of Ukraine. Kluge noted in his remarks that this week, Russian military forces attacked "Kyiv, Dnipro and other cities nationwide," which include large civilian populations.

Kluge went on to detail three key aspects of the upcoming winter that Ukrainian civilians must prioritize, beginning with **"responding urgently to the damage done by the latest attacks on health."** According to WHO, since the war between the two nations began in February, the health agency has confirmed 620 attacks on health.

"The second priority is **attending to the immediate health needs of people in the newly accessible areas back under Ukrainian control.** We must find ways to respond to the magnitude of physical and mental suffering endured by these populations," WHO said.

WHO went on to state that the third priority is **preparing for "significant challenges" that are expected to come during winter.** "Too many people in Ukraine are living precariously, moving from location to location, living in substandard structures or without access to heating. This can lead to frostbite, hypothermia, pneumonia, stroke and heart attack," WHO said.

"The coming brutal winter could prove particularly dangerous for vulnerable people—including the elderly, patients with chronic conditions, and those needing maternal and neonatal services, especially given the current reality of low coverage with vaccines against COVID-19 and other illnesses."

### **Russia's new Armata tank is missing from Ukraine** - Where Are Russia's T-14 Armata Tanks? Not in Ukraine.

The Russian military's seeming mighty T-14 "Armata" main battle tank (MBT) has long been touted as a potential game-changer for Moscow. Since first displayed during the May 2015 Victory Day Parade in Moscow, the tank's advanced capabilities have been praised.

However, the tank has been absent from the battlefield of Ukraine – possibly where it would be needed most.

Work on the Armata program began in 2010 when the Russian MoD terminated its "Object-195" – the T-95 program – far less revolutionary and simply too evolutionary. Instead, the Armata project was seen as a huge technological leap from Soviet-era military hardware designs and was to be from the ground up very much distinct from past Soviet/Russian tank platforms.



The outline of the tank, from its hull to its long and boxy turret – which resembles Western tank turret designs – was a notable departure from past Soviet designs. The T-14 also featured seven road wheels, instead of the six wheels that were commonplace on almost all previous Cold War Soviet and even modern Russian MBTs.

### **Not in Ukraine**

The T-14 may not be in Ukraine, simply because Moscow doesn't have enough to actually send. As previously reported, Russian tank manufacturer Uralvagonzavod first said the T-14 would be delivered in 2018. Then distribution of the first

nine tanks would come in 2019. After this date came and went, leadership said 20 would be tested and 80 ready by the end of 2021.

Moscow had announced last year that the T-15 Armata would enter serial production this year, but it seems that the new cutting-edge MBTs won't be ready until after next year at the very earliest.

But another consideration is that Russia can't afford to lose any.

Moscow may not have expected much resistance in Ukraine, and therefore it had little reason to risk its shiny new toys in its "special military operation." That may be for the best for Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin, as each T-14 reportedly costs in excess of \$3.7 million, roughly 20 times the price of a \$175,000 Javelin anti-tank rocket.

The Ukrainians have proven to be using the Javelin and British-made NLAWs to great success. (Senior Editor for 1945, Peter Suci).)

**Belarus to conduct multiple joint live-fire drills with Russia** – The Belarusian Ministry of Defence (MoD) has confirmed that the military forces of Belarus and Russia are set to conduct a series of live-fire exercises.

Citing a report by Russian news agency Interfax, a Reuters report has claimed the bilateral exercises will be conducted as part of a joint grouping pact between the two countries.

The participating forces will also carry out several 'anti-aircraft guided missile launches' during the exercises, which will take place in Belarus.

**Pentagon chief tells Russia's Shoigu he rejects any Russian pretext for escalation** - U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin told Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu in a phone call yesterday that he "rejected any pretext for Russian escalation" in Ukraine, the Pentagon said.

Shoigu told his French, Turkish and British counterparts of Moscow's concern that Ukraine could detonate a "dirty bomb," according to the Russian Defense Ministry.

"Shoigu's calls—and Russian state media's amplification of false dirty bomb threats—are likely intended to intimidate the West into cutting or limiting support for Ukraine as Russia faces continued military setbacks and the likely loss of western Kherson by the end of the year," analysts for the Washington-based think tank the Institute for the Study of War said in their Sunday evening assessment.

**Russia steps up 'false flag' accusations** - The US has seen no indications that Russia has decided to use nuclear, chemical or biological weapons in Ukraine, a senior military official said.

"We still have seen nothing to indicate that the Russians have made a decision to employ nuclear weapons," the official told journalists, later adding that the same applies to chemical and biological arms.

The remarks come after repeated Russian warnings that Ukraine could use a so-called "dirty bomb," which have sparked fears of an escalation by Moscow.

**The U.S., UK, and France "reject[ed] Russia's transparently false allegations that Ukraine is preparing to use a dirty bomb on its own territory,"** the three governments said in a joint statement Sunday, calling it "a pretext for escalation," and adding that the three nations "remain committed to continue supporting Ukraine's efforts to defend its territory for as long as it takes." (Turkey, notably, did not join in the statement from its fellow NATO alliance members.)

**West warns Russia against using dirty bomb pretext in Ukraine** - After Russia alleges Ukraine is planning to use a bomb that would spew radioactive materials, France, UK and US describe the accusations as 'transparently false.'

Western countries have accused Russia of plotting to use a threat of a dirty bomb laced with nuclear material as a pretext for escalation in Ukraine as Moscow evacuated civilians from a southern city in anticipation of a major battle.

With Ukrainian forces advancing into Russian-occupied Kherson province, top Russian officials phoned their Western counterparts on Sunday and Monday to tell them Moscow suspected Kyiv of planning to use a so-called dirty bomb.

**Russia Planning Major Offensive?** - Two unnamed sources close to the Kremlin revealed last week that Putin is considering a return to peace negotiations not in any expectation of success – though he would certainly take a deal on his terms – but to catch Ukraine by surprise with a new full-scale offensive in the new year.

The sources described Russian authorities created a “tactical option” whereby Ukraine will agree to a peace treaty, and the Kremlin organizes a ceasefire through cooperation between the two opposing militaries without the involvement of either country’s president. The same sources, however, suggested that Putin doesn’t have any real plans to end the war and believes that the ceasefire could be used to launch a new offensive in February or March of 2023.

Kyiv appears to be aware of Russia’s intended strategy, with Zelenskyy advisor Mykhailo Podolyak telling Meduza a ceasefire will give Russia a “chance to fix a de facto new line of separation and hastily dig up Russians in the temporarily occupied territories.”

## Impacts

**Ukraine accuses Russia of deliberately delaying Black Sea grain exports** - Kyiv has accused Russia of delaying more than 165 cargo ships heading to Ukrainian Black Sea ports to load up with grain under a deal brokered by the United Nations and Turkey.

Russian inspectors "have been significantly prolonging the inspection of vessels," the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said in a statement on October 24. "As a result, more than 165 vessels have been stuck in a queue near the Bosphorus Strait, and this number continues to grow daily."

Cargo ships carrying grain and other foodstuffs to and from Ukrainian ports must be inspected by teams organized by the four-party Joint Coordination Center (JCC), a group set up under the UN-Turkey brokered deal with Ukraine and Russia that was signed in July amid concerns that the blockage of Ukrainian grain exports was contributing to a global food crisis.

The Ukrainian Foreign Ministry said it had reason to believe the delays were politically motivated and were once again threatening food security for millions of people.

"Russia's actions undermine global food security, in particular in the Global South," the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry statement added. "The inspection delays have already prevented Ukraine from exporting an additional 3 million tons of grain. Ten million people across the world have not received food in time because of Russia's political agenda."

## Russian mobilization

**Tricks, threats, tragedy: Central Asian migrants targeted in Russian military mobilization** - Valentina Chupik, the director of Tong Jahoni, a Russia-focused human rights organization, said that up to one-third of the more than 500 appeals she receives from migrants each day are related to bad faith recruitment. That is despite Russian officials claiming that mobilization is nearing an end.

They include cases where migrants have been asked at Moscow's Sakharovo migration center to sign a 40-page document that includes military service papers. Other cases involve Central Asians who do not have Russian citizenship or residency permits being issued draft papers.

"In Russia, anything goes now," Chupik told Current Time, a Russian-language network run by RFE/RL in cooperation with VOA. "[There are instances] where [migrants] are detained on the street by the police or the national guard, beaten, [given] electric shocks to their genitals, and told to sign up for the army. Of course, they sign up."

Recruiters, including from the Kremlin-connected military contractor Wagner, have not wasted time in targeting groups over which the Russian state has even more leverage: detainees and convicts.

On October 14, Putin said the mobilization would be over by the end of the month, adding the military had drafted 220,000 men over the first three weeks. Days later, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyanin said the mobilization was over in the capital and suggested there would be no repercussions for those who did not respond to draft notices.

But Chupik said migrants, with or without Russian passports, will "continue to be forced into 'volunteering' to fight as long as there is a need for cannon fodder," in Russia's war in Ukraine

## Containment

**RAPIDFire autonomous air defense to Ukraine?** - Manufacturer Nexter and Thales unveiled their latest version of the RAPIDFire autonomous gun turret specifically designed to combat low-level, near-quarter surface and air threats.

Thales described their new weapon as a "disruptive versatile gun system against modern threats." If we look at what's happening with low-cost Iranian drones attacking residential regions in Ukraine, while the Ukrainian Ground Forces spend more than triple just to fight one drone, it makes sense to explore a type of artillery that can automate defenses more efficiently. This is what the RAPIDFire aims to do.

A multi-role artillery 40mm gun system, is based on the 40CTAS gun suite. Its features are integrated with the Fire Control system, including an "operator console, offering anti-surface and anti-air capabilities, in Naval and Land environments." The system automatically seeks out and locks onto aerial or land threats as it pushes around 140 rounds in its rack (enough for approximately 30 interceptions), according to New Atlas.

Its munition has a state-of-the-art selection system that can select the right kind of ammunition to fire, depending on the type of threat it faces. As a result, it is the only system in the world capable of defeating personal watercraft, free-floating minds, ships, loitering munitions, unmanned aerial systems (like the Shahed-136), fighter jets, attack helicopters, and missiles at a range of 4,000 meters.



**Zelensky:** It's time for Israel to choose side, back Ukraine. President Zelensky made the appeal for more support from Israel during an online speech at the Haaretz Democracy Conference. "Isn't it time for your state to choose who you are with as well?" said Zelensky. "Is (Israel) with the democratic world, which is fighting side by side against the existential threat to its existence? Or with those who turn a blind eye to Russian terror."

**Hensoldt delivers first TRML-4D radar to equip IRIS-T SLM for Ukraine** - German sensor solutions specialist

Hensoldt has delivered the first IRIS-T surface-launched medium-

This is the first of four radar three radar systems is expected to

With the delivery of Hensoldt's also completed the air defence system

Hensoldt CEO Thomas situation in Ukraine decisive action.

"Due to a serial commitment of our to deliver such population in the shortest possible time."



TRML-4D multifunctional radar system to equip Diehl Defence's range (SLM) air defence system.

systems to be delivered by Hensoldt. Delivery of the other complete in the coming few months.

TRML-4D radar, the three companies have final delivery of the first ground-based IRIS-T SLM.

Müller said: "The requires quick and

production line and the employees, we are able systems to protect the

**Loitering munitions** - Loitering munitions, much in demand in by Ukrainian forces fighting off the Russian invasion have been sent to the embattled country. AM General showed a Humvee kitted with a launcher for Switchblade kamikaze drones, the kind the U.S. has been sending to Kyiv.

The HUMVEE Saber is based on AM General 13-Series HMMWV 4x4 chassis. The general layout of the vehicle is standard for a light tactical armored vehicle with a powerpack at the front, crew and troops compartment in the middle and a cargo area at the rear. The vehicle is powered by a 6.5L V8 turbocharged diesel engine developing 205 hp coupled to a 4-speed electronically controlled transmission. The vehicle can reach a road speed of up to 90 km/h with a maximum cruising range of 402 km.

The Army is already working to phase out the Humvee but the company that makes the iconic ride from new life: as a mobile platform for suicide

AM General, the company behind its Humvee Saber Blade this Association of the U.S. Washington, D.C. It looks, with some large mounted on it. The launchers in the back different "loitering the vehicle has a Weapon System turret.



for its new Joint Light Tactical Vehicles (JLTV) the Global War on Terror wants to give it a drones.

the Humvee, showed off past week at the annual Army convention in well, like a Humvee, but weapons platforms new Saber Blade has that can fire 24 munitions," while the top of

Hornet Air Guard Remote Controlled

That is, thanks to a series of cameras and a

## Expansion of conflict

**Thousands in new Moldova anti-government protest - Here we go** - Several thousand protesters denouncing Moldova's pro-Western leaders marched through ex-Soviet state's capital for the sixth consecutive Sunday and set up a new tent camp days after police cleared a similar encampment.

About 7,000 demonstrators decried steep price increases, particularly for gas bought from Russia. They called for the resignation of President Maia Sandu and her government.

The protests, organised by the party of exiled opposition politician Ilan Shor, underscore the most serious political challenge to Sandu since her landslide election win in 2020 on a pro-European and anti-corruption platform.

But Sandu and her government, backed by a big parliamentary majority, appear in little danger of falling for the moment in what is one of Europe's poorest countries wedged between Ukraine and European Union member Romania.

Demonstrators converged on Chisinau's central square in four columns, but police kept them well away from the parliament and the president's residence.

Three smaller parties, including Moldova's Communists, joined in the protest for the first time. Activists set up an encampment of several dozen tents by the prosecutor's office, five days after police removed without incident a much larger camp outside parliament.

## Sanctions

**TSMC said to suspend work for Chinese chip Startup Biren amid US curbs** - Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) has suspended production of advanced silicon for Chinese startup Biren Technology to ensure compliance with US regulations, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The decision is linked to public domain information that Biren's products outperform Nvidia's A100 chips, which are now banned from the Chinese market, the person said, asking not to be identified discussing a sensitive topic. While TSMC has not come to a conclusion on whether Biren's products meet the US threshold for restrictions, the Taiwanese chip maker decided to halt deliveries to the Chinese startup for now, the person said.

Biren, one of China's most promising semiconductor designers, has earlier concluded its artificial intelligence chips produced by TSMC are not covered by the latest U.S. export restrictions because its product specifications do not meet the restriction criteria, Bloomberg reported on Friday.

A representative for TSMC said the company is in compliance with all relevant rules and declined to comment further. No one at Biren, based in Shanghai, was immediately available to respond to requests for comment outside of normal business hours.

**More sanctions on Russia, Belarus** - The EU is slowly edging closer to a new set of sanctions aimed at Russia and Belarus, just a few weeks after it signed off on its eighth package of restrictive measures since the start of the war in Ukraine in late February.

Prompted by recent missile attacks on Ukrainian cities, including Kyiv, EU foreign ministers discussed the issue when they met in Luxembourg on October 17. There was a "rather broad consensus, without any concrete dissenting voices," to continue piling on the pressure, according to one senior EU official familiar with the talks.

A few days later, they met in Brussels and signed off on summit conclusions, stating that "the EU has further reinforced its restrictive measures against Russia and stands ready to continue to do so," after having been addressed by

Ukrainian President Zelenskiy via video link. The president implored them to move swiftly toward the ninth installment of punitive measures against Moscow and Minsk.

**Deep Background:** The truth is that if a new round of sanctions is adopted anytime soon, it won't be particularly hard-hitting. Partly this has to do with the fact that the bloc has covered a lot of ground already, slapping asset freezes and visa bans on 1,239 individuals and 116 entities. It has also targeted Russian coal, steel, wood, and closed its airspace to Russian flights -- just to mention a few measures adopted in the last nine months.

But the other and more significant reason is that there are political realities that could curtail Brussels' ambitions. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban has increased his rhetoric against EU sanctions in recent weeks and started a "national consultation" with his fellow Hungarians -- basically, surveys are mailed out and the answers to the leading questions will be used to show support for the government's position.

With soaring energy prices, it also seems inconceivable that any more measures will be taken regarding energy. 90% of Russian crude oil imports will be banned across the EU as of early December after a protracted decision was made in the summer. Don't, however, expect the bloc to ban the remaining 10 percent.

Similarly, it likely won't impose further sanctions on gas, and Russia's Gazprombank will continue to avoid being excluded from the SWIFT payment system. It looks like the same goes for nuclear, as some member states are still maintaining extensive cooperation with the Russian state nuclear agency Rosatom.

An import ban on liquefied petroleum gas products such as propane and butane has been considered before -- and, this time, it might just fly, largely because, all in all, it doesn't cause a great deal of damage.

**Drilling Down:** So, what can be included in a potential new package? The use of Iranian drones by Russia in Ukraine already prompted Brussels to blacklist three Iranian officials and the manufacturer, Shahed Aviation Industries, last week. More could follow. Also, don't rule out that an export ban on all unmanned aerial vehicles, in addition to the already targeted military ones, will come into force.

Much of the future sanctions work will be about "closing loopholes" in already existing measures, essentially adding to an ever-growing list of various items that can't be exported to Russia -- be it filters, plastics, or lasers, to give just a few examples. This is often a cat-and-mouse game, in which even a small component change can give the product a different industrial code, enabling it to get around sanctions. It's often not headline-grabbing stuff, but this type of nitty-gritty work is "a death by a thousand paper cuts for Russian industry," as one EU diplomat, speaking on condition of anonymity, put it to me.

Expect that there might be a push to act on items that were proposed in previous sanctions rounds but for various reasons didn't pass. This time around, will Belgium be OK with a ban on diamond imports? And will Cyprus green-light a prohibition on selling EU property to Russian citizens? Are some maritime nations ready to restrict access not only to Russian-flagged vessels but also to those owned or operated by a Russian individual or company? Is there now enough evidence to sanction the cybersecurity firm Kaspersky Lab and de-SWIFT the largest Russian private bank, Alfa-Bank?

Work is already under way in the European Commission to propose ways on how to legally recover frozen Russian assets in the bloc and use them to support Ukraine's reconstruction efforts. EU leaders and officials will have to decide what to do with the 17.4 billion euros (\$17.2 billion) worth of assets seized from sanctioned individuals and entities in the 27 member states.

Belarus was spared in the previous sanctions round on October 6, but with EU leaders last week calling out Minsk for permitting Russian armed forces to use Belarusian territory, more restrictive measures could be on the horizon. The idea is to "mirror" the sanctions already imposed on Moscow and then apply a similar package on the regime of Belarusian leader Alyaksandr Lukashenka. One of the chief aims of the sanctions would be to prevent Belarus from

becoming a hub for Russian sanctions circumvention. Details still need to be worked out but, for example, there is a ban on importing timber placed on both countries. In addition, there is also a ban on importing wooden furniture from Russia, but there is no similar measure on Belarus. Closing those loopholes might mean a raft of new measures targeting Belarus.

## Putin

**Will Putin go nuclear?** - With Putin's recent warning that Russia will use "all available means" at his disposal to defend his country, there has been increased chatter about the Russian president going to use nuclear weapons. But just how likely is that, and what does it mean to start a nuclear war in 2022?

Putin has repeatedly cautioned the West that any attack on Russia could provoke a nuclear response.

### **But will he go nuclear?**

Much depends on how he perceives the threat to the Russian state and his rule.

He casts the war in Ukraine as an existential battle between Russia and the West, which he says wants to destroy Russia and grab control its vast natural resources.

He warned the West he was not bluffing when he said he'd be ready to use nuclear weapons to defend Russia. Some analysts say Putin is bluffing but Washington is taking Putin seriously.

By claiming 18% of Ukraine as part of Russia, the room for nuclear threats increases as Putin could cast any attack on these territories as an attack on Russia itself.

Russia's nuclear doctrine allows for a nuclear strike after "aggression against the Russian Federation with conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is threatened".

Many Russians live in Ukrainian territory that Putin has proclaimed as Russian and breaking the post-World War Two nuclear taboo would not necessarily change the tactical situation on the ground.

"He is bluffing right now," said Yuri Fyodorov, a military analyst based in Prague. "But what will happen in a week or a month from now is difficult to say - when he understands the war is lost."

Asked if Putin was moving towards a nuclear attack, CIA Director William Burns told CBS: "We have to take very seriously his kind of threats given everything that's at stake."

Burns, though, said U.S. intelligence had no "practical evidence" that Putin was moving towards using tactical nuclear weapons imminently.

### **What nuclear weapons could be used?**

No Russian official has called for a strategic nuclear weapons strike with the weapons that were designed to destroy cities in the United States, Russia, Europe and Asia.

Ramzan Kadyrov, head of Russia's Chechnya region, said Moscow should consider using a low-yield tactical nuclear weapon in Ukraine.

Tactical nuclear weapons are nuclear weapons used on the battlefield for a "tactical" purpose and which are much less powerful than the big bombs that would be needed to destroy large cities such as Moscow, Washington or London.

Such weapons can be dropped from planes, fired on missiles from the ground, ships or submarines, or detonated by ground forces.

Although Russia has specialized nuclear forces trained to fight in such an apocalyptic battlefield, it is unclear how its army of regular troops, mercenaries, drafted reservists and local militias would cope.

### **What would the US do?**

As the dominant global superpower, the US will in effect decide the response to any Russian nuclear strike.

Russia and the US control 90% of global nuclear warheads. Their arsenals were built up during the Cold War, and the Soviet Union bequeathed its nuclear assets to modern Russia.

US President Biden's option would include a non-military response, responding with another nuclear strike that would risk escalation, and responding with a conventional attack that could involve Washington in a direct war with Moscow.

US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said Washington had warned Moscow of specific "catastrophic consequences" if it used nuclear arms.

Retired General and former CIA chief David Petraeus said that if Moscow used nuclear weapons, then the United States and its NATO allies would destroy Russian troops and equipment in Ukraine - and sink its entire Black Sea fleet.

Russia has 1,458 strategic nuclear warheads deployed - or ready to fire - and the US has 1,389 deployed, according to the latest publicly declared data. These warheads are on intercontinental ballistic missiles, ballistic missiles on submarines and strategic bombers.

When it comes to tactical nuclear weapons, Russia has about 10 times the number the US has. Around half of the 200 US tactical nuclear weapons are deployed at bases in Europe and have adjustable yields of 0.3 to 170 kilotons (the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima was equivalent to about 15 kilotons of dynamite).