

# Conflict Update # 315

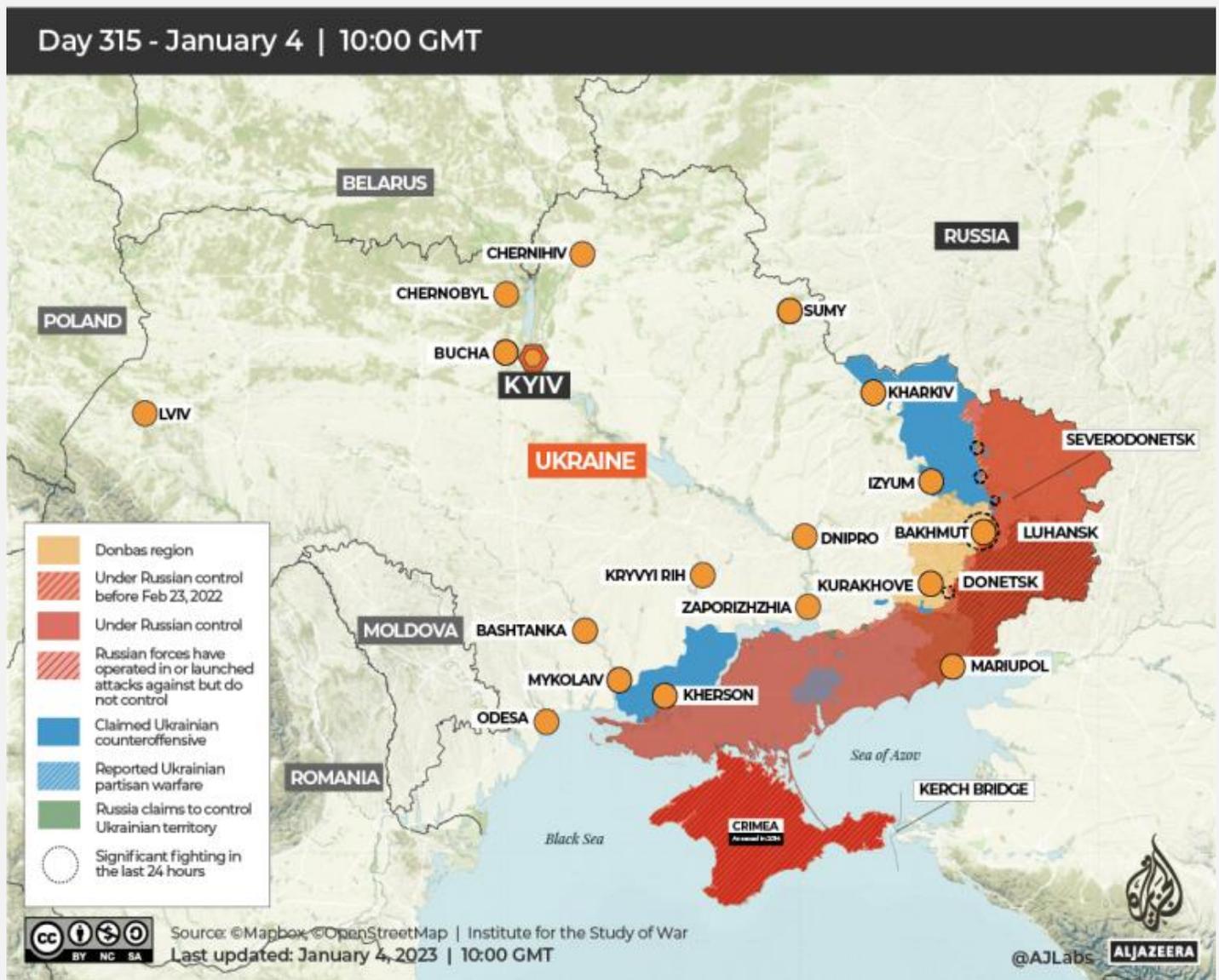
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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** – 108,910 (720) soldiers killed, 3,038 (+2) enemy tanks, 6,106 (+6) armored combat vehicles, 2,039 (+6) artillery systems, 424 (+0) MLRS systems, 215 (+1) air defense systems, 283 (+0) warplanes, 270 (+0) helicopters, 1,842 (+3) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 723 (+0) cruise missiles, 16 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,745 (+10) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 181 (+0) units of equipment.

## Key Takeaways



**Ukrainian pivot?** – Ukraine is killing thousands of Russian soldiers every week, announcing they will eliminate (Russian) draft mobilization call up numbers in the months ahead.

However, we can see Russia throwing as many soldiers into battle as it can muster. Looking along the front line from Kherson to Kreminna, we can see increasing numbers of conflict with Russia throwing troops en masse at Ukrainian positions.

It is trying to wear Ukrainian numbers down, not making any strategic advances, just throwing numbers into battle.

Now also evident is the increasing number of mobilized troops returning from training in Russia and Belarus, convoyed by train through Rostov-On-Don, via Mariupol and into Melitopol and elsewhere, and then trucked to front lines.

Should Russia have 4 times as many men and tanks as the Ukrainians, but are losing 3 times as many in battle, then they still win by attrition as they have once as many left over.

As astute as Ukrainian Command is, this will not be lost on them and it appears they have pivoted to counter this return and strength imbalance, by going deep.

They are attacking well into into Russian occupied territories. tracing, locking in and striking incoming troop movements on a daily basis, killing thousands. Keenly familiar with their (erstwhile) Ukrainian rail network, and Russia moving everything by rail, they and (American) electronic trackers, with the help of partisan monitors, pinpoint when and precisely where large numbers of soldiers have massed pending transfer to the front.

We can see this by the numbers with 9,201 enemy combatants killed during the past two weeks alone (see graph below and see the 9-month moving average curve) – excluding the as yet unconfirmed Makiivka strike number – but not as many tanks and other armored equipment. They are striking troop concentrations - constantly in and around rail lines, junctions and transfer points.

The only steeper slope of the “Russians killed” curve occurred during early months of the war when they defeated the initial Russian northern insertion and then later a few weeks after starting their September counteroffensive in Kharkiv.

It is crucial for them to continue doing this as the imbalance in numbers is a serious threat.



**Moscow panicking** – Russia is panicking with a perceived threat of Ukraine attacking Moscow and St. Petersburg.

Ukraine reaching ever-deeper into Russian home territory is awakening and stimulating fears for these cities, with the Kremlin now moving large numbers of air defense systems from battle zones to defend these urban areas.

This is telling as it indicates Russia has insufficient defense systems to cover more than just conflict zones, and secondly, that Ukraine possesses armements capable of taking the war to Russia's Main Street.

A third implication is that transferring air defense batteries from war fronts to Moscow and St. Petersburg, leaves the former lacking in complete air cover. This can similarly be a factor in the increasing success of Ukrainian attacks further and deeper into Russian-occupied territories.

**Close combat** - I was watching a blogger channel last night of an intense combat mission with the Kraken unit, some wearing head cameras, advancing from building to building around Bakhmut, routing out Russian combatants. It was brutal and extremely loud with instructions and directions being shouted by some troop commander, soldiers shouting and shooting, and screaming from the killed and wounded.

It was merciless, with grenades lobbed into buildings and stairwells, non-stop firing and bazooka rockets blowing out walls. But they appeared well-coordinated and advancing in an orderly fashion.

At the culmination one could see piles of dead Russians, even more captured men lying with their hands behind their heads, as well as injured and killed Ukrainians. Brutal but illuminating as to the intensity of the daily fight encountered.

**Moscow blames soldiers' phone use for attack** - The unauthorised use of mobile phones by Russian soldiers led to the deadly Ukrainian rocket attack in Makiivka on January 1, Moscow's military says, raising the death toll to 89.

## Putin

**Putin expected to speak to Turkish President Erdogan** - Putin plans to talk to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov tells the Interfax news agency.

Turkey acted as mediator alongside the UN in 2022 to set up a deal allowing grain exports from Ukrainian ports.

## Impacts

**Italy cannot be a 'honest broker' in the conflict, says Russia** - Russia says Italy is not an "honest broker" or possible mediator in peace talks with Ukraine due to its position against Moscow.

"Obviously, given the partisan position taken by Italy, we cannot regard it as either an 'honest broker' or a possible guarantor of the peace process," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said.

She added that it is "strange" for Moscow to hear proposals for mediation from countries that took "an unequivocal and very aggressive anti-Russian position" since the very beginning of its "special military operation" in Ukraine last February.

Zakharova added that some countries pursue "selfish goals" with the intent of being involved in the negotiation process to receive "foreign policy dividends."

"It would be better if the European pseudo-peacekeepers stopped the military support of Kyiv and focused their efforts on more firm and demanding work with the President of Ukraine Zelenskyy," she said, referring to Zelenskyy previously saying he would not negotiate with Putin.

**Ukraine looks to securing faster grain inspections** - Ukraine's efforts to increase grain exports are currently focused on faster inspections of ships rather than including more ports in the initiative, a senior Ukrainian official said.

Three leading Ukrainian Black Sea ports in the Odesa region were unblocked in July under an initiative between Moscow and Kyiv brokered by the UN and Turkey.

Under the deal, all ships are inspected by joint teams in the Bosphorus.

But Kyiv accuses Russia of slowly carrying out inspections that cause weeks of delay and reduce the supply of Ukrainian grain to foreign markets.

"Ukraine focuses on normalizing inspections rather than opening new ports," the senior Ukrainian official said.

The official added, "Why open the port of Mykolaiv if, at the current rate of exports, we can close half of the ports of Odesa, which are already open?"

## RUSSIA-UKRAINE WAR

# Ukraine-Russia grain exports deal

Kyiv and Moscow signed deals that will let Ukraine restart grain exports from its Black Sea ports, raising hopes that a global food crisis inflamed by Russia's invasion will ease.



### SIGNING CEREMONY ATTENDEES



**OLEKSANDR KUBRAKOV**  
Ukrainian infrastructure minister



**SERGEI SHOIGU**  
Russian defence minister



**RECEP TAYYIP ERDOGAN**  
Turkish president



**ANTONIO GUTERRES**  
UN secretary-general



ALJAZEERA



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## The New World

A number of impacts arising out of the Russian invasion of Ukraine will come to the fore in the years ahead, some sooner and others later. Here are a few for consideration.

**Green energy** – In seeking to avoid impact of Russian sanctions and OPEC+1 production crises, the world will pursue green options for their energy requirements. This will accelerate research, development and investment in pursuit of environment-friendly and localized energy supplies.

**Remote warfare** – The attraction of remote warfare where drones – now visible in air defense and attack – will spread to land and sea weapons. New technology will see ever more advanced types and variants of drone and related weaponry arriving on the battlefield, molded to various war theaters and requirement.

Naval vessels, particularly smaller attack boats, will increasingly see introduction together with advanced remote and unmanned submarine technology.

This plays nicely into the hands of countries such as the US where war casualties are a constant reminder to Main Street in its resistance to anything war-related, both blood and treasure.

**Smart weapons** – Technology will leap in bounds with huge steps in smarter weapons being designed and deployed. These will focus on the non-nuclear application, but as effective as any tactical nuclear device.

Evermore we will see “computer game type” scenarios where skilled young operators manipulate battle situations from afar such as in Denver US and the Arctic in the north.

**Rearmament** – Global arms inventories are being rapidly depleted by the Ukrainian war. But just as rapid is an increasing awareness of the need for modern, technologically adept weaponry.

The Boer War exposed antiquated British tactics, WWI revealed disastrous European war maneuvers with extreme casualties on both sides, and in WWII Rommel advanced at lightning speed through Europe via deployment of new German communication ability to reveal defunct French and British military doctrines.

And just as in those and myriad other instances, new weaponry with previously unthought of development and application will now follow.

US, NATO and other militaries will replenish along existing weapons systems, but with a parallel path of design and development for 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Century solutions and advancements.

**Musk** – Increasing reliance and use of satellite technology will see field observation translated to battle dimension at speed with initial identification of target to strike ability happening in minutes, quicker once AI development reaches critical mass.

Elon Musk will prevail and one can expect to see increasing dependence on his systems in this new world. Anticipate closer interdependence between his development teams and those of the US Department of Defense.

**Strategic raw materials, ores and minerals** – The war has exposed distinct and non-beneficial dependencies on strategic minerals, materials and ores. Neon is monopolized by Russia and an absolute requirement for microchip manufacture. Phosphate is a cardinal element of fertilizer production with Russia providing the bulk of global demand.

We can expect to see realignment of sources and geopolitical relations to drive down such dependencies. Look to Venezuela and the US moving closer together and the rise of Australian importance with their offshore natural gas reserves and Antarctic rights for example.

**Demographics** – War is a great reducer of population growth, particularly in the young men of 20 to 35 year age group. This is the “worker” belt who drive economies with their spending and family growth requirements. Older folk are the investors and do not drive economic multiplication as do the worker category. Too many aged folk manifest a drain on national economies – a distinct result of a major war.

Future demographic profiles around the globe will be affected by any new smart weapon warfare, with casualty rates diminishing accordingly. This will lead to a return to the normal pyramid demographic profile.

**Geopolitical alignments** – China and Russia have made no secret of their desire for a new “World Order” wherein they form a natural counter order to the existing Western Order.

We can expect to see both, depending on the outcome of this war, pursuing closer relations with 3<sup>rd</sup> World states, especially those with strategic minerals, fuels, ores and food. The Middle East is currently realigning as we speak with Saudi Arabia making increasing noise about forming an allegiance with China.

**Arctic** – This area to the north will fast become the new conflict zone with Russia moving quickly to claim as much of the Arctic seabed as its own. Seabed possession does not include interval water, surface and air possession though, these being different.

We can expect to see western nations rapidly gravitate to a new challenge of Russian moves so as to circumvent Russian, and by association Chinese, claims and grabs.

This is the future of the known resource world and of crucial import to 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Century success.

**Antarctic** – Just as with the Arctic, down south is also fast becoming an area of strategic import, although governed by different rules and international

## NATO

**The time is now to question how NATO should look post Ukraine** - "Now is the moment to consider what changes may be needed to ensure the alliance is strong, healthy and focused on its core task of keeping alliance members out of Russia's grasp," writes Joshua Huminski of the Center for the Study of the Presidency & Congress.

The war in Ukraine doesn't look like it will end anytime soon. But there are plenty of lessons to be learned from the conflict, and planners in the NATO nations should be thinking them through. In this op-ed, Huminski of the Center for the Study of the Presidency & Congress lays out the key points he believes NATO officials should be thinking about now.

In the Ukraine war, NATO's success (by proxy) and Russia's weakness presents an opportunity to reconsider the very force structure and design of the alliance. But that very success runs the risk of creating complacency. Seizing this moment requires Washington, Brussels, and European capitals to recognize the opportunity's presence and act with alacrity, and not allowing the feared “brain death” of NATO to reemerge.

Perhaps the first and most pressing question that must be answered is what NATO's purpose will be when the war in Ukraine eventually ends. The clearest answer is, naturally, returning to collective defense, focusing on European security, and deterring Russia. But bolstered by the additions of Sweden and Finland and the effective support against Moscow, leadership needs to ensure NATO doesn't follow the path of the US national guard and become the solution for everything that has a security tie.

The organization must keep its strategic focus narrow — that aforementioned “brain death” was as much a lack of focus as it was a lack of urgency. NATO itself cannot solve every problem; it can be an addendum and a tool, but unless it addresses its central purpose of maintaining European security and deterring Russia, it will return to a state of missing focus. And now is the moment to consider what changes may be needed to ensure the alliance is strong, healthy and focused on its core task of keeping alliance members out of Russia’s grasp.

Structural reform requires a careful analysis and consideration of national military priorities, and planning to identify what capabilities are needed and how they will be met. Here, critical questions need to be asked: Does it make sense for every country to invest in and purchase mini-armies, or would purposeful force specialization make more sense for the long-term? Would it make sense for the United Kingdom to focus, as one of their senior defense leaders remarked to me, on the value-added capabilities such as high-speed fighters, cyber capabilities, and space? Would it make sense for Germany to take that €100 billion defense fund and, in addition to bringing the beleaguered Bundeswehr into the 21st century, focus on heavy tanks and artillery (though reports suggest Berlin is struggling to operationalize this fund)?

Verbal NATO spending commitments, while welcome, are likely to encounter domestic political reality checks in the face of an anticipated global economic slowdown and as competition for domestic spending increases. Will the United Kingdom be able to meet its pledged 3% of GDP defense spending when social and healthcare needs skyrocket in the near term? Signs suggest that Whitehall recognizes this is not viable.

The accession of Sweden and Finland represent opportunities to formalize existing, informal, joint operational planning and training, both of which are critical for the future of NATO. Stockholm and Helsinki operate robust and modern militaries, and their entry into the alliance should be smooth (although the sheer amount of staff work related to NATO may strain their smaller cadres). Regular rotations and deployments across Scandinavia and Central and Eastern Europe will improve coordination and interoperability—key strengths of the NATO alliance — and serve as a signal to Moscow.

Here too, critical questions must be asked: what is the best allocation of forces? Are fixed deployments more appropriate versus more mobile, frequently changed rotations? This will, invariably, highlight differences amongst NATO allies. Estonia, for example, is likely to desire a more permanent and significant NATO presence (avoiding the “tripwire” model), whilst NATO HQ is increasingly aiming for more frequent rotations.

An emerging question is also the long-term relationship of Ukraine and NATO. At the end of November, NATO officials stressed their commitment for Kyiv to eventually join the alliance. According to Jens Stoltenberg, NATO’s SG, “NATO’s door is open.” The provision of aid, development of military-to-military links between NATO and Ukrainian forces, and ongoing training that the foundations of a NATO-standard military are being laid, which would assuredly ease Ukraine’s membership — at least, on the field. Political challenges, not small, will remain, as they will across the alliance.

In fact, navigating the tumultuous exigent political relationships and dynamics will almost certainly grow as a challenge, as evidenced by Turkey’s opposition to Sweden and Finland’s membership in NATO. The complicated relationship of Hungary (which indicated it will ratify membership in the Spring of 2023, but remains a force of chaos within the European Union) with Russia will also complicate NATO’s political machinations. Managing an alliance in which not all parties equally appreciate the immediacy of the threat, especially in the face of a weakened Russia, will require diligent effort from Brussels and whomever occupies the Secretary General’s seat.

There is also the open question as to the balance of responsibility and division of labor between the EU and NATO in continental security. The latter clearly has the capabilities and the defense expertise, while the former has considerable financial and civilian resources. What this looks like could well inform NATO’s mission set and prioritization.

The force design and structure will require an updated and comprehensive assessment of what Russia’s military will look like and what strategic threat Russia will pose to Europe in a post-Ukraine world. While much is unknown (not the least of which is the outcome of the war in Ukraine) arguably, and based on its not inconsiderable losses, the

conventional threat will have been dramatically reduced. Determining what the Russian threat will look like in the near-to medium-term is critical to informing NATO force design and force structure.

The West's sanctions and technology embargos make rearming exceptionally difficult, though not impossible. North Korea is one of the most heavily sanctioned countries in the world, yet continues to make improvements in its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs. Moreover, despite the imposition of punitive trade sanctions and sharply limiting Russia's access to Western technology, Moscow will undertake a concerted effort to rearm. That timeline is unclear: analysts have speculated anywhere from two to three years at the low-end to over a decade at the high-end. Yet, this rearmament will only get Russia back to its February 2022 level. While Moscow struggles to rebuild its conventional forces, NATO militaries will be continuing their own modernization programs (while incorporating lessons learned from Kyiv's successes the Russian military), while re-arming and restocking on spent munitions sent to Ukraine.

Moscow's cyber, space, strategic arms, and unconventional warfare capabilities have not suffered as much, or indeed at all. Russia will also find it more attractive to revert to political or informational warfare to pursue its aims in the near-term, to offset Russia's perceived (and real) conventional weakness in a post-Ukraine world. European and American efforts thus far to limit the efficacy of Russia's political warfare campaign are to be welcomed, but must be sustained.

Perhaps the biggest challenges for NATO will not be those related to the alliance itself or indeed Russia's military posture, but the internal balancing of national-level interests and considerations amongst individual member states. Domestic political and economic pressures are likely to absorb more time and attention in the coming months.

As the immediacy of the threat from Russia ebbs and, particularly as Ukraine continues to make advances, the urgency for reform in the face of a weakened Russia will decrease. Yet, failing to act today risks missing a generational opportunity to reform NATO for the 21st Century, something it has sorely needed and will need regardless of the outcome of the war in Ukraine. *Joshua C. Huminski is Director of Mike Rogers Center for Intelligence & Global Affairs at the Center for the Study of the Presidency & Congress, and a George Mason University National Security Institute Fellow.*

**Comment** – As instrumental in the above commentary will be the % of GDP expended on defense requirements as dictated by NATO agreements. This should be 2% by 2024, but the majority of members do not reach this number. Canada for instance spend 1,2%. This will need addressing should the alliance seek a balanced and effective role.

## Containment

**France to send light combat vehicles to Ukraine** - French President Emmanuel Macron told Zelenskyy that his government would send light AMX-10 RC armored combat vehicles to help in the war against Russia, a French official said after a phone call between the two leaders.

"This is the first time that Western-made armored vehicles are being delivered in support of the Ukrainian army," the official said.

Speaking to reporters, the official did not give any details about the volume or timing of the planned shipments but said talks would continue regarding the potential delivery of other vehicle types.

The French-made AMX-10 is an armed reconnaissance vehicle with high mobility, which carries four people, according to the French armed forces ministry website.

**Zelenskyy speaks to Romanian president about defence relations** - Zelenskyy has spoken with his Romanian counterpart, Klaus Iohannis, about developing their nations' defence ties, the Ukrainian president says on Telegram.

“Together with Klaus Iohannis, we agreed on steps to further develop Ukrainian-Romanian cooperation, primarily in the defence sector,” Zelenskyy wrote. “I thanked Romania for its solidarity and support in resisting Russian aggression.”