

# Conflict Update # 124

July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2022

## Conflict Assessment

### Key assessments

**The Russian Ministry of Defense's** meeting with the leadership of the Eastern grouping of forces in Ukraine suggests that the Kremlin will not focus on seizing Slovyansk at this stage of the campaign but will instead prioritize attempting to seize Siversk and Bakhmut.

**Russian President Vladimir Putin's** likely effort to put the burden of supporting operations in Ukraine on ethnic minorities to avoid conducting a general mobilization of ethnic Russians may be sparking resistance in ethnic enclaves in Russia.

**Russian forces conducted** a series of ground attacks east of Siversk and south of Bakhmut.

**Russian forces intensified efforts** to advance on Avdiivka and conducted limited ground assaults along the Donetsk City-Avdiivka frontline.

**Russian authorities are continuing** to integrate occupied areas into the Russian trade economy.

**Subordinate Main Effort— Southern Kharkiv, Donetsk, Luhansk Oblasts** - Russian forces

continued to conduct air and artillery strikes to the northwest of Slovyansk and may be preparing to resume offensive operations southwest of Izyum towards Barvinkove on July 18. The Ukrainian General Staff (UGS) reported that Russian forces tried and failed to advance around Brazhivka and Dmytrivka-both 20km northeast of Barvinkove along the T2122 highway. Russian forces additionally conducted artillery strikes around Barvinkove in the areas of Karnaukhivka and Virnopillya.



As ISW has previously assessed, Russian forces may be attempting to set conditions for advances southwest of Izyum to complement advances towards Slovyansk from the southeast of Izyum or to open a new advance towards Kramatorsk, although Russian troops are unlikely to successfully advance on Kramatorsk from Barvinkove due to the complicated cross-country terrain in this area. Russian forces also continued strikes directly on Slovyansk and on settlements to the east of Slovyansk, including Tetyanivka, Donetske, and Starodubivka.

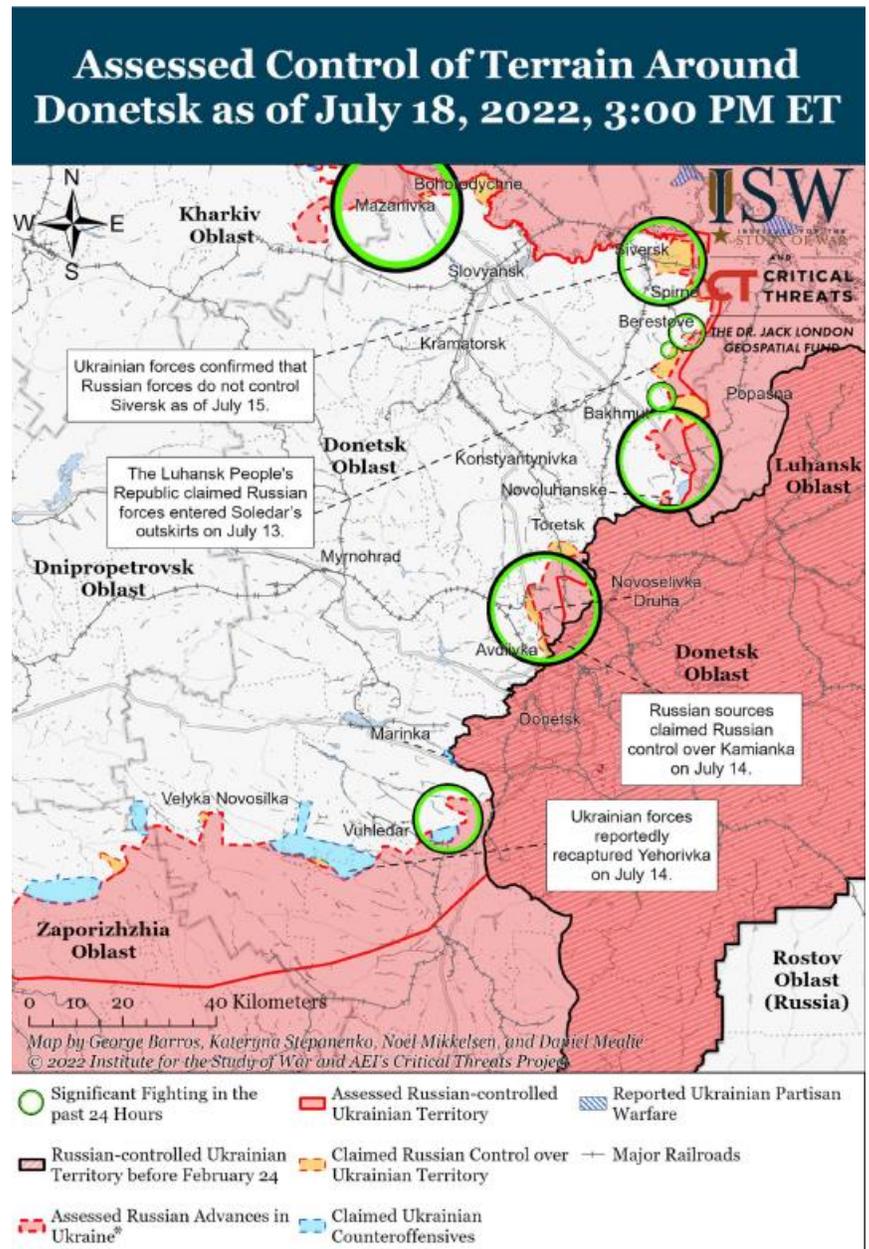
Russian forces conducted a series of unsuccessful ground attacks to the east of Siversk on July 18. UGS stated that Ukrainian troops repelled Russian attempts to improve their tactical positions in the directions of Bilohorivka-Hryhorivka, Zolotarivka-Verkhokamyanske, Zolotarivka-Serebryanka, and Verkhokamyanka-Verkhokamyanske. Russian forces also conducted limited ground attacks near Spirne, about 10km southeast of Siversk and continued to strike Ukrainian positions around Siversk.

Russian forces continued localized ground assaults south of Bakhmut on July 18. UGS noted that Russian forces unsuccessfully tried to advance along the Myronivka-Vuhledar Power Plant line, about 20km southeast of Bakhmut.

Russian forces conducted additional limited assaults in Novoluhanske and Semihirya, also south of Bakhmut, but did not make any confirmed advances. Russian forces continued artillery, missile, and airstrikes around Bakhmut and struck Pokrovske, Vesela Dolyna, Kurdyumivka, Travneve, Shumy, and Soledar.

Russian forces intensified ground attacks towards Avdiivka on July 18. UGS reported that Russian troops attempted to improve their tactical position around Verkhnotoretske and Kamyanka, both to the northeast of Avdiivka. Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) representative Eduard Basurin claimed that DNR forces have completely blocked the road from Avdiivka to Konstyantynivka (north of Avdiivka) and have surrounded Avdiivka in a semicircle.

Former Russian militant commander and Russian nationalist miblogger Igor Girkin noted that despite recent claims of success around Avdiivka, DNR units in this area are severely degraded and unlikely to make substantial gains under the threat of heavy Ukrainian artillery fire.



**Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv City** - Russian forces focused on preventing Ukrainian forces from advancing to the Russian border in Kharkiv Oblast on July 18. UGS reported that they continued to carry out air, artillery, and missile strikes on civilian and military infrastructure in Kharkiv City and settlements to the north, northeast, east, and southeast.

Russian Telegram channel Rybar claimed that Russian forces concentrated on striking Ukrainian positions in Chuhuiv on July 17-18. The Ukrainian Main Military Directorate (GUR) reported that the “Cedar” (“Кедр”) Ukrainian GUR Reconnaissance unit conducted a special operation in Dementiivka, north of Kharkiv City on July 18. The GUR stated that Ukrainian forces conducted a limited, localized counteroffensive that pushed “a large unit” of Russian forces out of Dementiivka.

**Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis** - Russian forces focused on maintaining occupied lines and preventing a Ukrainian offensive along the Southern Axis on July 18. Their forces conducted airstrikes on Ukrainian positions along the Kherson-Mykolaiv and Kherson-Dnipropetrovsk Oblast borders and settlements on the Zaporizhia Oblast frontline.

UGS reported that Ukrainian and Russian forces conducted mutual shelling strikes along the contact line along the Southern Axis. Kherson Oblast officials reported that Russian forces continued changing their concentration areas to densely populated areas in Kherson Oblast in an effort to deter Ukrainian strikes on Russian positions.

Russian Telegram channel Rybar claimed on July 18 that Ukrainian forces are increasing groupings of forces and equipment near the contact line in the Mykolaiv-Kryvyi Rih direction in preparation for an offensive on Kherson Oblast. Rybar also claimed that Ukrainian forces set up a pontoon bridge in preparation for a possible offensive across the Inhulets River near Arhanhelske, Kherson Oblast.

**Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts**

- Nothing significant to report.

**Activity in Russian-occupied** - Russian occupation authorities continued efforts to facilitate the economic integration of occupied areas into the Russian - trade economy. The Ukrainian Resistance Center reported that Russian authorities are “nationalizing” grain stores in occupied Zaporizhia Oblast under a unified Russian-owned “State Grain Company.”

The report notes that Russian authorities are exporting up to 100,000 tons of stolen Ukrainian grain from Zaporizhia Oblast to Egypt, Turkey, and unspecified Middle Eastern countries. Leveraging grain exports will allow Russian authorities to tie Ukrainian products directly into their global trade networks.



**Russian President Vladimir Putin’s likely effort to shield ethnic Russians from high levels of mobilization may trigger resistance in some of the ethnic enclaves that seem to be disproportionately bearing the burden of war.** Russian Telegram channel Rybar released a report on July 18 about the Novaya Tuva movement- an anti-war organization comprised of activists from the Tuvan ethnic minority enclave.

Rybar accused the Novaya Tuva movement of disseminating anti-war propaganda and inciting ethnic discord within the Russian Federation. This report is noteworthy in the context of the recent increase in the formation of regionally-based volunteer battalions through Russia, many of which fall along distinct ethnic lines.

ISW and others have previously noted the prevalence of non-ethnic Russian battalions fighting in Ukraine, which include troops from Chechnya, South Ossetia, Tuva, Tartarstan, Bashkortostan, Chuvashia, and others. These indicators suggest that Putin may be unwilling to conduct general mobilization in part due to a reluctance to mobilize large numbers of ethnic Russians. Rybar’s post as well as previous reporting on a "Free Buryatia" anti-war group bring to the fore the risk that Putin’s apparent desire to have non-Russians bear the brunt of the war at this stage could create domestic tension in these regions.

**Ukraine destroys two more Russian military ammo depots** - Ukraine has destroyed two more of Russia's military ammo depots in Ukraine's southern Kherson region, according to a Ukrainian military spokesperson.

Natalia Humeniuk, the head of the United Coordinating Press Center of Security and Defense Forces of the South of Ukraine, was asked during an interview with the Ukrainian news agency Ukrinform on Monday about the reported destruction of an ammo depot in the city of Nova Kakhovka in the Kherson region. Humeniuk responded that in addition to one in Nova Kakhovka, an ammo depot in another district of the Kherson region was also destroyed.

Humeniuk stated that these strikes resulted in the "enemy" lacking ammo to attack Ukraine's positions, saying that they saw "very good results." Such strikes "not only interrupt the logistic chains of the area, but it also affects the morale of the occupants," Humeniuk said, according to an English translation.

**Ukrainian targeting tactics** – In the first few weeks of the Russian invasion, starting February 24<sup>th</sup>, Ukrainian troops deployed “Shoot and Scoot” tactics, hiding out, striking (shooting) Russian supply lines and escaping (scooting). They would knock out front and rear units, blocking the convoy and bringing it to a halt. Columns of vehicles can be trapped easily by eliminating armor at the front and rear of a long line. The advance bogs down, and armored vehicles run out of fuel.

Then they would attack the middle sections, destroying tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs).

The Ukrainians particularly targeted food supply trucks and gas bowsers – an army cannot move on an empty stomach or without gas.

They also drove them off the road and into wooded areas, where they engaged in literal “arm-to-arm” combat, except with Russian armored vehicles, now stuck in difficult terrain.



Roll forward now and into the eastern Donbas, where Russia has re-concentrated its forces, having failed in other combat zones. See the article below “How many tanks can Russia afford to lose?”

Now Ukraine is deploying long-range newly-supplied weapons systems to engage the enemy from afar.

They are pointedly going after Russian arms and supply depots together with command posts and centers. The first is to continue to reduce Russian munitions supplies and the second to kill commanders and disrupt field command lines. It is astounding how many of both the Ukrainians have successfully destroyed.

This success is all the more evident, with General Sergei Shoigu, the Russian Minister of Defense, issuing instructions to battalion commanders to target Ukrainian “precision weapons” systems as a priority.

**HIMARS strikes against 106<sup>th</sup> Russian Airborne** - Ukrainian HIMARS strikes have killed or wounded most of the leadership of the Russian 106th Airborne and 20th Motorized Rifle Divisions. Russian sources confirm the deaths of those officers. All deputy officers of the 106<sup>th</sup> aside from one individual have been killed.

Colonels Sergei Kuzminov and Andrey Vasiliev were both killed on July 9. Valentin Danilovv, head of service of RAO58a was also killed.

Russia has lost so much so quickly from HIMARS that Sergei Shoigu, the Kremlin’s Minister of Defense, called for the military to prioritize the destruction of the weapons. "Army General Sergei Shoigu, noting the strengthening of the group's strike capabilities, gave instructions to the commander to prioritize the defeat of the enemy's long-range missile and artillery weapons with high-precision weapons," the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation, said on Telegram.

**Russian Solider Says He Was Sent To ‘Slaughter’ In Ukraine** - More evidence that all is not well with Putin’s war against Ukraine and the toll it is having on many members of the Russian military: Ukrainian authorities published audio they say shows a Russian soldier complaining to his partner that he had been sent “to slaughter” during Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine.

The Security Service of Ukraine shared audio of a conversation between the man and his wife last Friday.

“Here, you know, they just send us to slaughter. It’s not a smart way at all,” the man’s voice says in the audio. It is not clear where in Ukraine the man was, or when the conversation took place.

He said that as he moves, Ukrainian soldiers are “waiting for you, watching, expecting you. They’ve adjusted guns to these ----- trenches. You reach there, some point, and they’re ----- watching you!”

He said that Ukraine’s ability to fire from far away meant he and his fellow soldiers could not respond in kind. “They just sit drinking coffee and press buttons — and just throw shells on you.”

“Where do you shoot? Whom do you shoot? There’s ----- no one. ---- knows. And here you’re rushing around like an a\*shole. “So many of our tanks have been burned here, so many pieces of equipment, damn it.

“And our -----s can’t even hit them. They can’t locate them. Our brainless brigade. Our army. These ----- asshole commanders . Every day, people die here. Just for ----- nothing.”

The woman then responded, saying he needs to fire back with a tank. But he said that the Ukrainians are too far away.

“What the hell. They start firing at you from three to four kilometers away. Where are you going to shoot from a tank?”

The woman then asked: “Don’t you have such equipment?”

He responded: “We don’t have specialists, damn it,” and she replied “----.”

“No specialists here on our side. Our guys have probably thrown 20 carriages of projectiles into ----- nothing.”

The audio shared by Ukraine then ended.

**Putin's Ukraine Disaster: How Many Tanks Can Russia Afford To Lose?** - It seems like every time you check on the war in Ukraine, you see another Russian tank destroyed in vivid detail, its demise shared on social media videos and in news reports. Just how long can Russia hold out as it loses the tanks in its inventory?

The plan for the Kremlin's army is simple: Bombard the Ukrainians in the Donbas with artillery, rockets, and missiles. Then carry out maneuver-warfare techniques, using tanks and armored personnel carriers with dismounted infantry to assault the territory that Ukraine holds.

This operational art requires numerous tanks. With armor less available, stalemate is likely to continue, with no real Russian advances, but rather incremental gains that serve to lengthen the war.

As of July 18, Russia has lost approximately 1,450 tanks - most of them Soviet-era tanks that Moscow upgraded over the years. According to the RAND Corporation and the International Institute for Strategic Studies, Russia had 2,700 tanks before the war, with about 10,000 in storage.

The losses have quickly added up, with some units getting hit repeatedly by Ukrainian soldiers, drones, artillery, and aircraft. Russia's 4th Guards Tank Division saw 41 of their T-80s destroyed in only two weeks.

To increase firepower and execute their strategy of having infantry dismount from armored personnel carriers (APCs) to accompany armor, the Russians use battalion tactical groups, or BTGs, as their organizational unit. These groups mix tanks, infantry, and artillery, along with various support vehicles. The battalion tactical groups are showing weakness in Ukraine. More bluntly stated, they are being eaten alive by spirited Ukrainian defenses.

Phillips O'Brien, a professor of strategic studies at St. Andrews University, told the BBC that "[BTGs are] designed to attack quickly with lots of firepower. However, they have very little protection in terms of infantry personnel to escort them and to retaliate if the armored column comes under attack.

"That makes the Russian army like a boxer who has a great right hook and a glass jaw."

That glass jaw is a glaring problem. Russia's armored units were supposed to sweep through Ukraine and push the enemy into fearful retreat.

Of cardinal import to Russian offense tactics is that their BTGs are dependent upon tanks for ground cover for APC's and soldiers. No tanks, and the BTG grinds to a halt. Now a "sitting duck," with precise coordinates called in by partisans behind Russian front lines, Ukrainian artillery rains shells down, wiping out their positions. This is where the newly-arrived HIMARS batteries have been particularly lethal and effective. They have GPS-enabled projectiles that can be routed after launch across multiple warheads. (Read the Ukrainian report in the preceding headline of a Russian soldier's call with his wife).

To add humiliation to Russia's losses, the Ukrainians have taken abandoned Russian tanks and turned them into assets of their own, repairing damaged Russian tanks, re-flagging them as Ukrainian.

Not mentioned in reports is Russia's tank maintenance issue. A tank engine and gearbox needs major overhaul after approximately 1,000 hours in service. The majority of Russian tanks and heavy equipment in service are reported to have exceeded this service anniversary, without being serviced.

Further to this, domestic Russian maintenance companies, contracted to the Kremlin to service and repair tanks and artillery systems, have refused – because the Kremlin apparently is not paying them, reportedly running out of funds.

As reported in a previous War Update, Putin signed a new law into effect, forcing these maintenance companies to complete maintenance and repair work as ordered by Russian units.

Russian tanks often store ammunition in a carousel below the turret. Incoming missiles strike the top of the turret and explode the tank rounds inside, creating a huge fireball that blows the turret off the tank. To counteract this, Russian tank drivers constructed metal cages at the top of their turrets to shield against anti-tank missiles. This did not work, and worse, it kept soldiers from escaping tanks that caught fire.

Russia is now using older T-62s, taken out of storage and sent into battle. These are obsolete, having entered service in 1961 and has an underpowered 115mm gun, and its armor is not up to the challenges of modern warfare against anti-tank guided munitions such as the Javelin and NLAW.

**Putin Unable to Match People to Equipment in Ukraine War: UK Defense Chief** - Putin is struggling to match troops to equipment as his military suffers from low morale and recruitment struggles amid its invasion of Ukraine, said UK Defense Chief Sir Tony Radakin on Sunday.

Putin launched the invasion of Ukraine in late February, initially hoping for a quick victory. However, the Russian military was met with a stronger than expected defense from Ukraine, who has largely held its own during the war.

Fighting has been concentrated in only the easternmost region of the country in recent months, and Russia has not achieved its stated goal to "liberate" Donbas, a separatist region in Eastern Ukraine. Military experts have given a myriad of potential reasons for Russia's failure to quickly take Ukraine, with many citing weaknesses within Russian troops.

"There are some Russian troops that are clearly effective, and they are taking ground and being successful," he said. "But the overall force is struggling. They're struggling in terms of their numbers, but they're especially struggling in terms of their morale. And you're seeing that with the inability of President Putin to match the people with the equipment that he has."

Moscow has sought to mobilize reservist troops as the military deals with struggling morale, but that effort has not seen the success military leaders would hope for, as it has achieved only 30 percent of the numbers they would normally reach, Radakin explained.

"More and more, they're having to go to the more rural areas of Russia because people are avoiding the call-out in the cities," he said.

Ukrainian authorities said in April, less than two months after the war began, that some Russian soldiers were already refusing to fight due to their "moral and psychological condition," which prompted Russia to reportedly seek to enlist soldiers discharged from the military after 2012 to help fight.

The military has also faced other issues amid the invasion. US Lieutenant General Scott Berrier, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, said in May that Russian generals were being killed due to the military's poor chain-of-command communication—adding that Ukraine's chain-of-command is helping bolster its standing against Russia.

## Impacts

**Russian Court Fines Google \$370 Million Over 'Fake' Coverage Of Ukraine Invasion** - A court in Moscow has ordered Google to pay a fine of 21.77 billion rubles (\$373 million) over information distributed about Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine on its YouTube video-sharing platform.

The Magistrate court of the Taganka district in the Russian capital pronounced the ruling on July 18. It said Google "systemically" failed to delete as instructed what authorities had determined was banned content.

It was the second conviction for Google and the fine was 1/10 of all the profit the U.S. Internet giant and groups associated with it earn in Russia, the court said.

Russia's media regulator, Roskomnadzor, said on June 22 that it filed a lawsuit against Google accusing it of repeated failure to comply with the Russian authorities' demands.

Roskomnadzor's complaints about YouTube date back to March when it demanded that Google stop the spread of videos on YouTube that it said were "threatening Russian citizens."

In April, Roskomnadzor issued the first fine, a considerably lower 11 million rubles (\$188,500), saying YouTube "turned into one of the key platforms spreading fake news" about the war.

Days after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine on February 24, Roskomnadzor ordered media across the country to publish only information about the war in Ukraine provided by official sources.

It has also forbidden describing what several Western governments have called an "unjustified and unprovoked" attack on Ukraine as an invasion or a war, instead insisting it be called a "special military operation."

Over the past year, Russia has intensified its crackdown on any dissent, forcing the closure of most independent media outlets and limiting the free flow of information.

President Vladimir Putin in March signed a law that calls for lengthy prison terms for distributing "deliberately false information" about Russian military operations as the Kremlin seeks to control the narrative about its war in Ukraine.

The law envisages sentences of up to 10 years in prison for individuals convicted of an offense, while the penalty for the distribution of "deliberately false information" about the Russian military that leads to "serious consequences" is 15 years in prison.

This is how the Russian government hides its failures and barbaric behaviour from its citizens.

**The Fallout From the Russia-Ukraine Conflict** - Michael Walsh, partner with the law firm of Foley & Lardner LLP, discusses the impact on supply chains to date arising from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and what further effects companies might experience in the months to come.

There have been some major disruptions to U.S. supply chains as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "but not as many as one might think," says Walsh. U.S. exports of manufactured goods to Russia were never that strong in the first place, and a number of companies that were doing business in Russia prior to the invasion "have just pulled up stakes and walked away."

The most serious supply chain disruption right now is the cutting off of exports of grain from Ukraine, especially to Africa. In Europe, buyers of Russian oil are scrambling for alternative sources. In that respect, "there will be downstream effects," says Walsh. "I don't know that they're being acutely felt right now."

Russian industry is suffering, he says, especially in the country's automotive sector, which is lacking critical parts from manufacturers in the West. Also lacking are components needed to support Russia's oil drilling sector. And the country has been seriously hindered by the shutting down of payment methods through western banks.

U.S. exporters to Russia still must be aware of the various sanctions in place that could affect them and might be liable for penalties if their products end up in Russian hands, even if the initial buyer had no visible ties to those individuals. Walsh says industrial and tech sellers will have to adopt the due diligence methods of military suppliers, who have long been required to take special care that their products don't get to sanctioned purchasers. Companies are taking that obligation "very seriously," he says. "U.S. companies are paying attention to the issue and buckling down."

**Has the Ukraine war killed the tank for good?** - The war in Ukraine will surely be studied for years after it is finally over. That could mean many military experts declare the age of the tank dead and buried, as countless pieces of armor were destroyed on the battlefield. Or not?

One expert gives us his take: While the exact number of Russian tanks that have been destroyed or other immobilized in Ukraine cannot be confirmed, the numbers are significant. Even on the low-end, it is likely several hundred and that is in just under four months of fighting.

Russia's main battle tanks (MBTs) have shown to have significant vulnerabilities, while poor intelligence and simply bad tactics have been factors in the massive losses of the armored vehicles. Moreover, western-made anti-tank weapons – including the U.S.-made Javelin and British NLAW – have proven to be extremely effective when employed against a Russian MBT.

Videos circulated on social media of captured Russian armor being towed away by Ukrainian tractors, while images of destroyed hulks with the turrets blown off are routinely posted online.

According to multiple reports, a teen using a small drone helped Ukrainian forces target Russian armor in the early days of the invasion.

Even as many military experts have suggested that it is far too soon to consider this the end of the “Age of Tanks,” the conflict will likely impact future tank programs. That could include the Franco-German Main Ground Combat System, which has an estimated development cost of €1.5 billion (U.S. \$1.6 billion), which could face delays or even cancelation.

“Just as high-intensity warfare is underway in Europe, we cannot lose a program designed to help the survival of European defense,” Yohann Michel, a research analyst in Berlin with the International Institute for Strategic Studies think tank, told Defense News on Monday.

The war has highlighted flaws with Russian tank designs, notably how ammunition was stored near the turret in the T-72 and T-90 MBTs to feed an autoloader. This has resulted in a so-called “jack-in-the-box” effect where a hit from an anti-tank weapon can result in the ammunition being set off, which then blows the turret clean off the tank. Western analysts have reportedly known about the flaw since the Gulf War, but the Kremlin seemed to simply ignore the problem.

### **Bad Tactics**

In addition to the design flaws, poor tactics have also been under the microscope. Videos have shown how Russian tanks convoys have all too easily been ambushed due to a lack of support on the ground. Unprotected tanks are extremely vulnerable to such attacks – a fact known to military planners since the first armored behemoths rolled into action during the Battle of Somme in 1916.

Russian commanders had ignored 100 years of tactics and drove their tanks through Brovary, on the outskirts of Kyiv, with virtually no protection in March. The column was targeted by mortars and artillery and was quickly decimated.

“In Brovary, a well-trained NATO armored column would have been accompanied by infantry to stop an ambush,” retired British Army Brig. Ben Barry, a senior land warfare fellow at the IISS think tank in London, also told Defense News. “Tanks must be part of a combined arms team. Instead, the Russian tanks have suffered huge losses from [Next generation Light Anti-tank Weapons], Javelins and even Soviet-era anti-tank weapons.”

While military experts have suggested that canceling the MGCS would not be the right course of action, lessons from Ukraine do need to be considered in that and any other tank program going forward.

## Sanctions

**First Russia rail shipment to India reaches Mumbai with more to come** - The first test rail shipment between Russia and India via Iran completed its journey reaching Mumbai last week. However, this seems to be the starting point of a broader development process along the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) that includes more rail route variations and some trains already dispatched.

The Russia-India intermodal shipment connected St. Petersburg with Mumbai. The train departed from St. Petersburg carrying two 40-foot containers with wood laminate sheets heading to the Russian Caspian Sea port of Astrakhan. From there, it left to the Iranian Caspian Sea port of Anzali. After entering and crossing Iran by rail, cargo reached the Bandar Abbas port in the Persian Gulf and departed for the West Indian coast, reaching Mumbai.

**Russia's crude deliveries to China and India have plunged 30% from their wartime peak as concerns mount that Asia can't fully absorb Moscow's shrinking oil market** - Russia's crude shipments to China and India have fallen nearly 30% since they peaked after the war in Ukraine began, a Bloomberg report shows, signaling that Asia may not be equipped to fully absorb Russian barrels once European sanctions fully set in.

So far, expensive crude prices have bolstered Russia's export duty revenues and helped mitigate the impact of a shrinking market. Soaring oil prices have allowed the Kremlin to continue funding its war efforts even amid tightening sanctions.

Since the war began, India went from importing nearly zero barrels per day of Russian crude to almost one million barrels a day in June, according to Vortexa data.

China, too, has ramped up imports dramatically, nearly doubling Russian crude imports between February and June. But deliveries have slipped to roughly 30% below their highs, Bloomberg reports.

According to Bloomberg data, Moscow is netting roughly \$160 million a week in crude export duty, which is about 25% higher than pre-war months, but down by about the same amount from April peaks.

Since mid-June, Russia's seaborne crude flows have declined on a rolling four-week average of exports calculated by Bloomberg. Flows have slipped to 3.24 million barrels a day leading up to July 15, seeing a dip each of the prior four weeks.

**Romania reopens Soviet rail line to aid Ukraine grain sales** - Romania has reopened a Soviet-era rail link from its Danube River port of Galati to Ukraine a month earlier than expected reports Bloomberg.

Ukraine typically exports the bulk of its grain from Black Sea ports, but they've been blocked by Russia's invasion. It's curbing sales to road, river, and rail routes to EU countries while shipments remain well below normal pace.

Romania has already enabled the export of one million tons of Ukrainian grain since the war began. Romanian Transport Minister Sorin Grindeanu declared the government refitted the link connecting Galati after works by a state-owned company began in early June.

That means grain coming from Ukraine via Moldova can reach Galati directly to be transferred onto barges and then transloaded for onward passage. Romania's biggest logistics company on the Danube, Transport Trade Services SA, also declared that it opened a new water-only route to benefit the grain exports.

**Russia, China to Break Ground on Gas Pipeline Via Mongolia in 2024** - Construction of a Russian-Chinese natural gas pipeline transiting through Mongolia will begin in 2024, the landlocked country's prime minister has said.

The Power of Siberia-2 pipeline, which will deliver Europe-bound gas from western Siberian fields to China for the first time, is expected to go online in 2030.

Energy industry executives expect the timeline to accelerate due to Moscow's souring relations with the West over the war in Ukraine and the subsequent shrinking European market for its key export.

Mongolian Prime Minister Oyun-Erdene Luvsannamsrai said that he expects construction of the Power of Siberia-2's Mongolian branch to go ahead despite the war.

"The feasibility study of this project has finished, and we believe construction will begin in 2024," Luvsannamsrai told the Financial Times in an interview published Monday.

He added that Moscow had not pressured Ulaanbaatar to accelerate construction of the Power of Siberia-2 line despite Russian energy giant Gazprom's planned pivot to Asia.

The planned capacity of the 2,600-kilometer Power of Siberia-2 is 50 billion cubic meters.

Russia and Mongolia signed a memorandum of understanding in 2019 to study the Power of Siberia-2's feasibility across Mongolia.

What is not being said but apparent, is that insufficient gas pipelines exist to fully replace sanctioned sales to the West. Hence construction of a new route for exporting from Russia to China.

## Putin

**Russia and Iran Are Threatening the World With a New Cold War** - It may not be the Cold War, but it is beginning to look very like one. The US is trying to build a network of alliances in the Middle East between Israel and moderate Arab countries. In response, Putin has gone on the offensive, and is seeking to cement an alternative axis based in Tehran.

Putin's move comes on the heels of Joe Biden's trip to Israel and Saudi Arabia. As world media covers Biden's visits to Jerusalem, Jeddah and Riyadh, Putin is set to visit Tehran on July 19. He will be joined in Iran's capital by Turkish President Erdogan to meet with Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi.

The three leaders will take part in a summit to broker an end to the 11-year Syrian civil war — the so-called "Astana peace process." But it is difficult to believe Putin would head to Iran for only his second foreign visit since he invaded Ukraine if the US had not just made the attempt to strengthen the American presence in the Middle East.

And it was a genuine attempt. Biden was not only looking for the Saudis to increase oil production and thus bring down skyrocketing fuel prices, but also seeking support for normalization with Israel and the formation of an "Arab NATO" that would include the Jewish state. This bold move is a direct and potentially effective challenge to Iranian imperialism, and Tehran knows it. So does Putin.

So, Putin is on the move. He wants to intimidate the potential members of an Israel-Arab alliance, because such an alliance threatens his ambition to establish Russian hegemony in Eurasia — an issue that is all the more pressing as the Russia-Ukraine war drags on.

It's not surprising that he is nervous. Biden's optimistic remarks about his trip sent a very strong message: The US is deeply committed to the future of the Middle East, it has not disengaged, it is not weak and as strong as it has ever been.

Besides his push for an Iranian axis, Putin turned to the weapon he employs most frequently — propaganda. Maria Zakharova, a Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman, attacked Biden's request for increased oil production, saying it

betrayed promises Biden made to US voters on renewable energy and climate change. But she went much further than this. She made the direst threat imaginable: that the US and its allies are pushing the world toward nuclear war.

Putin's allies in Iran also chimed in to blast a potential Israel-Arab security alliance. The deputy head of Iran's terrorist Revolutionary Guards, Yadollah Yavani, threatened a "decisive response" to America, the "Zionist regime" and Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, just as Biden was set to take off for Jerusalem, we learned that Iran would supply Russia with hundreds of drones and train Russian forces in how to use them. Previously, such drones had only been in the hands of Hezbollah and Hamas. Now, they are undoubtedly headed for Ukraine.

Russia is lining up behind Iran diplomatically as well. Iranian Foreign Minister Amir Abdollahian recently visited Russia, and his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov said he is committed to seeing the removal of all sanctions on Tehran and the restoration of the 2015 nuclear deal.

Sides are forming up. The potential flash points are multiplying. And let's not forget that, behind the scenes, China is expanding its presence in the Middle East and Africa. There is an abyss of possible new developments, and none of them are peaceful.

**Putin's Nightmare: Russia's War In Ukraine Will Likely End And Become A 'Frozen Conflict'** - James Stavridis, a former NATO supreme allied commander for Europe, said yesterday that the Russia-Ukraine conflict will likely conclude in four to six months, with a "frozen conflict" ending similar to the Korean War.

Stavridis discussed the state of the war during a WABC 770 AM radio interview with New York businessman John Catsimatidis, where he remarked that it was "extremely obvious" the conflict has "bogged down on both sides."

"The Ukrainians are putting up a very strong fight," Stavridis said. "Putin's war plans have proven to be not particularly effective. He has gained a little bit of territory over what he started the conflict with. "I see this one headed toward a Korean War ending, which is to say an armistice, a militarized zone between the two sides, ongoing animosity, kind of a frozen conflict. Look for that in a four-to-six-month period. Neither side can sustain it much beyond that."

In May, Stavridis told Catsimatidis of some of the ongoing issues with the war, including the unprecedented numbers of casualties endured by Russia among its higher ranks.

"In modern history, there is no situation comparable in terms of the deaths of generals. ... Here, on the Russian side, in a two-month period, we've seen at least a dozen, if not more, Russian generals killed," he said at the time. Stavridis added that "not a single general was lost in actual combat" while the US engaged in wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

**Putin Threatens 'Doomsday' if Ukraine Attacks Crimea** – Putin's deputy chairman of Russia's defense council yesterday said there would be a swift, tough action that would mean doomsday for Ukraine if Crimea was attacked. Dmitry Medvedev made his threat in a statement to Russian state media TASS.

"Some ecstatic, bloody clowns, who pop up there with some statements now and then, are trying to threaten us, I mean attacks on Crimea and so on," Medvedev told a group of WWII veterans in Volgograd.

"Should anything of the kind happen, they will be faced with a doomsday, very quick and tough, immediately. There will be no avoiding it," Medvedev continued. "But they keep on provoking the general situation by such statements."

"Today, another not-so-sober statement was made from Russia about the alleged "doomsday" for Ukraine. Of course, no one will accept such intimidation," Zelenskyy said. "But look how cynical it is to say the same thing today - on the next anniversary of Russia's destruction of the Malaysian Boeing in the sky over the Ukrainian Donbas."

Medvedev's "doomsday" remark was likely sparked by Ukrainian Minister of Defense Vadym Skibitskyi on Saturday saying that Russian military facilities in the occupied Crimea are on the target list to strike by Ukrainian troops.

**Putin is already at war with Europe. There is only one way to stop him** - Putin has weaponized food, energy and refugees, spreading economic and political pain across the continent. Sanctions don't work, a land for peace deal would be a disaster.

Time to wake up and smell the cordite. Like shockwaves from an exploding missile, Putin's war on Europe's edge is rapidly rolling westwards, blasting its way through the front doors of homes, businesses and workplaces from Berlin to Birmingham. Its fallout seeds a toxic rain of instability, hardship and fear.

The idea the Ukraine conflict could be confined to Ukraine and that western sanctions and arms supplies would stop the Russians was always a nonsense. Now, enraged by Kyiv's stubborn resistance and hell-bent on punishing his punishers, Putin's aim is the immiseration of Europe.

By weaponizing energy, food, refugees and information, Russia's leader spreads the economic and political pain, creating wartime conditions for all. A long, cold, calamity-filled European winter of power shortages and turmoil looms. And like a coin-fed gas meter, the price of western leaders' timidity and shortsightedness ticks upwards by the hour.

Russia's destabilization operations, social media manipulation, cyber-attacks, diplomatic double-talk, nuclear blackmail, plus its unrelenting slaughter of civilians in Ukraine, will only intensify Europe's state of siege in the months ahead. The west's fanciful belief it could avoid continent-wide escalation is evaporating fast.

Though not entirely due to Putin's war, Europe now faces fundamental challenges as big or bigger than the 2008 financial crash, Brexit, or the pandemic. Yet many EU and UK politicians are in denial. If, as predicted, gas stops flowing and lights dim, it will not just be a matter of closed factories, lost jobs, and depressed markets.

Freezing pensioners, hungry children, empty supermarket shelves, unaffordable cost of living increases, devalued wages, strikes and street protests point to Sri Lanka-style meltdowns. An exaggeration? Not really. Blowback, fanned by the Putin-admiring far right, is already gathering strength in Greece and Italy, the Netherlands and Spain.

In prospect, too, is a shattering of EU solidarity as national governments compete for scarce resources. Brussels is due to publish a "winter preparedness plan" this week. But its provisions are unclear and unenforceable. The broader context is lack of an agreed, implemented EU-wide energy policy.

Despite bilateral cooperation pledges, a total Russian cut-off could pit country against country, further inflate prices, and split the anti-Moscow coalition. In such a scenario Putin would demand sanctions relief in return for resumed supplies, just as he has over blockaded Black Sea grain.

Import-dependent Germany is already taking unilateral steps, seeking alternative oil and gas suppliers. A national emergency moved closer after Moscow turned off the Nord Stream I pipeline last Monday. Many in Berlin fear (and some environmentalists hope) the shutdown – and any subsequent rationing – may become permanent.

Because Europe faces "very, very strong conflict and strife" this winter over energy prices, it should make a short-term return to fossil fuels, Frans Timmermans, the European commission's vice-president, suggested. Once again, Germany is showing a lead, increasing electricity production from coal-fired power stations. Once again, the west looks to Gulf oil.

The obvious escape route is a land-for-peace deal with Putin, agreed over Ukraine's dead bodies. If (and it's a big "if"), Russia returned to business as normal, it would alleviate Europe's suffering – though probably not Ukraine's.

Yet such a deal would also be a precedent-setting disaster for future peace and security across the continent and globally, too. Just think Taiwan. Or Estonia. It would destroy the sovereign integrity of democratic Ukraine.

Fortunately, there is an alternative: using NATO's overwhelming power to decisively turn the military tide.

As previously argued here, direct, targeted, forceful western action to repulse Russia's repulsive horde is not a vote for a third world war. It's the only feasible way to bring this escalating horror to a swift conclusion while ensuring Putin, and those who might emulate him, do not profit from lawless butchery.

Intent on inflicting maximum disruption, Putin openly menaces the heartlands of European democracy. The writing is on the wall and may no longer be ignored. Enough of the half-measures and the dithering! Nato should act now to force Putin's marauding troops back inside Russia's recognised borders.

It's not only Ukraine that requires saving. It's Europe, too. (Luke Harding of The Guardian).

## China

**China's Belt And Road Focuses On New Eurasian Trade Routes Due To Ukraine War** - Moving shipping containers from China through Russia to the European Union became a vital part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), but Moscow's invasion of Ukraine and the Western sanctions that followed have forced China to search for alternatives.

Faced with the economic fallout of trade disruptions after five months of war, many freight forwarders that move Chinese goods are looking further south to move rail-cargo across Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Turkey to Europe despite long-standing logistical problems with the route.

"In order to survive, the BRI has no alternative but to adapt to the new circumstances." Andreea Brinza, vice president of the Romanian Institute for the Study of the Asia-Pacific, told RFE/RL.

The main alternative is the roughly 6,500-kilometer network of roads, railroads, and ports stretching across Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey, and into Europe known as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR).

It's also known as the Middle Corridor of the BRI -- the globe-spanning infrastructure and investment project championed by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

The route has received billions of dollars in Chinese investment in infrastructure over the last decade but received a smaller share of shipments due to cost and predictability concerns. As a result, Russian trains -- which brought goods directly to Europe by rail or port or entered via Belarus -- became the main path for Chinese-EU overland trade, making up 68 percent of westbound traffic and 82 percent of eastbound traffic in 2021.

But that changed sharply following the Kremlin's February invasion of Ukraine.

According to the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route Association, cargo shipments across Central Asia and the Caucasus are expected to reach 3.2 million metric tons in 2022, a sixfold increase over the previous year. The route also received a boost in April when Maersk, one of the world's largest shipping corporations, canceled new bookings through Russia and started a train service along the Middle Corridor, which was joined by the Finnish company Nurminen Logistics in May.

Since then, multiple governments along the route -- from Turkey to Romania to Azerbaijan to Georgia to Kazakhstan -- have met to discuss further investment and deepening cooperation, including a state visit to Ankara in May by Kazakh President Toqaev, where he discussed the future of the route with his Turkish counterpart, Erdogan.

The refocus on shipments away from the Russian route also received the backing of many Chinese logistics companies, which had previously neglected the Middle Corridor as being unprofitable and vaguely defined.

“The combination of the preexisting interest [from governments along the route] and China’s limited options because of the war made the Middle Corridor possible,” Brinza said. “But [the] main driver of this route was China.”

The change marks a substantial and quick reversal of fortune for the TITR and opened up new possibilities for countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

The northern rail network through Russia was increasingly boosted by both Chinese and Russian officials as they deepened ties and won over freight forwarders and cargo companies during the COVID-19 pandemic as an alternative to ocean transport because ports around the world closed or curtailed operations to try to stop the spread of the virus.

In 2018, Putin ordered state monopoly Russian Railways to substantially grow container traffic and -- prior to its invasion of Ukraine -- Moscow said it expected container flows to increase to 3.6 million boxes by 2035.

During that span, Beijing worked hard to subsidize, promote, and make profitable those railway lines and the efforts led to a 50 percent increase in cargo transported in 2020, a marked improvement from only a few years previously when trains mostly ran empty on the eastward route back to China.

But with many large companies and shipping firms unable or unwilling to rely on transport through Russia, a substantial hole has been created and many governments are trying to capitalize by filling it.

Kazakhstan has announced plans to invest more into its ports along the Caspian Sea and its state-run railway operator Kazakhstan Temir Zholy reported that terminals along its western coast have already doubled their shipping volume.

Chinese officials have also moved to simplify transport, with Wang Lingjun, deputy minister of China’s General Administration of Customs, saying on May 25 that Beijing is improving its customs procedures at the Alashankou and Khorgos land ports on its border with Kazakhstan that would lead to increased volumes of goods being sent by rail.

## Containment

**HIMARS: The Weapon Ukraine Sings About and Russia Wants Destroyed** - As the war in Ukraine has turned from Russia’s failed attempt to quickly take the capital and remove leadership to a slow and grueling battle in the East. Ukraine has said that one weapon system in particular had made a huge difference in its effort to fend off the Russian invasion. It’s the U.S. manufactured M142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket System or HIMARS, an artillery launcher on wheels on wheels. Ukrainian president Volodymyr Zelenskyy has praised it, the Ukrainian Army is singing about it, and the Kremlin recently made destroying them a priority. HIMARS is, like the Javelin before it, a weapon of war that has become a meme and a symbol of the wider conflict.

Like the Javelin, HIMARS is a relatively new weapon system. It was developed by Lockheed Martin as a mobile and flexible rocket and missile launcher at the turn of the century. The U.S. plans to send a total of 12 of the systems to Ukraine. Eight have already arrived and are in use and four more are on the way.

HIMARS is basically a truck with a pod on the back that can fire a variety of missiles and rockets. Along with the actual trucks themselves, the U.S. has sent hundreds of Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System (GMLRS) rockets. Each HIMARS pod can hold six. The weapon fires from the back of the truck and is guided to its target using GPS. The rockets are expensive, but unlike some of the artillery that’s been playing a bigger role in the war since it shifted to the Eastern part of the country, the GPS lends them a high degree of precision that makes targeted strikes extremely effective.

The HIMARS also has a long range compared to other artillery units. GMLRS have a range of about 50 miles, double that of a modern U.S. howitzer and well out of range of Russian artillery. The range, precision, and mobility of the HIMARS has allowed Ukraine to strike at Russia’s logistics and supply lines without fear of immediate retaliation. They’re blowing

up Russian ammo depots and logistical centers with impunity. Ukraine has said repeatedly that Russia has it outgunned, but it appears these precision strikes have slowed the Kremlin's advance.

The GMLRS 50 mile range is enormous, but the HIMARS is capable of firing missiles that could go much, much farther. The HIMARS is also capable of firing massive Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS) that have a range of 186 miles. Ukraine has asked for the missiles, but Biden has declined so far. "We are not encouraging or enabling Ukraine to strike beyond its borders," he said in an op-ed published in the New York Times in May.

ATACMS would put both Crimea and the borders of Russia within reach of Ukraine's military. Ukrainian military officials have already suggested they will use HIMARS to strike at military targets in Crimea. The disputed region was annexed by Russia in 2014 and most of the West has not recognized it as a Russian territory. After Ukraine said it might strike the region, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev said that any strike in the region, HIMARS or otherwise, would provoke a "Judgement Day" response from Russia.

**Ukraine can now export grain having taken Snake Island** – Black Sea routes have been restored to Ukraine grain exporters using Danube River ports near Romania giving access to the Bosphorus and Turkey, the Mediterranean and ports beyond, reports Forbes magazine.

The two-month Ukrainian operation to take Snake Island from Russian forces June 30, made the grain exports possible. Snake Island is just 20 miles from the Danube Delta, where the river flows into the Black Sea.

The safe passage of eight cargo vessels from the Black Sea from the river ports of Reni and Izmail along the Danube-Black Sea Canal are expected to be able to sail back the same way.

"Even a partial recovery of sea exports will stimulate grain purchases by traders, which will support domestic prices," the country's grain exchange stated.

The ships, thousands of tons of cargo, could help to speed the flow of wheat and other grain that have piled up in Ukraine's silos since the Russia blockaded Odesa in February.

**The U.S. Navy Is Training For War In The South China Sea** - The South China Sea Is Back In the Spotlight: The Indo-Pacific has been full of activity lately. RIMPAC 22, the largest maritime exercise in the world, is currently underway in the region, with almost 30 nations participating.

Almost simultaneously, the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan and its carrier strike group are conducting operations in the South China Sea. At the core, both events have one recipient in mind: China.

Almost at the same time the USS Ronald Reagan reached the South China Sea and began with its training operations, the USS Benford, an Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer, conducted a freedom of navigation operation in the South China Sea, triggering a furious statement by China, which claims sovereignty over the international waterways.

For at least a decade now, Beijing has launched an aggressive territorial grab in the South China Sea, manufacturing (and fortifying with anti-access weapon systems) artificial islands.

### **Sailing Through the South China Sea**

While in the contested region, the USS Ronald Reagan and its accompanying warship are conducting maritime security operations, including maritime strike exercises, tactical training between air and surface units, and flight operations with fixed and rotary-wing aircraft.

"Our presence in the South China Sea demonstrates America's commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific. Every Sailor onboard contributes to this important and enduring mission as we operate in this region, in accordance with international

law to ensure that all nations can do the same,” Captain Fred Goldhammer, the commanding officer of USS Ronald Reagan, said in a press release.

In addition to the USS Ronald Reagan, the U.S. Navy has deployed the Ticonderoga-class guided-missile cruiser USS Antietam (CG 54) and the Arleigh Burke-class guided-missile destroyer USS Higgins (DDG 76) in the South China Sea.

**Swedish Air Force crafting new fighter strategy amid Russian aggression, NATO ascension** - The chief of the Swedish Air Force said Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and Sweden’s membership in that NATO alliance are driving the service to develop a new strategy for its next-generation fighter aircraft.

As a result of those significant geopolitical developments, the Swedish government boosted its 2022 military budget to 2% of gross domestic production from about 1.5%, an increase of \$3 billion krona (\$286.6 million). With the larger budget, Swedish Air Force Chief Maj. Gen. Carl-Johan Edstrom said his service is developing a strategy that will inform future fighter aircraft requirements.

**Six US Air Force B-52 bombers make symbolic sweep over all NATO members** - The U.S. Air Force is sending six B-52 Stratofortress strategic bombers to fly over each of NATO’s 30 members on Friday, a gesture meant to signal the alliance’s unity.

Four bombers, taking off from Royal Air Force Fairford in the United Kingdom, will pass over NATO’s European members, according to a statement by U.S. European Command in Stuttgart, Germany. (We pictured these aircraft at the airfield in our War Update dated March 8<sup>th</sup> – see picture to the right of the 4 B52s parked at Fairford AFB).



## Geopolitics

**Why the US doesn’t want Turkey to invade Syria** - US officials warned Turkey this week against expanding its so-called buffer zone in northeast Syria, saying such a move would complicate counter-ISIS measures, and would increase the violence that Kurds and Syrians in the region have faced since Turkey’s initial incursion in 2019.

“We strongly oppose any Turkish operation into northern Syria and have made clear our objections to Turkey,” Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for the Middle East Dana Stroul said in a speech at the Middle East Institute Wednesday. “ISIS is going to take advantage of that campaign, not to mention the humanitarian impact.”

As Stroul pointed out, the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), a group that’s made up largely of Kurds and is critical to the ground battle to recover ISIS-held territory in Iraq and Syria, are responsible for security in the Al-Hol and Azraq camps. Together the camps hold approximately 60,000 vulnerable, displaced people, and serve as prisons for around 10,000 alleged ISIS militants.

On May 23, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said his military would launch further offensives, creating a 30-kilometer-deep buffer zone as soon as the military and intelligence and security services had completed their preparations, Reuters reported.

“The main target of these operations will be areas which are centers of attacks to our country and safe zones,” Erdogan said during a speech at the time, although he didn’t specifically mention where the operations would take place or point to any particular target.

Erdogan has repeatedly warned that his military is planning an incursion into northeastern Syria, driving further into territory held by the Kurdish ethnic minority.

“That’s a global problem, it’s not a US problem,” Stroul said of a Turkish attack weakening the security situation in northeastern Syria. “So frankly, the whole world should be a little bit more active at this point in time about the risks, about the second- and third- order effects of renewed operations that detract from security of these detention facilities, security and access to the displaced persons camps, and continued counter-terrorism pressure on ISIS.”

**Prepare for a new ‘South Asian order’** - Sri Lanka is confronting a severe economic crisis which has brought its citizens out on the streets to protest against the calamitous shortages of essentials, food and fuel inflation and long power cuts. Recently, the protesters marched into the presidential palace in an attempt to show indignation against the Rajapaksa regime.

We all know that its economic woes stem from a balance of payments crisis, which has left it with limited foreign reserves to pay for fuel, food and other essentials. However, we must broaden our view to see that this is the first symptom of a disease that is yet to cover a major part of the South Asian subcontinent. While this view may appear pessimistic, it is, in fact, a reality check that India must come to terms with, in order to prepare itself to deal with entropies that may engulf the region in the next few years.

The chaotic views of insurrection in Sri Lanka can be attributed more to the economic distress than political unrest. While there is a limit to how India can interfere and repair the severe economic mismanagement in our neighborhood due to sovereign compulsions, we can prepare ourselves sufficiently to ensure that the fire which the arsonists in these countries are inflaming should not reach our shores.

#### **What can and should India do?**

1. **First**, India must **quickly invest in ramping up its border infrastructure and modernize its border security forces**, including the central and state agencies to ensure that the flood of migration does not create instability in our border states for the years (or decades) to come. Augment the capacity of your ramparts before you congregate at the bastion for an action.
2. **Second**, especially in the case of Sri Lanka, it is important to **keep a check over rising sub-nationalist demands that may balkanize these states** and create new challenges for India to deal with. We must be fully aware that in case of materialization of such a scenario, there will be cross-territorial implications to it. The regional parties in both India and Sri Lanka must be suitably coaxed in lieu of a future opportunity through constitutional means.
3. **Third**, the **path of democracy and constitutionalism must be incentivized** and any future negotiations with either the Indian government or multilateral financial institutions must be predicated upon the democratic structure of government. However, it is not an intransigent approach, and it must be suitably amended in order to pave the way for new realities. We must start looking beyond “red, white and blue” shades of South Asia and reorient our policies to reflect the local understanding of the situation.
4. **Fourth**, a leaderless political mobilization makes it difficult to palliate the frustrations of general public, as seen in recent mobilizations in India too. **Giving voice to a rational, credible and prominent face(s)** may help in quickly dousing the flames. Of course, this needs to be backed by transfer of immediate financial incentives through the new leaders to cover the necessities and earn the goodwill of the local public.
5. Last, but not the least, it **is important to appear non-interfering, non-aggressive and respectful of territorial integrity of the neighborhood state**. The last thing we would want at such a critical juncture is to inflame passions of their people against India’s big-brotherhood and provide a vent to the local demagogues to drive upon those passions and assume power, rupturing the entire subtle efforts that we would be investing to stabilize the region.

The crisis in Sri Lanka may be the first, but it may not be the last in the region. Unrestrained economic mismanagement, derision of constitution, breakdown of democratic institutions and external interference has put the countries in South Asia on a path of political and economic collapse. India has a rough path to tread as it will have to balance out the opportunities and the vulnerabilities together without letting the latter overpower the former at any point of time. This balance must be maintained and supported by right messaging and independent policies which must appear to be magnanimous in character.

While we have been disproportionately focused upon the emerging 'world order,' we cannot discount the possibility of an emerging 'South Asian' order. Resisting this churning may not be appropriate because we can stabilize this region through such manageable instabilities. (Vivek Shukla).

**Turkey's Newfound Cache of Rare Earths Could Supply the World's EVs and More** - Turkey announced last week it discovered a massive, rare earth reserve, almost as big as the world's largest in China. The find is reportedly so large that it could on its own satisfy global demand for decades.

According to the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources, the country found a supply of 694 million metric tons (765 million short tons) of rare earth minerals in Beylikova, Eskişehir. That reportedly makes Turkey's rare earths reserve the world's second-largest behind China, which has 800 million tons according to AA Energy. Deposits reportedly include 10 of the 17 rare earth elements and are close to the surface, which would simplify extraction.

Fatih Dönmez, the country's Minister for Energy and Natural Resources said the construction of processing infrastructure will begin later this year after R&D concludes. When the mining and refinement industries are up and running, Turkey anticipates it'll have the capability to process 570,000 metric tons of rare earths annually. That's nearly double the 315,000 metric tons that The Conversation reports will be demanded globally in 2030.

While the exact materials found in Turkey are unclear, more than one-third of rare earths have current or potential applications in the automotive world, especially in electrified vehicles. Their questionable long-term supply, however, has compelled BMW and others to leave rare-earth minerals out of their current EVs. But a more stable, less China-dependent supply may make their use more palatable.

Cerium has long been used in catalytic converters, but a long list of rare earths is rapidly growing in demand as the auto industry electrifies. Dysprosium, neodymium, and samarium are useful in permanent-magnet DC motors used in some EVs, while gadolinium has potential in both motors and batteries. While lithium-ion batteries are currently the automotive industry's gold standard, lanthanum and yttrium have their uses in alternative battery chemistries.

**European Foreign Ministers to Renew High-Level Council With Israel After 10-Year Pause** - European foreign ministers on Monday voted in favor of reconvening a high-level dialogue between the European Union and Israel, after a hiatus of nearly ten years.

EU High Commissioner for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell announced the resumption of the EU-Israel Association Council, which has not held formal meetings since 2012. Formed in a 1995 agreement signed in Brussels to define EU-Israel relations, Israel ditched the Council after a 2013 EU decision distinguishing settlements from the rest of Israel for the purposes of agreements.

"We know that the situation in the ground in the Palestinian territories is deteriorating and I think that the ministers agreed that this association council would be a good occasion to engage with Israel about these issues," Borrell stated at a press conference.

"The position of the European Union has not changed with respect to the Middle East peace process," he continued, pointing to a 2016 council document backing the two-state solution.