

# Conflict Update # 359

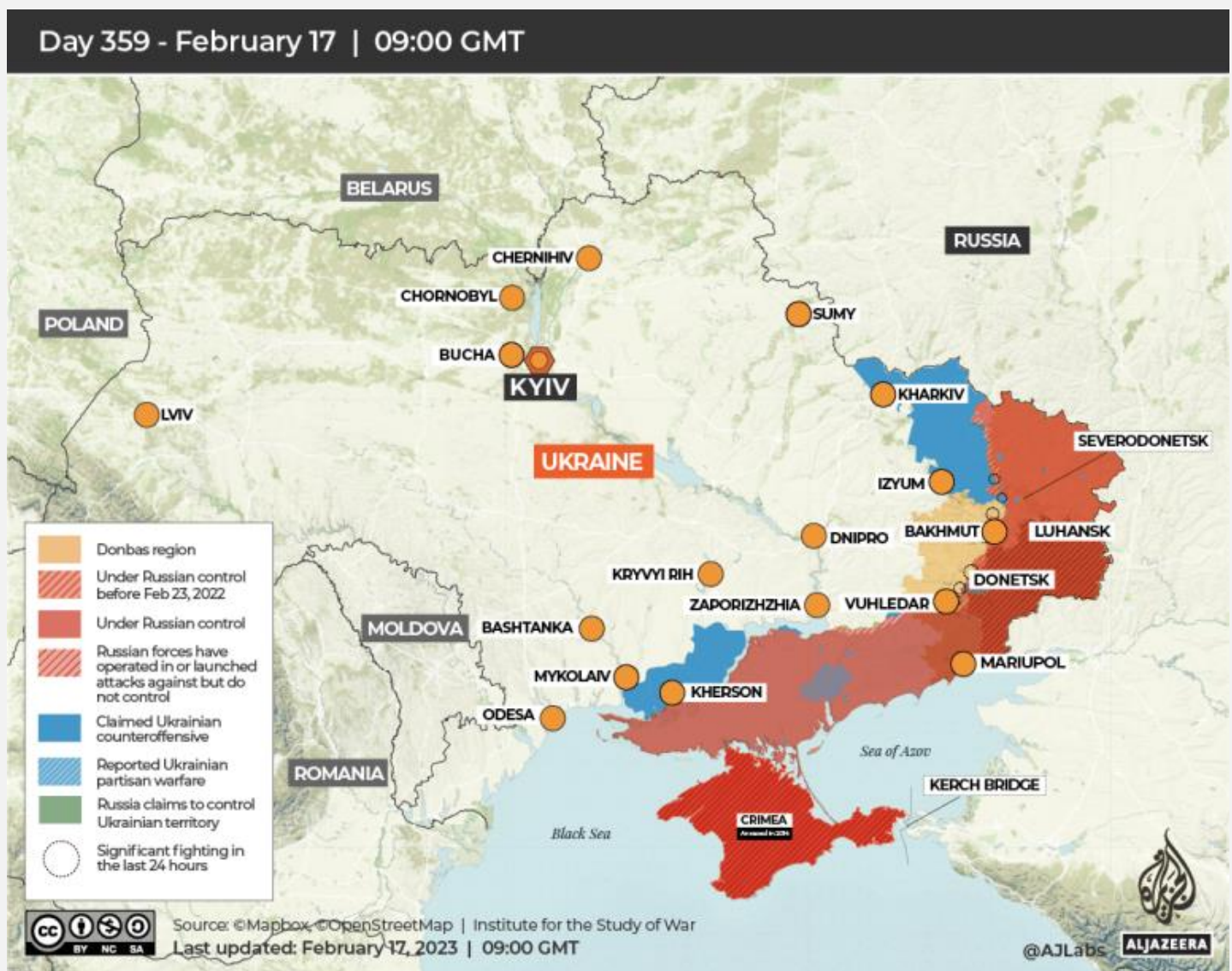
February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** – 141,260 (800) soldiers killed, 3,298 (+2) enemy tanks, 6,520 (+3) armored combat vehicles, 2,322 (+16) artillery systems, 467 (+1) MLRS systems, 241 (+2) air defense systems, 298 (+0) warplanes, 287 (+0) helicopters, 2,013 (+1) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 871 (+14) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,187 (+20) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 221 (+2) units of equipment.

## Key Takeaways



**What is up?** – There are multiple media reports and opinions of Russia having started its offensive campaign. I am not too sure.

I believe they are still “probing” for entry points in and around Ukrainian defensive positions and are assembling large numbers of now-trained 2022 conscripts, albeit with limited training and still pretty ill-equipped in the main. They are also massing fixed wing aircraft and helicopters along southern Ukrainian front lines.

Belarus will come into play with a new northern Russian front providing its southern campaign diversionary cover with Ukrainian defensive units drawn away from Kherson, Zaporizhia, Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts to the north.

The Wagner Group dispute with the Kremlin, where it appears to be falling out of Moscow favor, is not I think that Prigozhin is a political threat to Putin, but that he has not succeeded in cracking through Bakhmut to provide invading Russian forces an easier driveway to Donbas borders.

Instead, Kremlin battalions will now need to first pierce these Ukrainian strongholds before advancing westward, if they can at all.

Moscow has assumed full control of prisoner recruitment, having taken this away from Prigozhin, depriving him of a lucrative source of Kremlin funding, further weakening his position. This may be because Russia is running out of recruitment options, sans the next mobilization, which brings with it, its own Kremlin perils.

Ukraine still commands all roads and pathways from existing eastern front lines to major Ukrainian towns Russia will need to capture in order to make any statement of (claimed) success.

This is not something Moscow wanted and failure will be fully blamed on Prigozhin personally, hence him falling from grace rather rapidly.

He has gone on the (verbal) offensive, blaming the Kremlin for what he calls “major bureaucratic failures.” He yesterday further advised that capturing Bakhmut will take months and perhaps into Spring.

Not something Putin and his generals needed to hear on Russian media channels.

They (Putin and the Kremlin) realize that waiting for Spring to launch their much-vaunted offensive will be too late.

By then Kyiv will have received large-scale reinforcement, rotated battle groups and have new, advanced smart weaponry. In their minds, Russia needs to go now, right now.

Having said this, should they actually have already commenced an offensive, then their effort is rather underwhelming, losing an entire battalion battle group near the coal-mining town of Vuhledar in eastern Ukraine, which Moscow’s forces have been trying to capture for months, failing to take Bakhmut and losing many small skirmishes along the southern Ukrainian front line.

Ukraine has also been effectively and surgically taking out Russian supply lines all along the two primary rail supply links from Russia through Mariupol and Melitopol with a huge number of rail junctions and assembly points destroyed.

There is also other talk, unconfirmed but bubbling away under news radar screens, of Russia having lost a huge number of soldiers further south – reported to be around 500 – somewhere in southern Kherson. But it remains unconfirmed.

**Update** – It was 500 Russian casualties and is covered in a following article below.

Yesterday Ukraine successfully assaulted both Kherson points of land entry into Crimea and, with the Kerch bridge to Russia through its eastern flank still under repair, Kyiv is efficiently reducing any Kremlin ability to support its forces.

They also took out multiple Russian air defense systems, something they have been doing for weeks, all leading to a much-reduced Russian ability to defend against Ukrainian air and drone attack.

At the very least Ukraine is demonstrably reducing Russian supply capability, forcing replenishment routes increasingly further from front lines. This in turn compels Kremlin planners to provide additional trucking and drivers to traverse these longer distances between depots and front line positions.

So I do not fully subscribe to the notion that they have completely commenced their invasion, rather still grouping and preparing, albeit looming imminently, but certainly ahead of Spring.

What they will encounter is pre-Spring muddy terrain and a total dependence on rail, providing Ukrainian defenses easy retaliation and attack opportunities.

Muddy roadways will force Kremlin BTGs to deploy along existing roads, grouping them in columns - where leading and trailing vehicles will be taken out – isolating remaining tanks, armored vehicles and fuel bowsers as “sitting ducks” – just as happened north of Kyiv last February/March and in Vuhledar earlier this week where 31 tanks proceeding along a muddy stretch in column formation were lost all to Ukrainian assault.

Media reports from well-informed western military sources point to Russia having almost all of its army already committed to Ukraine, so it remains to be seen how they intend extending their front lines should this be the case.

Earlier this morning Belarus’ Lukashenko met with Putin outside Moscow – to discuss?

We are entering a stage of huge import in this illegal invasion and Ukrainian defense.

Should Putin fail, and all indications are that he is going to fail, he is at risk of being deposed. The question then is what comes next?

The devil you know may be the better one.



**Some Russian units have suffered up to 80% losses in the east, Ukraine** - Russia has experienced up to 80% casualties in some of its units fighting in eastern Ukraine, Ukraine's deputy defense minister claimed. Hanna Maliar said

in a statement on Thursday that up to 80% of personnel had been incapacitated in some Russian army units, including units of the Wagner paramilitary group.

She also said that Russia was barely evacuating soldiers that had been killed or wounded, or not doing it at all.

Meanwhile, the UK Ministry of Defence said on Friday that up to 200,000 Russian soldiers had likely been killed since the invasion started in February 2022.

One Russian marine told media outlet 7x7 that around **500 men** in his brigade had been killed fighting in the city of Vuhledar, one of the current flashpoints in the war, and that there were **only eight survivors** in one company.

**Russia failing to meet demands of new offensive: UK Intel** - Russia's defense industry is failing to meet the demands of the "new offensive" it is planning against Ukraine, according to the latest UK MoD intelligence report.

The intel, released nine days before the war's first anniversary on February 24, suggests that Moscow's military-industrial output is already becoming "a critical weakness."

Defense production is reportedly falling short due to sanctions imposed by the US and other Ukrainian allies.

**US intercepts 4 Russian military planes that entered Alaska's air defense zone** - US fighter jets intercepted 4 Russian military aircraft that entered Alaska's air defense identification zone (ADIZ) on Feb. 13.

NORAD, which oversees NA airspace and its defense, responded to the incursion with two F-16 fighters and five other supporting aircraft including two F-35s, according to a press statement.

They successfully intercepted a group of Russian bombers and fighters that entered Alaska's ADIZ.

Alaska's ADIZ is not part of US airspace, but the zone immediately surrounding it in which NORAD tracks and identifies foreign aircraft.

The NORAD statement said that the incursion was "in no way related" to several high-profile efforts by NORAD to shoot down unidentified aerial phenomena (UAP) over the last two weeks.

Further, it said, the action was more routine than escalatory, as Russian forces attempt to penetrate the country's ADIZ several times a year in an effort to test U.S. responses.

**'Better than nothing': Outgunned Ukrainian pilots take the fight to Russia in ancient Soviet-era helicopters** - Given the gigantic advantage that Russia enjoys over Ukraine in terms of aircraft and pilots it's



staggering that Ukraine can still threaten Russian forces. Indeed it's baffling that almost one year into the conflict Ukraine has an air force and helicopter fleet at all, given the effort to destroy them.

"We're always surprised that we're here. But, well, we are and we're never going to stop," says the deputy commander of the Sikorsky Brigade – his location are military secrets but is

name and pictured here.

Ukraine's helicopter pebble as it skims and

pilots have to fly so low that being onboard one is like riding a skips across water. Serhiy and Hennady are both middle-aged

pilots with more than two decades of flying behind them. They spent much of the early 2000s flying for the United Nations on peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The experience, they say, had been invaluable. It kept their hours up and gave them experience of flying low and in difficult circumstances – like the ongoing civil war in the DRC.

Still this week Serhiy, who commands a flight of two Mi-8s each flying about three combat sorties a day, tells CNN he clipped a tree. Three of his five rotor blades were damaged and caused a forced landing – a drop of about 20 feet. The venerable Mi-8s – all made before the collapse of the Soviet Union – are over three decades old, their flanks are streaked black with exhaust and oil.

Speaking to CNN at the brigade's operation base, he says, "Of course we need newer helicopters because we have aircraft from the Soviet era. We are squeezing everything possible and impossible out of them.

"It would be good if we were given some new kinds of helicopters, including the Apaches. We'd learn them very quickly because we have the motivation."

His team has set up temporary locations near the front line where they hide fuel and ammunition. Support crews tuck themselves out of sight. Perimeter security exists but it's invisible.

"They're old aircraft sure. But they're better than nothing – what else can we do?" asks Hennady.

**Comment** – True Ukrainian heroes.

**Ukrainian team sends drones deep into Russian-controlled territory by night** – Ukrainian crews say they have made 2,000 sorties since the war began, by day and night, providing vital reconnaissance and targeting capabilities to the Ukrainian military.

**First group of Ukrainians finishes advanced US military training in Germany** - The first group of 635 Ukrainian fighters has finished a five-week advanced U.S. training course in Germany on sophisticated combat skills and armored vehicles, the Pentagon said today. The troops were put through an intense course that prepared them to take Bradley fighting vehicles and M109 Paladins into battle. The training is expected to be critical in the coming spring offensive against the Russians. A second group of about 710 Ukrainian troops has arrived at the Grafenwoehr training area, Pentagon spokesman Brigadier General Pat Ryder said.

**With threat of new Russian attack in east, Ukrainian forces train near Belarus border** - As fighting intensifies in the eastern Donetsk region, Ukrainian forces in the northern Rivne region were undergoing intensive training on February 11. Troops practiced ambushes and attacks to prepare against possible airborne invaders. They also demonstrated speed with artillery, fighting vehicles, and mixed tactics.

**Russia media channel calls defeat in Vuhledar a "War crime"** - "If this is not a war crime, then what is a war crime?" one Russian Telegram channel known for its ties to the Wagner mercenary group said in scathing post that featured aerial photographs of the devastation, apparently captured by Ukraine.

The channel was referring to Russia's loss of nearly 130 vehicles including 36 tanks and a reported 500 troops in the battle as reported in previous Updates.

I was watching very graphic geolocation coverage of the battle with absolute mayhem and panic in Russian ranks as tanks were taken out one-by-one with catastrophic soldier injuries and deaths following, with troops running amok in order to escape. Absolute regimental pandemonium. Soldiers were run over by their own tanks, others mown down by Ukrainian fire, with tanks driving in circles to escape, backtracking in uncontrolled fashion and then bogging down when leaving the surfaced road.

Pictured right are 14 of the destroyed tanks of the Russian 155<sup>th</sup> motorized brigade in close proximity to one another. This specific tank division has now suffered three catastrophic battle losses, first north of Kyiv in February/ March and again in Kharkiv last year, and now last week.



Russian invading forces were assembled and traveling in rigid column formation along a road headed to Vuhledar, because with

muddy weather it is impossible to travel off-road. Ukrainian artillery and drone forces took out the leading tank and then the rest in efficient and clinical fashion.

### What Exactly Happened In Vuhledar?

Beginning in the last week of January, after weeks of a rumored buildup of Russian forces in the district, Russian units again attacked Vuhledar (pictured in blue highlight in the map to the right) – with units from the Russian 155th brigade as well as the 40th Naval Infantry Brigade, based on the Pacific peninsula of Kamchatka attacked the city.

A unit of mobilized soldiers from the Tatarstan region was also part of the assault.

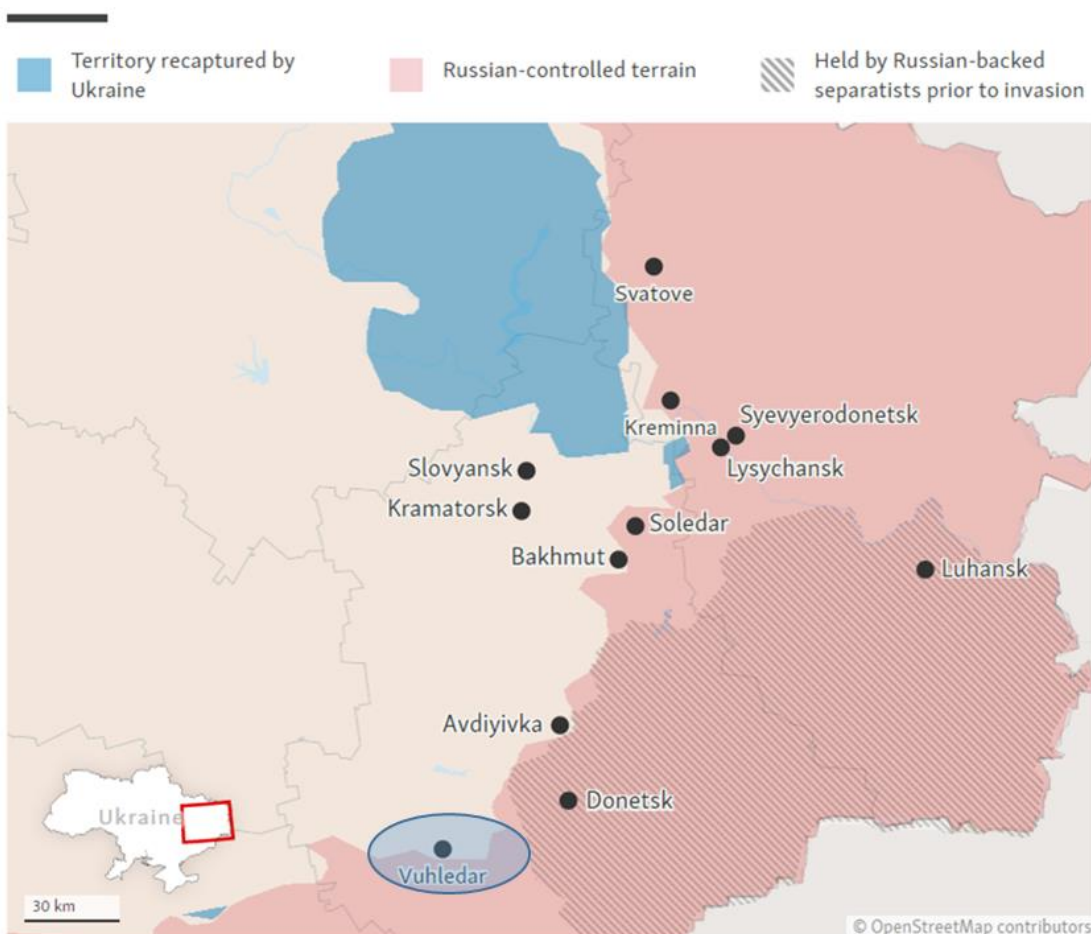
It didn't go well.

By the end of the first week of February, the offensive stalled.

According to Rybar, a Telegram channel believed to have close links to the Russian MoD, Russian commanders then tried a flanking assault

### Heavy Fighting In Donetsk, Eastern Ukraine

Russian forces have been attempting to make further advances in the eastern region of Donetsk.



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from the north, but that failed in the face of fierce Ukrainian artillery and drone strikes from higher ground, and heavily land-mined approaches to the town.

Estimates by Ukraine's General Staff said Russia lost at least 130 armored vehicles, including 36 tanks, though some observers said those figures were likely exaggerated.

In an interview with the Russian website 7x7 published on February 13, a man identified as a member of the 3rd Company of the 155th Brigade said that only eight members of the unit survived the assault, and up to 500 soldiers in total may have been killed.

"Something bad happened on February 6 at the front with the Tatar battalion Alga," said Ukrainian blogger Denys Kazanskiy, who highlighted the post on his Telegram channel. "They write that as a result of an unsuccessful attack on Ukrainian positions, several dozen people died at once. The exact number is still not known, since the corpses lie in the fields and cannot be taken away."

**Note** – I watch Denys' blog together with other blogger channels. Being disallowed from providing close-up coverage on these channels, one has to review other sources in order to track events. Denys is a Ukrainian Airways pilot covering the illegal Russian invasion of his country. He provides insightful commentary given his detailed knowledge of air channels and rural areas where fighting is taking place. He and other bloggers, both Ukrainian and Russian, cover and source one another in seeking detailed coverage of ongoing events as they unfold. Very informative.

**Russian military reserves "significantly depleted", analysts say** - Russia's costly military campaign in Ukraine has likely "significantly depleted Russian equipment and manpower reserves necessary to sustain a successful large-scale offensive in eastern Ukraine", says ISW.

**Russia, Ukraine swap 101 war prisoners each** - Russia and Ukraine have carried out a war prisoner swap that saw 101 service members on each side returning home.

The Russians will be flown to Moscow for treatment and rehabilitation. All the released prisoners are receiving the necessary medical and psychological help, the Russian Defence Ministry said in a statement.

Kyiv also confirmed that the swap had taken place. According to senior official Andriy Yermak, Ukraine brought back 100 service members and one civilian. Out of the total number, 94 people defended Mariupol, 64 of them were fighting for the Azovstal Steel Works.

**Russian lieutenant featured in Putin's New Year address to nation dies in Ukraine** - Yuri Shnyder, a Russian lieutenant who was filmed in Putin's traditional New Year address to the nation, was killed in Ukraine on 7 February, user Necro Mancer who collects casualty data tweeted.

**Bodies of Putin's fallen troops are 'piling up' in trenches as Wagner chief slams Moscow's 'monstrous bureaucracy' for slowing military gains in embattled Ukrainian city** - The head of Russia's mercenary outfit Wagner has slammed Moscow's 'monstrous bureaucracy' for slowing military gains, saying it could take months to capture the embattled Ukraine city of Bakhmut.

Russia has been trying to encircle and capture the city ahead of February 24, the first anniversary of its invasion, but the bodies of Vladimir Putin's forces are said to be 'piled up' in trenches as his army continues to struggle.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the head of the infamous Wagner mercenary group, has attacked the Russian military for slowing efforts to retake Bakhmut, arguing the city could have already been captured from Ukraine.

Prigozhin has previously accused the Russian military of attempting to 'steal' victories from Wagner, a sign of his growing influence and the potential for dangerous rifts in Moscow.

## Containment

**Germany to send 'half battalion' of tanks to Ukraine** - Germany said it has "half a battalion" of Leopard 2 tanks to send to Ukraine, as NATO allies appear to struggle to muster the heavy vehicles pledged to Kyiv.

Berlin said late last month that it was aiming to send around 30 battle tanks to help Ukrainian forces fight Russia's invasion after pressure from Kyiv and its supporters to greenlight the supplies.

But German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius said after a meeting of Ukraine's backers in Brussels that so far it had gathered only 14 newer A6 type Leopard tanks and three from Portugal.

"Let's be clear: we have not reached a battalion," Pistorius said. "It will be half a battalion."

He added: "For the German Leopards, I want to say again that ours will be delivered in the last week of March. That is certain."

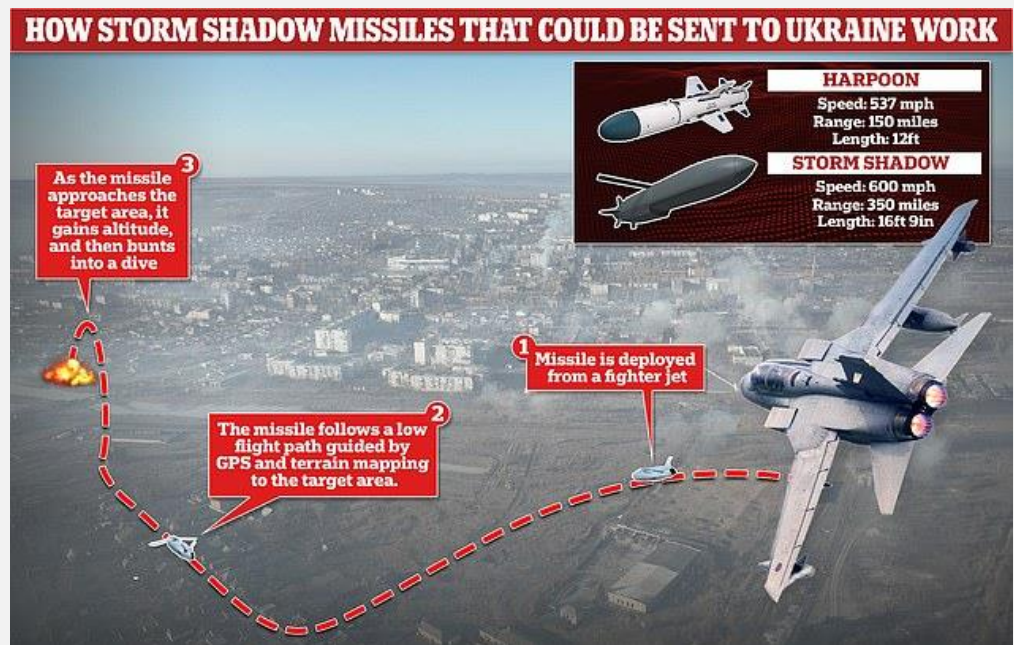
**Rheinmetall to produce 300,000 Gepard anti-aircraft tank rounds for Ukraine** - Rheinmetall has been awarded a contract to manufacture 300,000 rounds for the Gepard anti-aircraft tanks used by the Ukrainian Army.

Half of the ammunition will be Armor Piercing Discarding Sabot – Tracers featuring increased armor penetration. The other 150,000 rounds will be High Explosive Incendiary – Tracer.

"Rheinmetall is currently creating additional medium-caliber ammunition production capacity, which is due to go into operation in summer 2023," the company said.

**Storm Shadow missiles en route to Ukraine** – It is being reported that additional Storm Shadow missiles are to be supplied to Ukraine. The Storm Shadow, also known as SCALP, is an air-to-ground missile that can hit fixed or stationary targets with a length of 16ft 9in and a range of 350 miles, flying at 600mph – the speed of sound.

**Ukraine won't need targeting coordinates to be provided by UK before firing any long-range missiles the MOD sends to Kyiv - as Rishi is urged to do more to help Zelensky** - Britain will not have a role in firing of long-range missiles it is considering sending to Ukraine to boost the country's arsenal, according to defence sources.



Rishi Sunak held talks with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy about the UK's ability to provide long-range missiles to Kyiv, which it currently doesn't have.

The Prime Minister said these were 'going to make a big difference' in Ukraine's fightback against Russia's invasion.



It has also been claimed that Ukraine could use such weaponry to strike Russian-occupied Crimea, which would potentially be a major escalation in the conflict.

**Italy will 'probably' help Ukraine amid risk of Russian nuclear threat** - Italy, while struggling to meet NATO spending requirements, will probably help Kyiv against the risk of Russian nuclear threat as a ceasefire appears very unlikely for now, Defence Minister Guido Crosetto told lawmakers during a hearing Thursday.

During a hearing before the Defence and Foreign Affairs Committees of the House and Senate, Crosetto (FDI/ECR) outlined his ministry's policy lines and expressed strong misgivings about the peaceful resolution of the conflict in Ukraine in the short term.

"I hope for a ceasefire, which does not mean the war's end. Only after that can reasoning begin," said the minister, who, for now, does not see the necessary conditions to discuss negotiations.

"Look at the attacks that are being launched daily by Russia (...) At every meeting, Kyiv asks for reinforcements because, every day, bombs are falling, and there are troops trying to occupy the cities. Every day a siren sounds telling us to go to the shelters," said Crosetto.

**Moldova to receive NATO aid amid Russia's 'hybrid warfare'** – NATO said the alliance will provide Moldova with a new "non-lethal" aid package to help blunt Russian hybrid threats, as the government in Chisinau grapples with a political crisis it blames on Moscow.

It said Thursday that Moldova—a European Union aspirant that cooperates with, but has not yet officially sought membership of, NATO—requested the alliance's assistance after a chaotic week in which Moldovan President Maia Sandu accused the Kremlin of orchestrating a coup attempt.

The package, said the Organization, will focus on "Russia's use of [its] arsenal of instruments in the field of hybrid warfare," according to Romania's IPN News Agency. The assistance was approved by NATO defense ministers who met this week in Brussels.

## Comments, Developments and Reports

**Lawmakers in Slovakia** have designated Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism and called its current regime "terrorist."

**Next on the chopping block: Moldova** - Moldova is one of those places that most people couldn't find on a map, but what it lacks in size, it makes up for in strategic significance.

It is one of the access points between the European space and the region Russia seeks to control. Unfortunately for the Moldovans, this comes at the cost of a steady presence by the Russians - both militarily and meddling in government affairs.

As the Ukraine War rages on, Moldova's importance continues to grow. Should the Ukrainians fall...Moldova will surely be in the crosshairs next.

*Peter Ziehan – an acclaimed geopolitical scientist.*

**Ukraine sanctions Belarusian Railways, but not RZD** - Zelensky has signed a decree imposing sanctions on 182 Russian and Belarusian entities and three individuals. Among the sanctioned entities, there are Belarusian Railways, which collaborated with Russia in transporting over 100,000 tonnes of ammunition and 5,200 tonnes of vehicles since the war started. Absent from the list of companies sanctioned by Ukraine is Russia's national railway company RZD.

## South Africa

**Russia to test missile in drills with China and South Africa** - Russia, China and South Africa are set to begin naval drills off South Africa's Indian Ocean coast in a demonstration of the countries' close ties amid Russia's war in Ukraine.

The 10 days of exercises, named Mosi II, will coincide with the first anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine Feb 24.

A Russian frigate, the Admiral Gorshkov, arrived in Cape Town earlier this week sporting the letters Z and V on its sides, letters that mark Russian weapons on the front lines in Ukraine and are used as a patriotic symbol in Russia.

The warship is set to test-fire a Zircon missile during the joint naval drills, according to Russian state news agency Tass. The test will be the first launch of the missile in an international exercise.

In addition to the Admiral Gorshkov, other ships participating in the maritime exercises will include a Russian oil tanker for refueling, a South African frigate and three Chinese ships - a destroyer, a frigate and a support vessel, according to a South African military statement.

**South Africa's naval exercise with Russia, China raises Western alarm** – South Africa was due to launch a joint naval exercise with Russia and China on Friday (17 February), a move it is calling routine but which has fuelled domestic criticism and fears the drills will endanger important relations with Western partners.

World powers are vying for influence in Africa amid deepening global tensions resulting from the war in Ukraine and an increasingly aggressive Chinese posture towards self-ruled Taiwan.

Some African nations are steadfastly refusing to take sides as they seek to benefit from the diplomatic tug-o-war. But analysts said hosting the 10-day Mosi II exercise, which coincides with the one-year anniversary of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, is a risky strategy.



"These exercises are going to be a lightning rod," said Steven Gruz, of the South African Institute of International Affairs.

South Africa says it maintains a neutral stance on the Ukraine conflict and abstained from voting on a UN resolution last year condemning Russia.

Pointing to similar exercises it's held with other international partners, including one with France in November, it has rejected criticism.

"South Africa, like any independent and sovereign state, has a right to conduct its foreign relations in line with its ... national interests," South Africa's defence ministry said last month.

But six South Africa-based diplomats – all from NATO or EU countries – told Reuters they condemned the exercise.

"It's not right, and we told them that we do not approve," one said.

"I'm not sure South Africa really realizes the potential backlash," Gruzd said.

There is a risk, however, of Pretoria's foreign policy aims undermining its economic interests.

"Some companies have asked us if it is still safe to engage with South Africa for business, because they fear possible consequences," one European ambassador told Reuters.

China is now Africa's top bilateral trading partner, but the EU is by far the largest market for South African exports.

Two-way trade with the EU amounted to around \$53 billion last year, according to South African data, compared to a little over \$750 million with Russia.

Domestic critics of South Africa's push to deepen ties with Russia and China say that economic reality alone should be enough to give the government serious pause.

"It is a slap in the face of our trading partners to be this clearly on the side of Russia on the anniversary of the invasion," said Kobus Marais, who heads the opposition Democratic Alliance's defence portfolio. "We're the useful idiots."

**Russia-China drills strain ties with West** - Pretoria's Western allies are unhappy about South Africa hosting upcoming joint naval exercises with Russia and China. Historical ties between Moscow and the ruling ANC may explain President Ramaphosa's stance.

On Monday, the Russian military frigate "Admiral Gorshkov" docked in Cape Town harbor ahead of naval exercises hosted by South Africa between the 17 and 27 of February. It is the second such operation involving the naval forces of Russia, South Africa and China, and the first since 2019.

"Exercise Mosi II", named after the Tswana word for "smoke", coincides with the anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, and has disconcerted South Africa's Western allies. The European Union's top diplomat Josep Borrell said in a joint press conference with his South African counterpart Naledi Pandor, that the planned naval exercises were "not the best thing."

While the South African government has not commented on the schedule, "the fact that it happens on the anniversary of the Ukraine war is just extremely awkward," said Pauline Bax, deputy program director for Africa of the International Crisis Group.

Observers agree that Moscow landed a significant propaganda coup in a country that has refused to condemn Moscow's aggression, insisting it wants to stay neutral.

## Putin & Russia

**Putin's nightmare: nearly the entire Russian army is fighting in Ukraine (and losing)** - Nearly the entirety of Russia's Army has been deployed to Ukraine, but it shows no signs of making any significant progress and instead is facing attrition levels in combat not seen since the First World War more than a century ago. (**Comment** – This is borne out by Putin sending his most senior Kremlin general to head the Ukrainian campaign).

Moscow has called up tens of thousands of reservists, intensified its ground attacks across southern and eastern Ukraine, and has likely already begun its first major offensive in months.

However, after a year of fighting, Russia is increasingly relying on poorly trained conscripts and as a result, continues to throw its men into battle only to make minor gains while taking heavy losses. According to British Defense Minister Ben Wallace, who spoke with the BBC on Wednesday, Russian forces are now spread thin out along the frontline and are

unable “to punch through in a big offense.” When the Kremlin does mount an attack, it comes “at a huge cost to the Russian Army.”

Wallace added that Russia is now incurring “almost First World War levels of attrition, and with success rates of a matter of meters rather than kilometers.”

**Russians increasingly talking about ‘succession’ after Vladimir Putin, say western officials** - Russians are increasingly talking about “succession” after Vladimir Putin, western officials said on Thursday.

They believe that it is now less certain that he will stay in the Kremlin for the next decade, compared to a year ago, given his “catastrophic error of judgement” in launching his Ukraine war.

However, they doubt that there will be any movement on Putin being toppled or standing down “imminently.”

On the war, which was launched nearly a year ago, one western official said: “This is such a catastrophic error of judgement and this is harming both the present and future of Russia to such a degree that it has damaged President Putin. “People are talking about succession in a way that they weren’t a year ago.

**Russian rouble slides past 75 vs dollar to near 10-month low** - The Russian rouble fell past 75 to the dollar on Friday, extending a recent weakening trend sparked by embargoes on Russian oil products and the steady recovery of imports, which has raised demand for foreign currency.

At 0706 GMT, the rouble was 0.4% weaker against the dollar at 75.15, falling to 75.2525 earlier in the session, its weakest mark since April 25.

It had lost 0.1% to trade at 79.99 versus the euro and shed 0.3% against the yuan to 10.90.

The Russian currency may face further headwinds as EU leaders discuss a new batch of sanctions against Russia over its actions in Ukraine, with politicians, military leaders and Russian banks expected to be targeted.

Russia's finance ministry on Friday said it was sticking with plans to post a budget deficit of no more than 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023, despite towering spending and slumping energy revenues contributing to a huge shortfall in January.

**'London will be turned to dust': Putin's top TV propagandist shrieks 'burn in hell' at the camera while ranting about Ukraine using British missiles** - Putin's top TV propagandist has called for London to be 'turned to dust' after reports said Ukraine was 'prepared' to use British missiles to strike Crimea.

The latest tirade against the UK was featured on a nightly show on channel Russia 1, hosted by chief propagandist Vladimir Solovyov.

One of Solovyov's 'analysts' supposedly quoted from a British media report regarding the possibility of the British Government supplying Kyiv with Harpoon anti-ship missiles or surface-to-air Storm Shadow missiles.

**For many Ukrainians, everyday Russians are as guilty as Putin** - “No, most of the population supported Putin – those who did not support Putin lived in an agreement with his government that, ‘We still have gas and oil, we still have a lot of money, so don’t touch us and we will not revolt’,” she added, referring to an unwritten social contract whereby the authorities promised Russian citizens stability in return for their silence.

With the first anniversary of the war approaching, many Ukrainians feel the same, and are asking a critical question: “Why aren’t Russians doing more to stop the war?”

A poll conducted in November 2022 by the Levada Center, an independent and highly respected Russian research organisation, revealed that 49% of Russians surveyed agree that “every real man should serve in the army”.

Putin hesitated to give the order for a general mobilization, reportedly fearing a public backlash against the war and mass resistance to the call up.

And he was right to be concerned. While many men complied with their mobilization orders – expressing precisely the views reflected in the Levada Center’s surveys – hundreds of thousands of others fled the country to avoid being sent to fight in Ukraine.

Demographic differences within Russian society help to explain the sharp divisions in these responses to mobilization. The Levada survey revealed that people in the 18-24 age range, along with those who live in Moscow and the larger cities of Russia, are least likely to identify military service with being a “real man”. They are also most likely to agree with the statement that “military service is senseless and dangerous and should be avoided at all costs.”

But even men who view military service positively and are prepared to do their patriotic duty can still rebel when the state fails to keep its side of the bargain and prepare them adequately for war.

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One year on from the start of a military operation that Moscow was expected to win easily, there are increasing signs of anger, frustration and resistance from ordinary Russian soldiers. These are important reminders that these men are not mindless pawns who will do Putin’s bidding under any circumstances.

**Comment** – We have consistently reported that Russians are jointly and collectively responsible for the damage, raping, killing and destruction of Ukraine and its people.

**What the last 12 months has meant for the ordinary Russian soldier** - Moscow has shown little consideration for these soldiers over the past 12 months. In February 2022 troops who were told that they were going on routine exercises instead found themselves fighting a war in Ukraine. Barely trained conscripts were sent into battle in defiance of Russia’s own laws.

Civilians with medical conditions that disqualify them from military service were called up and put into uniform. And men mobilised for wartime service were told to bring their own medical supplies because of dire shortages at the front.

Ukrainians have found Russia’s soldiers to be everything from frightened teenagers who cry when they are captured, to men who brutally torture, rape and kill civilians and prisoners-of-war with no regard for the Geneva conventions. Russia’s soldiers have turned out to be very different from the formidable fighting force that many expected a year ago.

The degree of Russia's success in replenishing its own supplies, particularly ammunition, will also be important in determining the intensity of attacks that Moscow is able to sustain against Ukrainian civilians and soldiers alike.

However Putin's announcement in September 2022 of a "partial mobilisation" of 300,000 men for the armed forces suggests that Russia is planning to rely heavily on one of its traditional advantages in war: the ability to overwhelm the opponent by the sheer numbers of troops that it can put into the field.

But will Russia be able to continue to mobilize large numbers of its men to fight in this deadly war? Recent US estimates suggest that nearly 200,000 Russian soldiers have been killed or injured in Ukraine over the past year. The answer may lie in the complex relationship that Russians have with the armed forces.