

Conflict Update Day 379

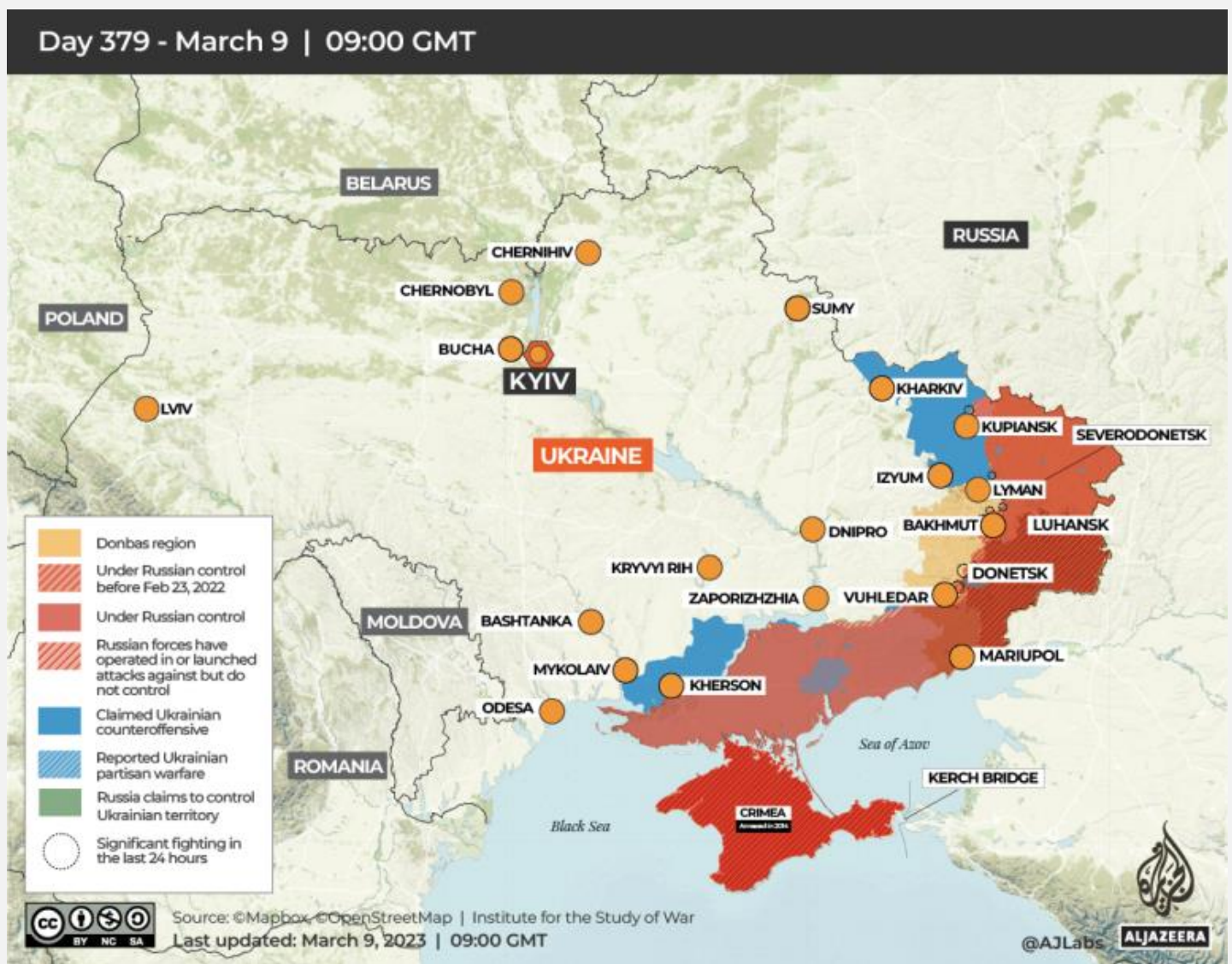
March 9th, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 156,120 (+590) soldiers killed, 3,441 (+5) enemy tanks, 6,736 (+13) armored combat vehicles, 2,465 (+2) artillery systems, 488 (0) MLRS systems, 254 (+1) air defense systems, 303 (+0) warplanes, 289 (+0) helicopters, 2,098 (+0) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 873 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,331 (+1) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 237 (+1) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways



Russia unleashed a missile barrage targeting energy infrastructure across Ukraine, hitting residential buildings and killing at least six people in the largest such attack in three weeks.

Russia pounds Ukraine in ‘retaliation’ for border attack - A barrage of Russian missiles struck cities across Ukraine, including the capital, Kyiv, the Black Sea port of Odesa and the second city of Kharkiv, killing at least six civilians, according to officials.

Russia says the wave of attacks were in retaliation for a border incursion last week that Moscow blamed on Kyiv. Ukraine denied responsibility.

The Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant lost power through Russian missile attacks, according to nuclear state operator Energoatom. It is the 6th time it has been in a state of blackout since it was taken over by Russia months ago.

30 Russian unsuccessful attacks overnight - Near Orikhovo-Vasylivka, (12 miles) northwest of Ukraine’s eastern city of Bakhmut, Russian forces made more than 30 unsuccessful attacks on Wednesday, according to the military.

Wagner claims eastern Bakhmut - The head of Russia’s Wagner mercenary group, Yevgeny Prigozhin, said his fighters had captured all of the eastern parts of Bakhmut. Prigozhin has previously made premature claims of successes that could not be verified.

Deputy Ukrainian Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said fewer than 4,000 civilians – including 38 children – remain in embattled Bakhmut out of a pre-war population of some 70,000 people.

Russia’s military will likely be unable to sustain its current level of fighting in Ukraine and will not capture significantly more territory this year, according to the US Director of National Intelligence Avril Haines.

Putin’s troops filmed threatening to turn weapons on bosses - A group of Russian troops sent to Ukraine to fight is threatening to raise absolute hell over what they describe as pointless suicide missions—and they’ve made clear they’re willing to turn their weapons on members of their own team if necessary.

The draftees from Kaliningrad have already appealed directly to Putin to complain of ancient weapons, lack of training, and people dying “for nothing.” In a video released publicly earlier this week, they shamed top military brass by saying there appears to be no battlefield strategy whatsoever and declaring that “this is no way to fight a war.”

Now, a video has leaked capturing the aftermath of their complaints. In a five-minute clip released by the independent outlet Ostorozhno, Novosti, the men can be seen surrounding a commander sent out from Kaliningrad and warning him they will put up a fight if they are not heard.

“You can jail us all! How many years is it, 5, 7, 10? We don’t give a f---!” one soldier yells after the commander tries but fails to convince them to obey orders and storm Ukrainian positions. The troops say they were never meant to be part of assault teams but were instead assigned as members of territorial defenses. The Kremlin-backed proxy troops fighting in occupied Donetsk, they say, send them on suicide missions while they themselves “run-away” or sit around away from the gunfire.

They shout that they’d rather go to jail than go on guaranteed-to-fail assault missions “for who knows what.”

“Did you see that puddle of blood here? That person was sent to storm [Ukrainian positions], so he pulled the trigger, because he knew where he was headed,” one soldier says. “Do you want suicides here?”

After the commander responds that they’ve presented a “weak” argument for not obeying orders, they warn that they will use force.

“No one is going on this storm. You can f----- jail us all. And if someone tries to trick us and say we supposedly aren’t going there and then they throw us on the frontline, it will be a shitshow, it won’t be forgiven, we will just go head to head against them,” one soldier says.

“Honestly, we’re ready for that,” he says, asking the entire group: “Is everyone ready for that?”

“Yes, yes! Everyone!” the group responds in unison.

“We are so f----- angry after the deaths of our friends... we’ll walk on foot, we’ll leave by taxi. Fight your f----- self!” the leader of the group says.

He goes on to tell the commander that several other soldiers had been “taken away,” apparently after also protesting conditions. “They came at night. What is that? Is it 1939? NKVD? Black ravens?” he said, referring to the Soviet secret police rounding up “enemies” in night-time raids.

This latest uprising by draftees is just the most recent of many as the Russian war machine finds itself running out of men to use as cannon fodder. And in a particularly ironic twist, more and more of the same young Russian citizens that Putin claimed to be trying to protect from outside forces with his full-scale invasion are now being sacrificed for the sake of his conquest of Ukrainian land.

“Previously, the Donetsk and Luhansk draftees were used as expendable materials, but now it’s the Russians,” military analyst Kirill Mikhailov told iStories of the mounting conflict between Kremlin-backed troops in Ukraine’s occupied territories. “They cannot fight any other way. If the approach doesn’t fundamentally change, which I doubt, then Russian draftees will keep dying this way.”

Comment – As mentioned in previous Updates, once mobilization reaches Russia’s Main Street, as opposed to where it has hitherto been centered and focused on occupied territory and far-flung Russian provincial citizens, we can expect to see the resisting genie truly escape the Kremlin enlistment bottle.

Russian cyberwar in Ukraine stumbles just like conventional one - Even before Russia invaded Ukraine, its hacking offensive was well under way.

Suspected Russian hackers targeted Ukrainian government and financial websites with so-called distributed denial-of-service attacks aimed at creating chaos; they bombarded government, nonprofit and IT organizations with malicious software designed to render computers inoperable; and, in a broadside widely blamed on Russia, they zeroed in on Viasat Inc.’s commercial satellite network, causing major disruptions in Ukrainian communications, including for military units, at a crucial early stage in the war.

A long-anticipated cyberwar, it seemed, was finally underway. But what began with a bang stalled into something less substantial — a persistent deluge of digital attacks, yet nothing like the full-blown cyber-hostilities many predicted.

State-sponsored Russian hackers have bullied Ukrainian networks for a generation, targeting businesses and electric utilities, shutting off the power in 2015 and again in 2016 experts said. A 2017 attack on Ukraine’s financial sector by Russia, using NotPetya malware, spiraled across the globe and cost a reported \$10 billion in damages.

Knowing that an attack was possible, Ukraine started preparing for Russian hackers in the fall of 2021. In addition to support from Western governments, technology companies like Microsoft, Google and others provided support to the Ukrainian government to bolster cyber defenses.

In addition to providing free software, tech companies shared analysis on Russian hackers, helped Kyiv probe for areas of network vulnerabilities and provided intelligence on cyber threats.

Another contributing factor, experts say, is that Putin expected the war to be wrapped up quickly, blitzing Ukraine with troops – and cyberattacks – that would cause that country’s government to quickly collapse. Along with numerous failures by Russia’s military, its plan to use cyber operations as part of a hybrid war have consistently fallen short “without substantially enabling troop progress,” according to a February report by cybersecurity firm Recorded Future.

“To meaningfully influence a war at this scale, cyber operations must be conducted at a tempo that Russia apparently could sustain for only weeks at most,” said Jon Bateman, a senior fellow in the Technology and International Affairs Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in a December panel discussion.

Another Russian Oligarch perishes – There is a death riddle unfolding as Russia’s ‘Scarface Oligarch,’ who sold Meghan and Harry their £12m Montecito mansion, dies after blasting Putin.

Sergey Grishin - known as the ‘Scarface Oligarch’ - passed away on Monday in a Moscow hospital after a serious illness, it is understood.

His cause of death was given as “circulatory problems in his brain” which led to sepsis.

After slamming Putin’s regime, he previously called on then-president Donald Trump to grant him a US passport saying: "I want to be safe.

“I am kind of under fire right now by the criminal world of Russia...by the top government officials of Russia, too.”

However, he spent the last part of his life in Russia, after selling his American mansion to the Duke and Duchess.

The Russian tycoon was the former co-owner of RosEvroBank - and once boasted he had brought the Russian bank system to its knees in the 1990s by committing a \$60bn fraud.

Tankenstein - Desperate Putin building ‘Frankenstein tanks’ with ageing naval guns welded on top as Ukraine wipes out Russian military.

Russia's failed campaign in Ukraine has seen its military already lose more than 3,400 tanks and its dwindling armory stockpile has meant the Kremlin needed to improvise.

Images have emerged of the crudely-engineered vehicles being deployed in Ukraine.

Footage to show a anti-



from an undisclosed location appeared 25mm 2M-3 twin-barreled naval aircraft turret fitted to a Soviet-era MT-LB amphibious fighting vehicle.



The bizarre contraption is believed to be built with machinery parts from 1945.

Its guns were likely taken from a naval patrol boat, while its tracks could date back to the 1950s.

Comment – Russia must have learnt this from ISIS as they were known to adapt vehicles exactly like this when fighting against Kremlin forces in Syria.

Wagner troops in Bakhmut are 'definitely' on drugs, Ukraine fighter says - As fighting in Bakhmut grows bloodier, one Ukrainian soldier is certain that members of Russia's Wagner Group are using illegal substances.

Frontlines in the Russia-Ukraine war that entered its second year on February 24 shifted to Bakhmut last fall, and Russian soldiers have mostly surrounded the city, suffering heavy losses. One report by the Kyiv Post said Russian tactics are so fierce that they are losing soldiers at a rate of 7 to 1 compared to Ukraine. However, the losses doesn't seem to be deterring Russia's efforts.

Ukrainian troops have held the city for months, but recently leaders have discussed strategically retreating to preserve their ranks. However, on Monday, the Kyiv Post reported that Ukrainian President Zelenskyy instructed his leaders to find "appropriate forces" to help the troops in Bakhmut, and soldiers to continue to fight.

A Ukrainian Armed Forces member described inhumane actions by members of the Wagner Group, indicating that he felt the mercenaries were using drugs to fight in such a bizarre manner.

Leshiy described how Wagner Group soldiers are digging trenches while under fire from Ukrainian troops. After the trench digger is killed, another takes his place.

Containment

US Army is moving to get tanks to Ukraine 'as quickly as possible' - The US Army is already executing on a plan to send M1 Abrams tanks to Ukraine, the Army's acquisition chief said yesterday. The Pentagon announced early this year it would send Abrams tanks to Ukraine. Since then, Defense Department officials have said they were weighing a variety of options, including building new tanks or drawing existing older tanks from U.S. inventory.

But speaking at a webcast hosted by Defense News, Doug Bush said Wednesday the Army already has a plan. "We're executing it," he said. "We just can't talk about the details."

Russia has enough resources for two years: Lithuanian intelligence - The chief of the Lithuanian military intelligence said Russia has enough resources to continue the war in Ukraine for two years.

"The resources which Russia has at the moment would be enough to continue the war at the present intensity for two years," the chief, ELEGIJUS PAULAVICIUS, told reporters in Vilnius.

"How long Russia is be able to wage the war will also depend on the support for Russia's military from states, such as Iran, North Korea. But if you look at what Russia has today, such as the strategic reserve, equipment, ammunition, armaments – it can wage it at the present intensity for two years," he added.

CIA Says it's already fighting Russia's Wagner mercenaries abroad - In a plot that seems fit for a spy flick, the Central Intelligence Agency says it is **secretly** (Comment - ??) helping to fight against Russian mercenaries led by a villainous caterer.

CIA Director Bill Burns said that the agency is doing everything in its power to counter the Wagner Group—a key Kremlin ally and private military contractor with thousands of soldiers fighting everywhere from regional conflicts in Africa to Ukraine—today during a public hearing for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence.

U.S. military eyes mounting Western air-to-air missiles on Ukrainian MiGs - The effort, if successful, could be part of a solution to Kyiv's need for additional firepower and air defenses.

The US military is studying whether how to integrate advanced air-to-air missiles with Ukraine's Soviet-era fighter jets, in the latest attempt to jury-rig old platforms with new capabilities ahead of what's expected to be a bloody spring.

Officials are looking into whether AIM-120 advanced medium-range air-to-air missiles, designed to be fired from Western fighter jets such as the U.S.-made F-16, can be mounted on Ukraine's existing MiGs, according to two Defense Department officials and another person involved in the discussions.

If successful, it would be the first time the US has given Ukrainian aircraft the capability to fire air-to-air missiles, some of which are already in their inventory. U.S. military officials believe Kyiv is looking to mount its offensive in the next six to eight weeks as the weather warms up and Ukrainian forces finish their training on combined arms maneuver tactics in Germany, the DoD officials said.

Officials are concerned that Ukraine is running low on air defenses as Russia continues missile attacks and even sends decoy balloons with radar reflectors to deplete Ukrainian missiles.

Sanctions

US issues warrant for \$25m airplane owned by Russian oil giant - US government alleges the Boeing-made plane violated sanctions and commerce law by travelling to and from Russia.

The US has requested and obtained a warrant to seize a Russian aircraft valued at \$25m, according to a statement released on Wednesday.

The US-made plane, a Boeing 737-7JU, is accused of travelling from a foreign country to Russia, in violation of US law and sanctions implemented after Moscow's 2022 invasion of Ukraine.

Hyundai in talks to sell Russian plant to Kazakhstan - South Korean media reported that Hyundai Motor Co, which suspended operations last March, is in talks with a Kazakh company to sell its manufacturing plant in Russia.

Many factories in Russia have suspended production and furloughed workers due to equipment shortages and sanctions since Moscow invaded Ukraine last year.

Yonhap reported that negotiations to sell Hyundai's plant in St Petersburg to an car-related company in Astana, Kazakhstan are in the final stage, citing an unnamed source.

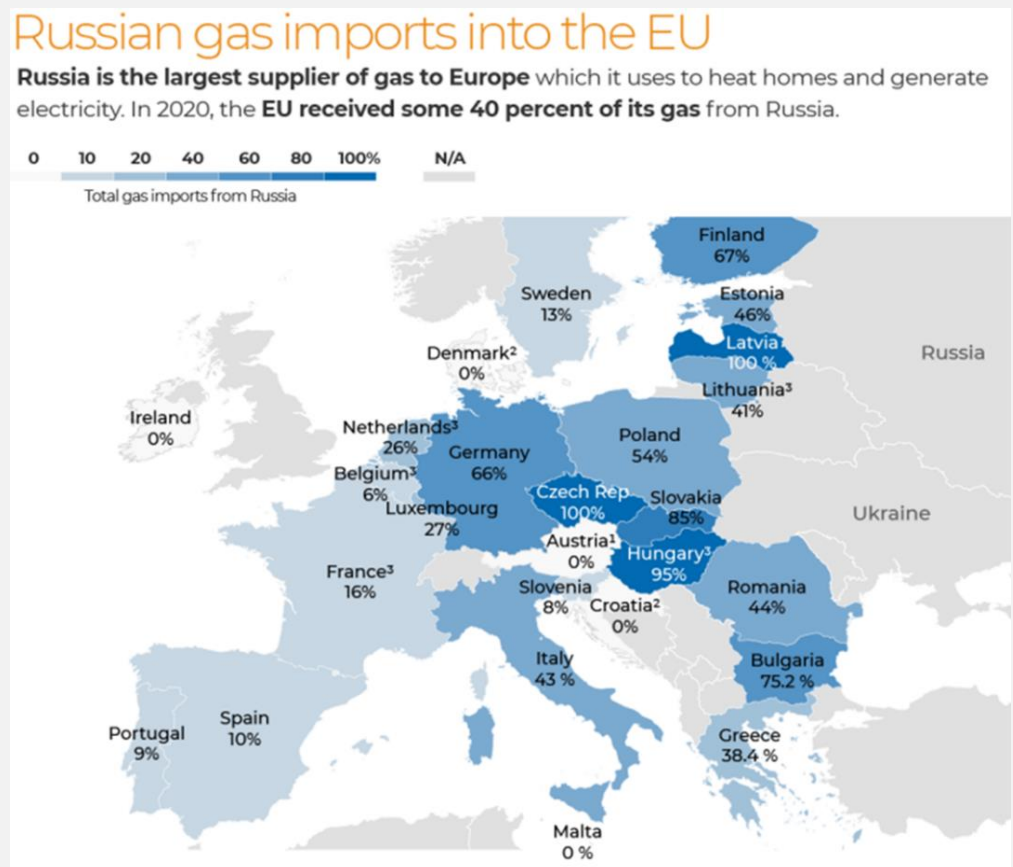
The deal could be signed as early as June, it said.

EU energy chief tells countries not to renew Russian LNG contracts - European Union countries and companies should not sign new contracts to buy Russian liquefied natural gas, the EU's energy policy chief said.

"We can and should get rid of Russian gas completely as soon as possible, still keeping in mind our security of supply," EU energy commissioner Kadri Simson told a meeting of EU lawmakers.

"I encourage all member states and all companies to stop buying Russian LNG, and not to sign any new gas contracts with Russia once the existing contracts have expired," Simson said.

The EU has pledged to quit Russian fossil fuels by 2027 and replaced about two-thirds of Russian gas last year.



While Moscow cut pipeline gas flows, deliveries of Russian liquefied natural gas to Europe increased last year to 22 bcm, up from approximately 16 bcm in 2021, according to an EU analysis seen by the Reuters news agency.

Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

Ukraine to pursue legal action against Russia over environmental crimes - Andriy Yermak, the head of the office of the president of Ukraine, met with representatives of ecology and environment-focused European civil society organizations on Tuesday to discuss the possibility of taking legal action against Russia for environmental crimes in Ukraine, according to a release from the president's office.

The environmental crimes in question were those caused as a result of the current war between Russia and Ukraine.

"The damage that has already been done to the Ukrainian ecosystem amounts to billions of dollars. This should become part of the reparations we will demand from Russia," said Andriy Yermak.

Georgia Uprising - Zelenskyy has called for "democratic success" in Georgia, where thousands of protesters have been protesting against a controversial "foreign agents" bill.

There's been rioting in Georgia's capital Tbilisi over a so-called foreign agent law, which the government is moving through parliament. Opponents say it replicates similar measures in Russia.

Thousands of demonstrators faced off against riot police in the Georgian capital Tbilisi overnight on Tuesday. They were protesting against a proposed law that would require any organization receiving more than 20 percent of its funding from abroad to register as a "foreign agent."

Demonstrators bore Georgian, Ukrainian, NATO and EU flags and chanted "Down with the Russian law" as they marched through the streets, pelting security forces with stones and Molotov cocktails. Police responded with water cannon and tear gas.



The law echoes similar legislation passed in Russia and other post-Soviet states, prompting concerns that Moscow is deepening its influence in Georgia, which has emerged as a key battleground in the Kremlin's escalating conflict with the Western NATO-European Union bloc.

Georgian President Zourabichvili explicitly pointed to Russia in comments made during her ongoing visit to the U.S.

"This law—which no one needed—does not come out of nowhere," she said. "It is something dictated by Moscow...The Georgia that sees its future in Europe will not allow anyone to take away this future."

Comment – Both President Stalin and NKVD founder Lavrentiy Beria were from Georgia.

Nordstrom announcements - Germany's defence minister, Boris Pistorius, has warned against reaching premature conclusions on who was responsible for blowing up the Nord Stream pipelines, suggesting the attack could also have been a "false flag" operation to blame Ukraine.

NATO's SG Stoltenberg has said it is still unclear who was responsible for the attack on the pipelines last year.

Russia State media warns war is coming to European country - As the war between Russia and Ukraine is anticipated to escalate in the next few weeks, the neighboring nation of Moldova may be caught in the crosshairs.

Russian state-run news outlet RT claims Eastern Europe is on the verge of a war that includes Moldova and Transnistria, known officially as the Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic—a post-Soviet state internationally recognized as part of Moldova.

Tensions are rising after claims in recent weeks by Russian officials that Kyiv "is preparing an armed provocation against Transnistria in the near future," which would hypothetically be led by the Armed Forces of Ukraine in tandem with the neo-Nazi Azov regiment.

Leaders of both Russia and Ukraine are countering the others' narratives about the importance of Moldova in the context of the overarching conflict.



"A staged Russian offensive from the territory of Transnistria is supposed to act as a pretext for the invasion," the Russian Defense Ministry said February 23 via Telegram. "Ukrainian saboteurs participating in the staged invasion will be disguised in the uniform of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation."

One day later, the Russian Foreign Ministry released its own statement alleging that a "significant accumulation" of Ukrainian military personnel equipment—including artillery in ready positions and "unprecedented" increases of unmanned aircraft—had exacerbated the situation on the Ukraine-Pridnestrovian border.

Comment – This has always been part of the Russian war plan - Moldova to follow after Ukraine – or what Putin believed when thinking his Ukrainian escapade would take only a week to execute. Should the EU, NATO and the international community have merely accepted this outcome, then the Baltic states would more than likely have been subjected to military “coercion,” followed by “manufactured” political unrest in other ex-Soviet states such as Poland, Bulgaria and so on.

The lesson for the West is that by ignoring Russian aggression in Syria, Georgia, Chechnya and Crimea among others, they were merely sweeping the geopolitical dirt under the carpet. But the carpet starting slipping around because of all the dirt and became so prominent that it's obvious presence was forced into view.

The name Chamberlain springs to mind. 1991 Soviet fallout echoing 1919 Paris implications.

Gas lines transiting Ukraine

The question with regard to gas pipelines transiting Ukraine from Russia to its EU partners should be whether they remain intact throughout the war, or will they be destroyed?



Putin & Russia

Russia war blunders show ‘fallibility of authoritarian governments’: Freedom House - While Russia’s invasion has tanked civil liberties and political rights in Ukraine, and prompted a backslide in Russian rights and press freedom, the last year has also showed the limits of President Putin’s power, according to a new report from the US-based Freedom House group.

The report noted that since the invasion, few of Putin’s “authoritarian allies have openly supported his war of aggression.” It particularly noted the lack of endorsement from China, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

The report also cited equipment shortages plaguing Russia’s army and a generally poorer performance on the battlefield than expected, underscoring the “fallibility of authoritarian governments.”

“Corruption, criminality, and feckless leadership have made the Russian army far more deadly to soldiers and civilians on both sides of the front line, despite the force’s failure to achieve stated war aims,” the report said.

Russia planned for the wrong war — with the wrong army - Russia is losing in Ukraine not just because of Putin's madness and the heroism of Ukrainians, but also because Russia's army is built for rapid invasion and occupation, not for the type of grinding war it is now fighting in Ukraine.

"Russia's strategic position dictated its focus on a blitzkrieg army. Its military-political ambitions were concentrated in the South Caucasus, in the Baltic region, with access to Central-Eastern Europe, and in Ukraine.

In the South Caucasus, Russia was preparing, first of all, for a war against Georgia, in which the main role could be played by strike units located at Russian military bases in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as the 7th Airborne Assault Division stationed in Novorossiysk, Stavropol and Anapa. It is an hour's drive from the South Ossetian border to the Georgian capital Tbilisi, so one would expect Russian forces to capture the city overnight, before the West could take political or military action to preserve Georgia's sovereignty and independence.

Moscow, apparently, planned to end a war with NATO in the Baltic region in a few days. European and American military and civilian observers wrote about this with great concern. The Rand Corporation concluded that NATO could not effectively protect its most vulnerable members: "To reach the outskirts of the Estonian and/or Latvian capitals, Tallinn and Riga, Russian troops could take a maximum of 60 hours."

As a result, NATO would be faced with a choice: admit defeat, or attempt a counter-offensive under the threat of escalation and the use of nuclear weapons by Russia.

For the war with Ukraine, as is now clear, Moscow allotted a couple of weeks. Airborne troops were supposed to capture the key centers of state administration and military command in Kyiv and the Baltic capitals in a few hours.

Therefore, Russia invested in building up combat power: eight special forces brigades, 45,000 airborne troops and 35,000 marines. They were supposed to crush the enemy in the shortest possible time.

The threat of using strategic nuclear forces against the United States and other Western countries was expected to deter them from taking decisive action.

Ground forces, motorized infantry and tank units, designed to capture and hold territory, played only a secondary role in such scenarios. It is no coincidence that in Russia they made up just 28% of the armed forces personnel. In other armies, including China and most European countries, they usually make up about half.

But Ukraine broke this calculation. By the end of the summer, it became clear that a long war lay ahead, and the Russian army was not ready. There were no reserves prepared. Elite airborne units were forced to turn into assault infantry, and suffered heavy losses. Poor communication and logistics created confusion. There were not enough command personnel with military experience — not to mention combat experience — to create new units and formations from the hastily mobilized."

Moscow's slow, bloody march to defeat - US intelligence believes that Russia will ultimately lose the war in Ukraine due to its poor battlefield performance, rigid command structure and heavy losses.

Even if Russian troops capture Bakhmut in eastern Ukraine, it would not be a victory and does not show any improvement in their military effectiveness, US defense officials believe.

Moscow has managed to move its army just 43 miles in seven months, while Ukraine ferociously defends its territory at great human cost.

The Russian army is facing up to 70 percent casualties among troops on the front line, U.S. defense officials say, and the Wagner Group of mercenaries is also suffering from shortages of ammunition and supplies.

"Russia is not winning, and the cracks in its foundations are getting larger," says a senior Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) officer who spoke exclusively to Newsweek. The official cites atrocious morale, poor battlefield performance, an overly rigid command structure, poor coordination (and even interference) between the Russian regular army and the Wagner Group of mercenaries, and shortages of everything due to disrupted and unreliable supply lines.

Where are Ukrainian people fleeing to?

According to the United Nations refugee agency, there have been 19.2 million border crossings out of Ukraine since the Russian invasion began in February 2022. Many people have sought refuge in neighboring countries.

The latest data show 10,034,694 border crossings into Poland, 2,039,149 to Romania, 2,852,395 to Russia, 2,316,456 to Hungary, 1,227,438 to Slovakia, 780,896 to Moldova and 16,705 into Belarus. Most of those displaced have been women and children. Men aged 18 to 60 have been asked to remain in Ukraine to fight.

