

# Conflict Update # 323

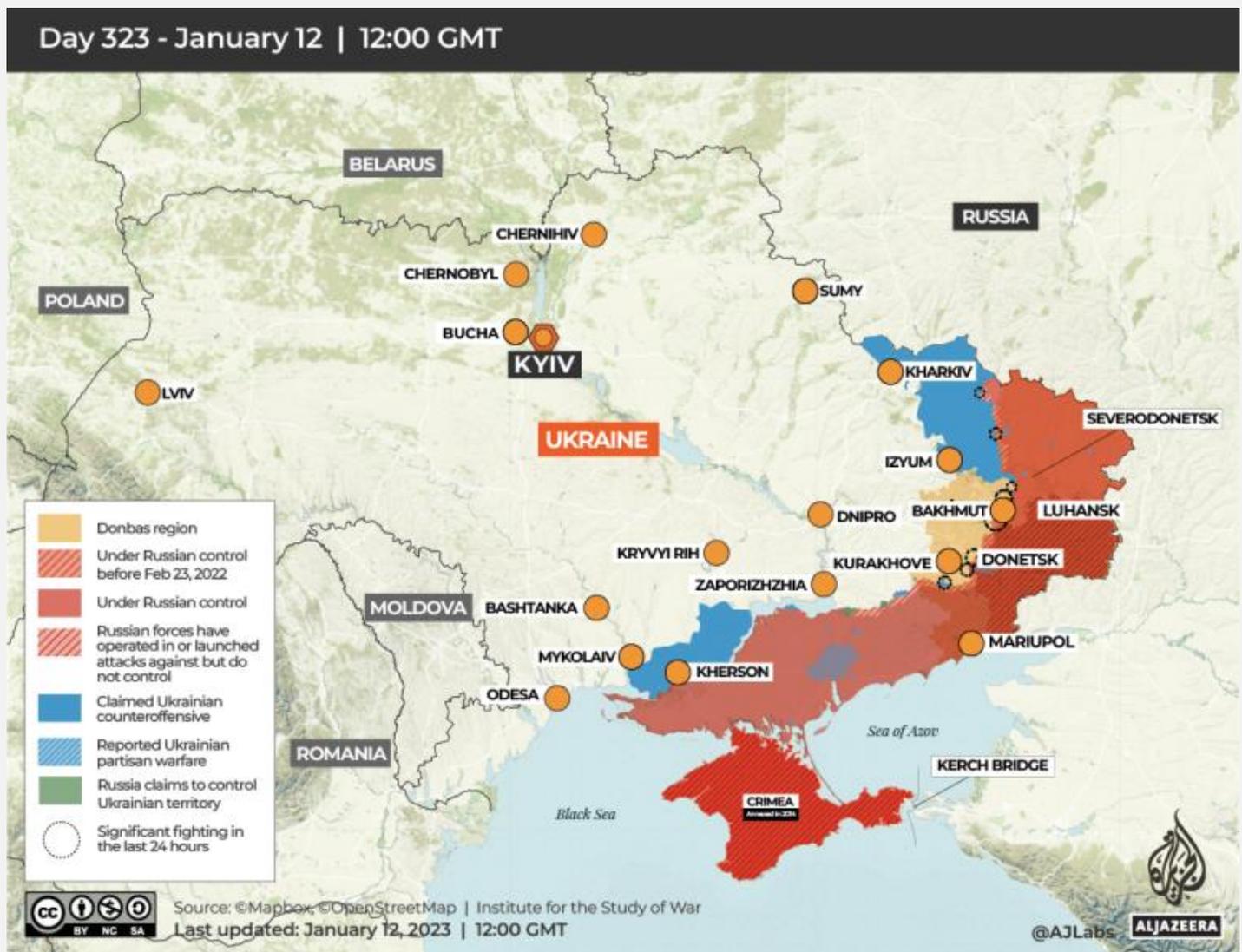
January 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023

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## Conflict Assessment

**Russian losses** – 113,990 (430) soldiers killed, 3,094 (+0) enemy tanks, 6,159 (+0) armored combat vehicles, 2,082 (+4) artillery systems, 437 (+0) MLRS systems, 218 (+1) air defense systems, 285 (+0) warplanes, 276 (+1) helicopters, 1,865 (+3) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 723 (+0) cruise missiles, 17 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,826 (+0) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 184 (+0) units of equipment.

## Key Takeaways



**‘Heavy shelling’ near Bakhmut, Soledar** - there is a lot of “heavy shelling” and machine gun fire taking place in the area.

“There’s a [Ukrainian] checkpoint very close to us as well, at which we were prevented from going any further towards Bakhmut. It seems as if they’re only allowing the military through,” a reporter added.

Situation in the region had changed “dramatically” within the past few months, with fighting intensifying as Moscow presses for control of Soledar and Bakhmut.

“We have been speaking to soldiers who have been inside Bakhmut and asking them about the situation in the city and in Soledar. They said to us that Russian forces were in the centre of Soledar and in control of its salt-mine,” said the reporter.

“They described Russian tanks in the centre of Soledar as well and said there are concerns among the Ukrainian forces about possible escape routes for the Ukrainian troops inside Soledar ... and that they [the troops] were trying to protect a western route out of the town.”

**Russia building up forces as battle for Soledar rages: Ukrainian official** - Russia is building up its forces in Ukraine but Kyiv’s troops are holding out in fierce fighting for control of the eastern town of Soledar, Ukraine’s deputy defence minister has said.

Hanna Malyar told a news briefing that the number of Russian military units in Ukraine had risen to 280 from 250 a week earlier. “They [the Russians] are moving over their own corpses,” Malyar said of the fighting for Soledar, which Wagner Group mercenaries have been fighting to take control of for weeks.

“Russia is driving its own people to the slaughter by the thousands, but we are holding on,” she added.

**Russia’s new deputy commander in Ukraine inspects troops in Belarus** - A delegation headed by the commander of Russia’s ground forces, Oleg Salyukov, has visited Belarus to inspect the combat readiness of a joint force stationed there, the Belarusian defence ministry says.

The visit took place a day after Salyukov was named one of the deputy commanders of Russia’s military operation in Ukraine in the latest of a series of reshuffles.

Russia and Belarus, its close ally, have beefed up their joint military group in Belarus and plan to hold joint aviation drills there from the beginning of next week.

The exercises are part of a pattern of activity that has caused fears in Ukraine that Moscow might try to use Belarus to launch a new ground invasion of Ukraine from the north.

**Top Russian general put in charge of ‘more dangerous’ Ukraine war** - Move makes Valery Gerasimov, pictured below, directly accountable for the fate of the campaign as Sergey Surovikin, nicknamed ‘General Armageddon,’ is effectively demoted.

Russia ordered its top general to take charge of its invasion of Ukraine in the biggest shake-up yet of its military command structure after months of battlefield defeats.

Russia’s defence ministry said on Wednesday that Minister of Defence Sergei Shoigu appointed Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov as overall commander of forces for what Moscow calls its “special military operation” in Ukraine.

The move not only made Gerasimov directly accountable for the fate of the campaign but also in effect demoted General Sergey Surovikin, nicknamed “General Armageddon” by the Russian media for his reputed ruthlessness.

“The increase in the level of leadership of the special military operation is connected with the expansion in the scale of tasks ... the need to organize closer contact between different branches of the armed forces, and improve the quality ... and effectiveness of the management of Russian forces,” a ministry statement said.

Surovikin’s demotion came after only Gerasimov’s deputy along with two other

three months on the job, and he becomes generals – Oleg Salyukov and Alexey Kim.

Surovikin, a veteran of Russian campaigns in Chechnya and Syria, was being made the fall guy for a series of recent Russian military debacles, including a Ukrainian attack on a Russian barracks in the town of Makiivka that killed at least 89 Russian soldiers, including conscripts, during the New Year period.

Surovikin had been named commander in Ukraine only Ukrainian offensives that turned the tide of the war and drew attention to poor training, equipment and morale among Russian forces. Surovikin, 55, marks Moscow’s third senior military appointment in the space of a week.



Russia’s top battlefield last October after a spate of

**Comment** – I view something more alarming from the Russian command perspective in this new appointment – it is getting closer to home and placing this 2-I-C from the Kremlin in direct control of forces inside Ukraine says things are not going too well.

Since his appointment Russia has ceded Kherson back to Ukraine and has lost 51,710 soldiers killed and approximately 103,000 injured.

**Change of commander reflects power struggle within Russia: ISW** - The appointment of Gerasimov over Surovikin is “highly likely to have been in part a political decision to reassert the primacy of the Russian [ministry of defence] in an internal Russian power struggle.” the Institute for the Study of War has said.

Wagner Group chief Prigozhin had increasingly criticized the ministry’s conduct of the war since late 2022.

“Surovikin, the previous theater commander in Ukraine, was a public favorite of Prigozhin, and Ukrainian intelligence reported him a rival of Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu,” the Washington-based think tank said in its latest assessment.

Gerasimov’s nomination is likely “a signal for Prigozhin and other actors to reduce their criticism” of the ministry, it added.

**Russia allocates airborne forces to reinforce Kreminna front line: UK** - Russia has “almost certainly” allocated a contingent of airborne forces to reinforce the Kreminna front line after assessing its vulnerability, the British Ministry of Defence has said in a regular update.

Kreminna, which had a population of more than 18,000 before the war, was the first town confirmed to have been taken by Russian forces in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine since they launched their invasion. Moscow claimed control over it in mid-April.

The ministry said Moscow had previously deployed the airborne troop contingent in Kherson, until November, when it withdrew its troops following a significant military blow.

**Wagner Group claims control of Ukraine’s Soledar** - Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the mercenary Wagner Group and a close ally of Russian President Vladimir Putin, says his forces have captured all of Soledar and killed about 500 Ukrainian soldiers in heavy fighting.

“I want to confirm the complete liberation and cleansing of the territory of Soledar,” Prigozhin said in a statement. “The whole city is littered with the corpses of Ukrainian soldiers.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy had rebuffed previous Wagner claims to have seized part of Soledar but made no immediate comment on the latest assertions.

**Comment** – This statement and these numbers have been disputed by both Ukraine – and the Kremlin – the latter a significant difference of opinion against Prigozhin and seen as a slap down from Russian Command.

**British casualty confirmed** - Wagner Group said it found the body of one of two British voluntary workers who had been reported missing in eastern Ukraine.

**Russia using old Ukrainian weapons sent in goodwill on front line** - During a disarmament campaign after the fall of the Soviet Union, Moscow received weapons as payment for Kyiv’s natural gas debts.

Moscow has 16 White Swans and has been using them as trump cards in its renewed confrontation with the West.

In recent years, they have flown over the North Pole to violate US and Canadian airspace, landed in Venezuela and launched cruise missiles at Syria.

Since last March, the White Swans have rained hell on Ukraine.

They take off from an airbase near the Volga River city of Saratov and launch non-nuclear missiles without entering Ukraine’s airspace.

And in what may come as a surprise, half of Russia’s White Swans once belonged to Kyiv – just like hundreds of missiles they can carry. After the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyiv inherited a colossal arsenal, including nuclear weapons and 19 White Swans, which were based at the Priluky Air Base in northern Ukraine.

Russia had only two such bombers.

But maintaining strategic aircraft was unnecessary after Kyiv, along with all other former Soviet republics, gave in to Western pressure and “returned” thousands of nuclear warheads to Moscow.

Washington was predictably worried about nuclear arsenals in the 15 newly independent nations that emerged from the USSR as they were undergoing painful economic transitions, often along with political instability.

“Let’s remember the pressure the US exerted on post-Soviet nations to transfer all the carriers of nuclear weapons to Russia,” Igar Tyshkevich, a Kyiv-based analyst, told Al Jazeera.

In 1991, Kyiv said that within 10 years, it would get rid of all its heavy bombers, the missiles these planes could carry and the airfield equipment to maintain them.

**Ukrainian intelligence chief says expect deeper drone attacks into Russia** - There will likely be further strikes into Russian territory, Ukraine’s military intelligence head, Kyrylo Budanov, told ABC News in an interview from Kyiv, without specifically saying whether Ukraine would be behind them.



Ukraine has not claimed responsibility for the Dec. 26 attack on Russia's Engels Air Force Base, which is located more than 800 miles from the Ukrainian border, but Budanov admitted he was "glad to see it."

He added the attacks would come "deeper and deeper" inside of Russia, but would only be able to comment on his country's responsibility for the attacks after the war was over.

And when asked about attacks on Crimea, which was illegally annexed by Russia in 2014, Budanov said, "Crimea is Ukrainian territory, we can use any weapon on our territory."

**Russian dead "piled up"** - In late December, Ukraine's military intelligence head, Kyrylo Budanov made a public appearance in Bakhmut in Donetsk, the hottest point of the 800-mile front line. What he saw shocked him.

"Soldiers showed me a section where dead bodies are piled up like something you would see in a movie," he said.

"There are hundreds of dead bodies just rotting away in the open field, in places they are piled on top of other bodies like makeshift walls, when Russian troops attack on that field they use those bodies for cover, like a shield," he continued. "But it's not working. There are actual fields of dead bodies there."

Budanov said Russia's weaponry is depleting, forcing it to resort to "cheaper," more "plentiful" solutions, like the Iranian-made, self-destroying Shahed drones, which have sowed fear and panic in the population.

**Maxar Technologies publishes before-and-after satellite images of Ukraine's Soledar. All houses are turned to rubble** – US Maxar Technologies has published satellite images of Ukraine's Soledar, Donetsk region, which now represents the epicentre of vicious fighting. The images were taken on 1 August 2022 and 10 January 2023.

The first image shows lines of houses fully intact. The second image does not depict a single undamaged structure, some quarters are fully flattened, while houses have been turned into rubble.



The town's population stood at 11,000 people before the war. Head of the Donetsk military authority Pavlo Kyrylenko reported that Soledar now only has 559 people left, including 15 children, who cannot be evacuated. Neighboring Bakhmut's population dropped below 8,000 people according to the official.

## Impacts

**Moscow questions Sweden over Nord Stream blasts probe** - Russia's foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova has questioned whether Sweden has "something to hide" over blasts along the Nord Stream gas pipelines last September.

Addressing reporters at a news briefing, she reiterated criticism of the Swedish government for not sharing information from the ongoing investigations into the incidents.

Sweden and other European investigators say the attacks were carried out on purpose, but they have not said who they think was responsible. Moscow, without providing evidence, has blamed the explosions on Western sabotage.

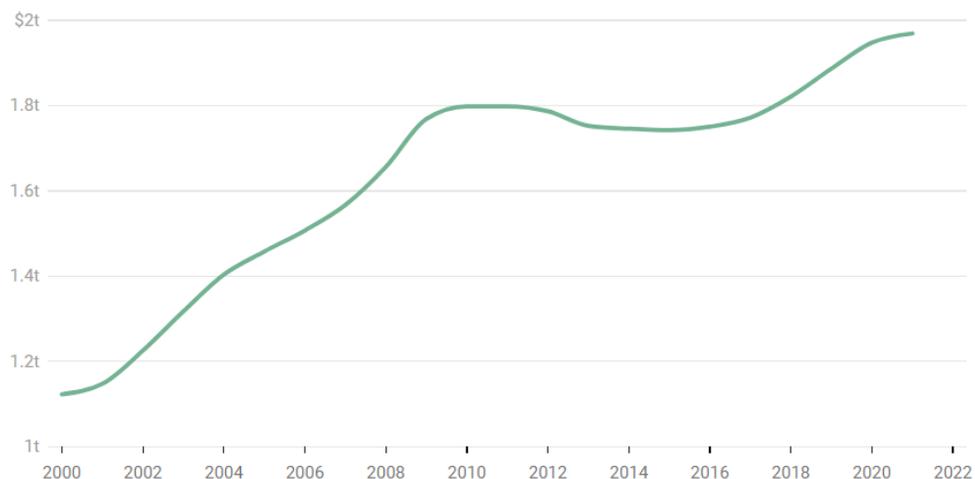
“Maybe Russian investigators, conducting an objective investigation, could come to an inconvenient conclusion ... about who conducted this act of sabotage, terrorism. About who thought it up, and who carried it out,” Zakharova said.

### **Finger on the trigger - Russia has provoked a new arms race: now, even its ‘allies’ want to protect themselves from it. Novaya-Europe’s analysis** - Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has led to the biggest growth of the

worldwide military-industrial complex in the last 20 years. All of the states bordering Russia — from Norway to Mongolia — are building up their military capacity, Finland and Sweden are planning to join NATO, Latvia is bringing back compulsory conscription, and Georgia is increasing its defence expenditure with the purpose of deterring “aggressive forces.” It is expected that the worldwide defence budget will reach a record high in 2023 and will then continue increasing. Novaya-Europe’s data department has studied the new arms race and its developments.

#### **Worldwide defence budget has doubled since 2000**

Defence spending in US dollars, not adjusted for inflation



Source: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

In 2021, the worldwide defence spending reached \$2 trillion (complete data for 2022 has not yet been shared publicly) — which is six times more than what governments spend on fighting climate change. Only in the last ten years, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the worldwide defence budget has gone up by 9% in real terms.

Half of the expenses belong to just two countries — the US and China: in 2021, the States spent \$800 billion, while China shelled out \$265 billion. Furthermore, back in the beginning of this century, China amounted for 2% of the worldwide defence budget, but in 2021, the number went up to 14%. In the next five years, Beijing plans to increase its military expenditure by 7% each year, which would be at least twice as fast as the growth rate of the US military-industrial complex.

In 2022, the entire world has become involved in the arms race. A war on European territory has led to unprecedented expenses on arms and increasing the size of armies, especially in the countries bordering Russia. According to analysts, the worldwide military-industrial complex will break records in the coming years: the Pentagon’s budget will grow by 10% already in 2023, while defence spending in Europe will increase by half by 2026.

This will inescapably lead to a tax increase or cuts to other state programs: “Every € spent on defence is an € not spent on health care, accommodation, pensions, education,” military analyst for the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Alexandra Markshteiner thinks.

## **The neighbours are scared the most**

In 2022, 35 out of the 40 countries responsible for over 60% of all worldwide military expenses increased their defence budgets. Among the leaders when it comes to growing the military-industrial complex is Kazakhstan: financial contributions to the republic's defence have jumped by 75%. In July, WSJ published a story on the government's plan to reform the army and strengthen the relations with the US, China, and Turkey following the start of the war in Ukraine.

In 2023, the growth of the military-industrial complex will speed up. Poland is one of the leading countries planning to grow their military capacity. Its defence expenditure will almost triple — from \$13 billion to \$31 billion.

“The best strategy is to deter the opponent with the power of one's own army and through cooperation with others,” Poland's Prime Minister said during military exercises in November. In 2023, the budget of the country's Defence Ministry will be higher than the military budgets of Ukraine, Turkey, and almost all European countries.

In November, two missiles fell on the territory of Poland, near the Ukrainian border. A week later, a shell ended up on the territory of Moldova. “This proves Russian missile terror poses a huge threat not only to the safety of Ukraine, but also of neighboring countries,” the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Oleh Nikolenko said.

In 2023, Moldova plans to increase its defence budget by 75%. “We need to develop our defence sector, including air defence, or join different associations that were created at the EU level,” Moldova's MoD stated during the Moldova-Europe Integration Forum.

Armenia ranks third when it comes to the growth of the military-industrial complex. Amid the conflict with Azerbaijan, the government plans to increase defence expenses by 50%. After the recent clashes on the border, Yerevan's officials lamented Armenia's lack of modern arms. The country's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said that Russia failed to supply weapons and lost control over the Lachin corridor that connected Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia.

The new leader in the arms race is Turkey which last year increased the army's financing by 30%, and in 2023, it went up by 50%. “As a result of increased threats in the world and in our neighborhood, we are increasing our defence budget for 2023 to a high enough level, 469 billion liras [\$25 billion]”, President Erdoğan said in October. Meanwhile, Turkey's DM called on Greece and Cyprus to refrain from further arms procurement, so as not to “end up in a deadlock situation.”

“China and Turkey armed themselves 20 years ago, and today they've started on rearmament, to be able to move towards more developed systems,” military analyst Pavel Luzin says. “China can spend bigger amounts of money on this goal: inside the country, a solid industrial complex has had the time to develop. The neighbours feel the threat and also begin to invest in defence.”

The growing military potential of China and Russia's aggressive actions made Japan rethink its pacifist policy: by 2027, the country will have doubled its military expenses — for the first time since the Second World War.

## **NATO's second life**

The worldwide military-industrial complex was growing steadily up until the end of the 2000s. In 2010, the biggest economies led by the US and UK paused the increase of military spending but growth of military financing resumed after Crimea's annexation. Back then, NATO member states held a summit in Wales to discuss “Russia's actions against Ukraine which challenged the fundamental principles of a united, free, and peaceful Europe.”

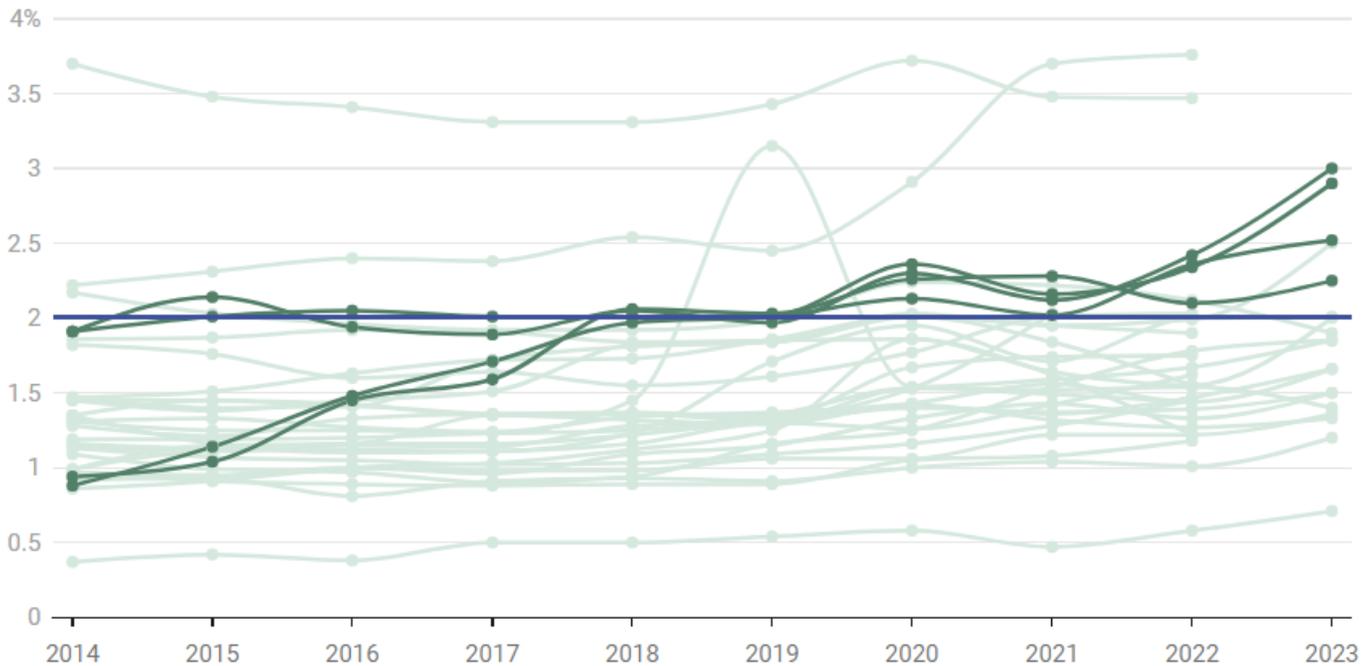
Following the meeting, it was decided to “reverse the trend of declining defence budgets”: Alliance members pledged to spend no less than 2% of GDP on defence by 2024. In 2014, this was only being done by the US, UK, and Greece. By 2022, the Baltic states, Turkey, Poland, Slovakia, and Croatia had joined them, however, this is still not even half of the Alliance's 30 members. Western Europe countries — Luxemburg, Spain, and Belgium — spend the least on their

defence, while all of the Baltic states and Poland, located near the Russian border, have exceeded the threshold set by NATO.

“All of the Alliance members won’t be able to reach 2%,” military expert Pavel Luzin says. “But the key countries have already either done it or will achieve the goal in the next couple of years, seeing as the Russian threat is quite real.”

## How much do NATO countries spend on defence

NATO’s requirement is **2% of GDP**. In 2019, this threshold was exceeded by **Poland and the Baltic states**



Source: NATO, public data

On 5 July, NATO member states signed protocols on Finland and Sweden joining the North Atlantic Treaty. Both countries will be able to join the Alliance as soon as all of the existing members ratify the protocols. Out of the 30 members, only Turkey and Hungary are yet to do so.

“De facto, Sweden and Finland are already members of the Alliance,” Luzin says. “De jure, they will become members even if Turkey continues throwing a spanner in the works, seeing as for these countries a direct Russian threat exists. NATO is their guarantee of strengthening defence.”

From 1994, Sweden and Finland held the status of NATO partners. “It was clear after the 24th of February when Russia made this full-scale invasion of Ukraine that there was a difference between partnership and membership. Ukraine was also partner to NATO. Yeah, it didn’t help,” Sweden’s Minister of Defence Pal Jonson declared.

In its turn, Sweden promised to increase defence spending — up to 2% of GDP, just like NATO has been asking from its members since 2014. Finland reached this target in 2021. Sixteen member states pledged to reach it by 2024.

The main reason for the invasion of Ukraine — as announced by the Kremlin — is NATO’s expansion to the east. But as of now, Russia’s foreign policy has been back firing: as Novaya-Europe reported last year, following the annexation of Crimea, the Alliance deployed its soldiers in Eastern Europe, and following the beginning of the full-scale war, it increased its military contingent in Poland and the Baltic states 3.5 times — from 5,000 to 18,200 people.

## The best defence is aiding Ukraine

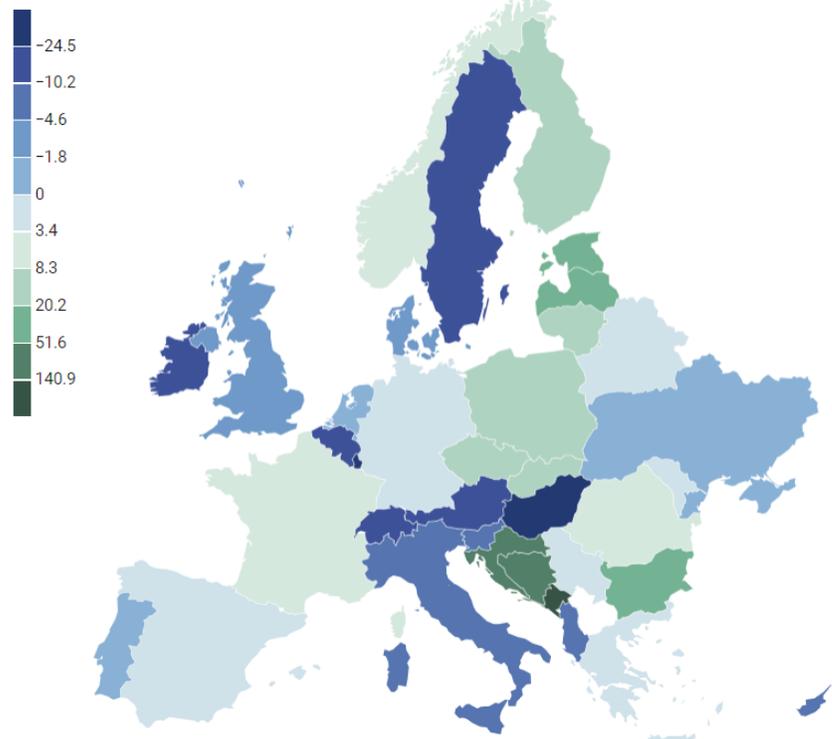
Lithuania approved a record military budget for 2023 — 2.5% of the country’s GDP — and if necessary, it is ready to increase it to 3%. Out of NATO member states, only Greece and the US spend more on defence. According to Lithuania’s Defence Minister, that is necessary if the country intends to continue further rendering military assistance to Ukraine.

During the ten months of combat, the military aid to Ukraine reached \$40 billion (Ukraine also receives humanitarian and financial aid, but we did not count it in our calculations). The main donor is the US: 60% of the money transferred to the needs of Ukraine’s Armed Forces was given by the Pentagon.

However, for the US economy, these expenses are less noticeable than for European countries: the US allocated 3% of its defence budget and 0.001% of its GDP to the support of Ukraine, while Estonia and Latvia gave Kyiv 40% of its national defence spending.

## Changes in the size of European armies

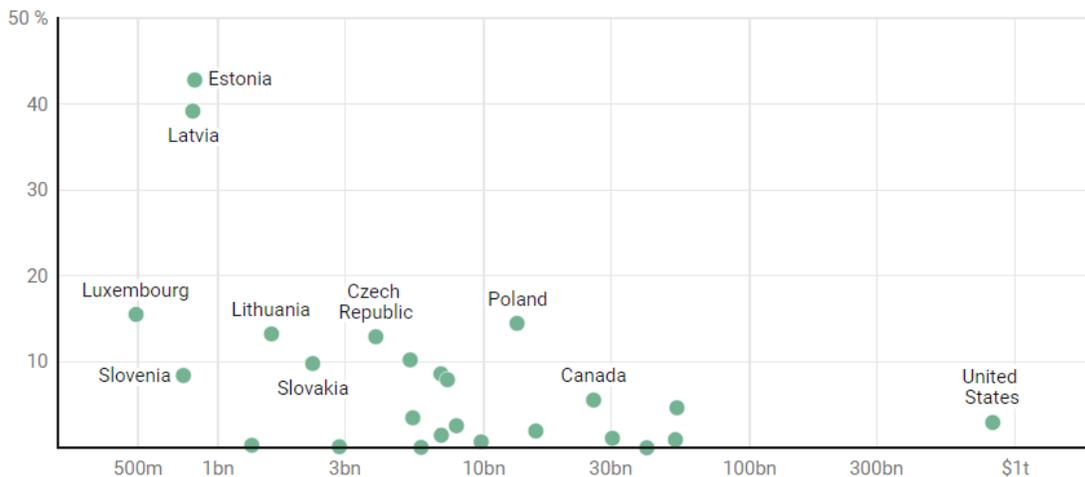
In percent, 2022 compared to 2018



Source: Military Balance

## Military aid provided to Ukraine

The share of the countries’ defence budget used for military aid to Ukraine compared to their total military expenditure



Source: Kiel Institute for the World Economy

Estonia’s Defence Minister Hanno Pevkur explains that “the decisions to support Ukraine today reduce the Russian strength to behave irrationally” in the Baltic region, which means that “Ukraine winning the war will also increase Estonian security.”

Europe and the US have no plans to decrease the amount of military assistance provided to Ukraine in 2023. UK Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has promised to increase the military aid to the Ukrainian Armed Forces in 2023 compared to the 2022's \$2.8 billion and has called upon the countries of Northern Europe to do the same: "We know that their security is our security. We will continue to stand with Ukraine." – **Article from Novayagazeta.**

**Comment** – Countries are increasing defense expenditures, but also requisite of capture and recognition is the cost of replenishing existing military inventories as are being depleted through supplying Ukraine.

## Containment

**Poland has decided to send Leopard tanks to Ukraine** as part of an international coalition, the Polish president said, as Warsaw seeks to play a leading role in reaching a consensus among Western allies on such support.

Details of timing or quantities were not immediately available. Poland's statement implies Warsaw is committing to supply around 12 Leopard 2 tanks, a very small percentage of the 242 units it operates, according to figures from the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).

Europe holds an arsenal of over 2,000 of the German-manufactured vehicles, with operators besides Poland including Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and Turkey. While the other members of what Duda called an "international coalition" have not been identified, a key Finnish lawmaker on Friday suggested it was time to send Leopard 2 tanks to Kyiv as well.

In November, the Council on Foreign Relations published a piece calling for 90 Leopard 2s to be sent to Ukraine, as part of a coalition effort.

## Russian sanctions

**Moscow imposes new sanctions over UK's 'anti-Russian course'** - Russia's foreign ministry says Moscow has imposed sanctions on 36 individuals in connection with the "anti-Russian course" adopted by the UK's government.

The list includes politicians, security officials and journalists, the ministry said in a statement.

"Deliberately refusing constructive and constructive dialogue, London continues the line of confrontation, in collaboration with Washington, and spreads false information about Russia, [and] incites Russophobia," it said.

The UK and its Western allies have rolled out sweeping sanctions on Russia over its offensive in Ukraine – measures which Moscow has persistently railed against.

## Sanctions

**Russian car sales slump in 2022 as sanctions bite** - Car sales in Russia collapsed by 58.8 percent in 2022, the Association of European Businesses (AEB) has said, as the industry continues to reel from the effect of Western sanctions on Moscow.

Total car sales for the year came in at 687,370, compared with more than 1.6 million in 2021, the AEB said. In the month of December, sales were **down 50.2 percent.**

Several Russian carmakers suspended production for periods last year, as the industry struggled to source parts and establish new supply chains following the imposition of sanctions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

## Russian Mobilization

**Moscow could raise upper age limit for draft: Official** - Russia could raise the upper age limit for citizens to be conscripted into the armed forces as soon as this spring, a senior politician has said, as part of Moscow's plans to boost the number of Russian troops by 30 percent.

The chairman of the Russian parliament's defence committee, Andrei Kartapolov, said in an interview with the official parliamentary newspaper that Moscow could raise the upper age limit for conscription to 30 for this year's spring draft.

But only after a one-to-three-year "transition period" would the lower limit be raised from 18 to 21 years, Kartapolov said.

Critics said the idea of a transition period was a transparent attempt by Russian authorities to increase the number of Russians eligible to be called up for military service to plug massive manpower shortages resulting from heavy losses in the war in Ukraine.

**Comment** – Calling Moscow Main Street, are you ready for callup?

**Another draft office set on fire - in village in Russia's Amur region** - A draft office has been set on fire, with equipment standing near a window getting damaged, in the village of Magdagachi in Russia's Amur region, Russian media outlet RBC reports, citing the local office.

"Yes, this [incident] took place tonight, in the early hours of 11 January. Someone threw a Molotov cocktail — the bottle was found. Firemen arrived. A small fire occurred, but it all was extinguished in time, nothing was damaged, except for equipment that was standing on a window," the draft office representative tells RBC.

According to Mediazona, there have been reports about at least **43 cases of draft offices being set** on fire since the start of mobilisation in Russia, and 78 cases since the start of the war in Ukraine.

## Humanitarian

**HRW annual report hails international response to Russia's invasion** - Human Rights Watch has hailed the international response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, urging governments to show the same concern for civilians caught up in other conflicts.

"Never in the history of responding to conflicts have we seen a coordinated international response where we have all the arsenal of the international community to protect human rights and ensure accountability," HRW said in its annual report.

The Washington, DC-based watchdog urged governments to "replicate the best of the international response in Ukraine" and "scale up the political will to address other crises."

**Russia says Moscow and Kyiv interested in talks on human rights** - Russian Human Rights Commissioner Tatiana Moskalkova has said Moscow and Kyiv are interested in future contacts between their rights commissioners, the TASS news agency has reported.

Following a meeting this week in Turkey with her Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Lubinets, Moskalkova said she believed Ukraine was open to discussions. "They have taken a pragmatic approach and are ready for dialogue," Moskalkova said on Thursday, speaking of Lubinets.

“We already have concrete results on the search for missing people, and return of children to their families. I hope the dialogue is continued. The most important thing is that it should not be politicized, but based exclusively on humanitarian and human rights principles,” TASS quoted her as saying.

## Geo-diplomatic

**Will Israel and Russia forge closer ties under Netanyahu?** - Ukraine has expressed its disappointment in signals that the new Israeli government may establish closer ties with Russia.

Netanyahu had close ties to Putin during his previous period in office and Ukraine has expressed its disappointment in signals that the new Israeli government may establish closer ties with Russia.

On foreign policy, particularly regarding Russia’s war in Ukraine, some argue that Israel’s most right-wing government yet is inclined to deviate from its predecessor’s path.

Take the new foreign minister’s first public speech, on January 2.

Among other things, Eli Cohen said the new government would “talk less” when it came to Russia and Ukraine, implying that the administration would avoid taking public positions on the conflict.

Cohen also spoke to his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov before speaking to Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba, a decision that upset the Ukrainians, with the ambassador to Israel saying that the phone call was evidence Israel was changing course under Netanyahu.

“The difference between the two governments is that the previous government was 100 percent ideologically sympathetic to Ukraine and sought to support Ukraine as much as it could, without totally alienating the Russians,” Jonathan Rynhold, head of political studies at Bar-Ilan University, told Al Jazeera.

**Zelenskyy urged NATO to do more** than just promise Ukraine its door was open at a July summit, saying Kyiv needs “powerful steps” as it tries to join the military alliance.