

Conflict Update Day 385

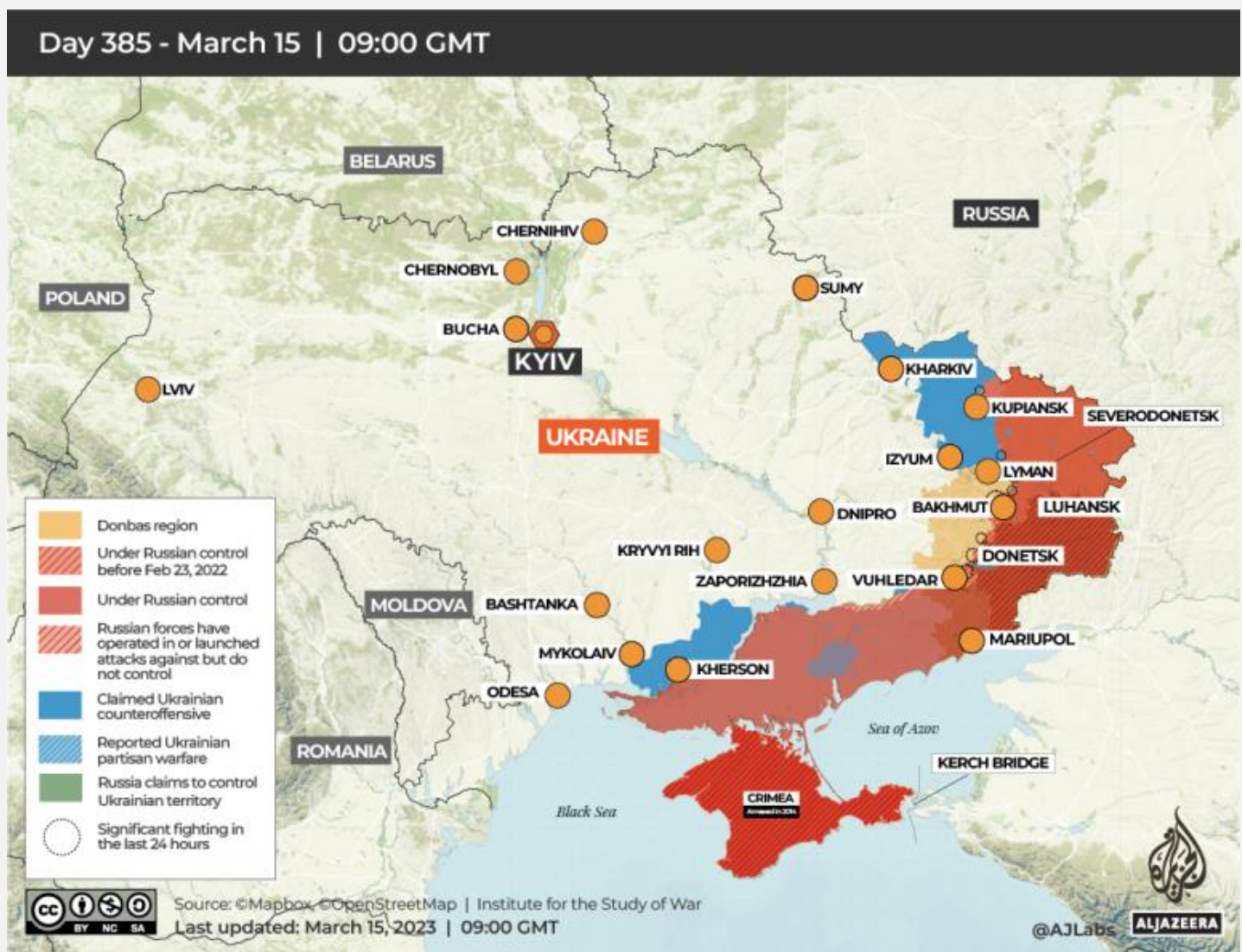
March 15th, 2023

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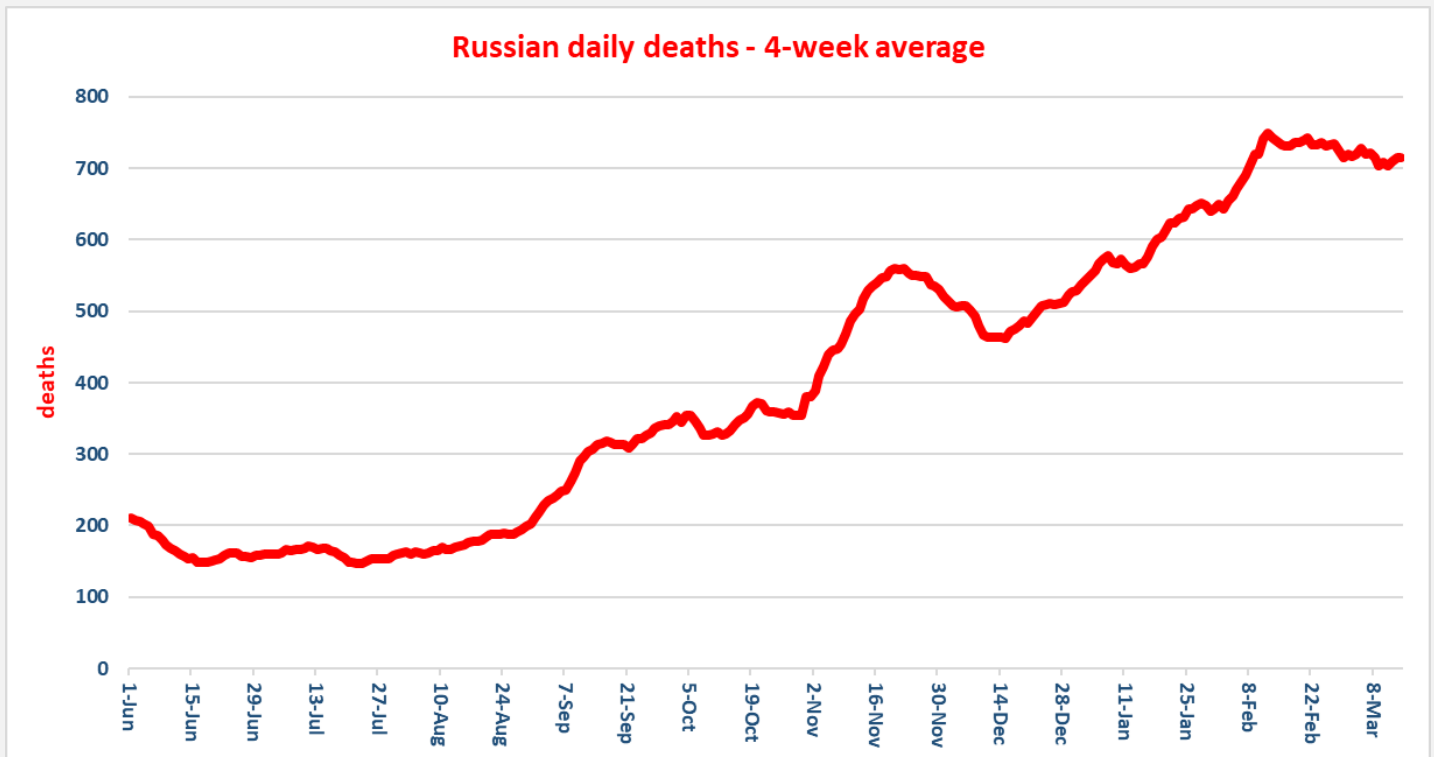
Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 161,520 (+980) soldiers killed, 3,492 (+8) enemy tanks, 6,799 (+10) armored combat vehicles, 2,528 (+9) artillery systems, 502 (7) MLRS systems, 262 (+2) air defense systems, 304 (+0) warplanes, 289 (+0) helicopters, 2,132 (+12) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 907 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,377 (+10) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 257 (+1) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways



Ukrainian sources reported that Russian forces continue building defenses along Russia's border with Ukraine in order to pin Ukrainian troops to northern border areas.



Russia on Defensive as Ukraine Holds Advantage, Ex-Kremlin Aide Admits - Russia's military strategy is no longer to "attack" in eastern Ukraine, as Kyiv "solves several problems" by investing further resources in the contested city of Bakhmut, according to an ex-Kremlin aide.

Writing yesterday on Telegram, Sergey Markov, a former adviser to Putin, said Ukraine's focus on Bakhmut offers Kyiv more time to mobilize, train and equip troops for a wider counteroffensive in the war that is now in its second year, (**Comment** – Precisely what your Updates have been saying for months).

Moscow's fighters, meanwhile, have to "wait for a big offensive" and then "try to defeat it," deciding whether or not to approach a possible peace accord or fight back, Markov wrote.

The battle for control of the destroyed Donbas city of Bakhmut has lasted months and dominated coverage of the war in Eastern Ukraine. Russian forces have advanced in and around the city, according to Western analysts, but Ukrainian soldiers continue to defend the settlement, Ukraine's military has said.

Bakhmut, as part of the Donetsk region, is in the eastern Donbas. Zelenskyy's investment in defending the city "symbolically makes Donbas Ukrainian," Markov wrote.

"Zelenskyy is trying, by pouring Ukrainian blood on the land of Donbas, to make the land of Donbas Ukrainian in the eyes of the population of Ukraine," he added.

Russia rationing shells amid ammunition shortage - Russia has resorted to rationing shells for use in its war against Ukraine amid a shortage of artillery ammunition, the British MoD said yesterday.

In its latest assessment of the conflict in Ukraine, which hit the one-year mark on February 24, the ministry noted that in recent weeks, Russia's ammunition shortage has worsened significantly.

The assessment comes days after Oleksiy Danilov, the secretary of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine, said Russia is beginning to run low on a stockpile of weapons its military has maintained for decades. Yevgeny Prigozhin, chief of the Wagner Group paramilitary unit that has led the months-long offensive in Bakhmut, has also made desperate pleas for more ammunition for his fighters.

Russia's ammunition shortages "have likely worsened to the extent that extremely punitive shell-rationing is in force on many parts of the front," the British defense ministry said in its latest intelligence update.

The ministry said this worsening shortage has almost certainly been a key reason why no Russian formation has recently been able to generate operationally significant offensive action in Ukraine.

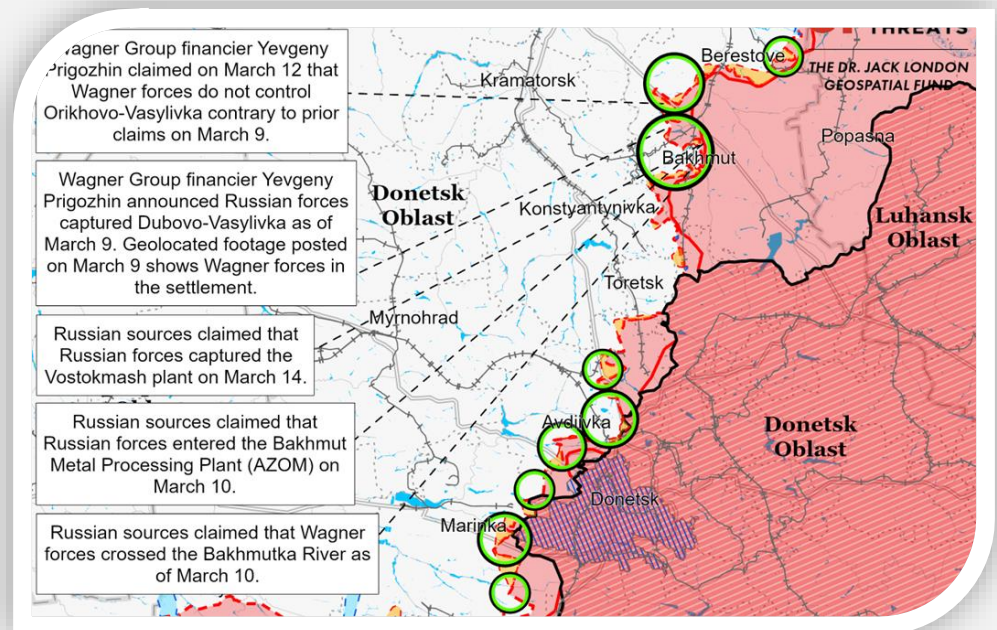
"Russia has almost certainly already resorted to issuing old munitions stock which were previously categorized as unfit for use," it said.

Zelenskyy hails Bakhmut efforts of elite Ukrainian Brigade - Ukrainian President Zelenskyy hailed efforts of an elite brigade in Bakhmut as the battle for the contested Donetsk city grinds on.

Speaking in his nightly address, Zelenskyy said he wished to "commend the warriors of the 92nd separate mechanized brigade for their successful actions in the area of Bakhmut."

For months, the Donbas settlement has been the scene of heavy fighting and bombardment as Moscow's forces attempt to wrest control from Ukrainian fighters.

Eastern Ukraine defense - Zelenskyy says the country's top military command is unanimously in favour of defending eastern Ukraine, including the besieged town of Bakhmut, to inflict maximum losses on Russian forces.



Wagner 'recruiting in Moscow high schools for young warriors' - Russia's Wagner mercenary group have been trying to recruit in Moscow high schools, distributing questionnaires and collecting contact details of interested pupils who might want to become "young warriors," says the British Ministry of Defence.

Wagner is also reportedly recruiting in dozens of sports centres across Russia.

In its latest intelligence update, the MoD says that Wager Group's owner Yevgeny Prigozhin has "likely lost access to recruiting in Russian prisons," because of ongoing disputed with the Kremlin's military leadership. Wagner had been promising pardons to prisoners who signed up to fight in Ukraine, but the UK MoD says about half of those prisoners already deployed "have likely become casualties."

"The new initiatives are unlikely to make up for the loss of the convict recruit pipeline," the MoD concludes.

Russia turns to women's prisons for fresh recruits - Russia has resorted to recruiting inmates from women's prisons to serve in the military in a bid to make up for its growing losses in Ukraine, according to both Ukrainian officials and an independent Russian prisons watchdog.

“Last week, a train with sleeping cars for the transfer of prisoners was spotted moving towards the Donetsk region. One of the cars [had] female convicts [in it],” Ukraine’s Defense Ministry said in an update published on Monday.

Olga Romanova, the co-founder of prisoners’ rights organization Russia Behind Bars, confirmed the ministry’s claims to independent news outlet iStories, noting that Russia had likely been using female prisoners to aid its invasion efforts since at least the end of last year.

“They were taken from penal colonies in southern Russia. I don’t know the exact ones, but they worked in Kushchevka [in the southern Krasnodar region],” Romanova told iStories.

Has Russia's Bakhmut offensive stalled? - Russia's offensive to capture the eastern Ukraine city of Bakhmut offensive appears to have stalled.

The US-based Institute for the Study of War (ISW) said there were no recent confirmed advances by Russian forces, amid gritty fighting over the eastern Ukrainian city.

There were, however, claims of Russian progress earlier in the week. Russian army and units from the Wagner Group mercenary force continue to launch ground attacks into Bakhmut, but there was no evidence they were making any progress the ISW said.

Citing the spokesperson of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, the American think-tank said fighting in the city was growing more intense, reporting 23 clashes over the last 24 hours.

Bakhmut, now squeezed to the north, south and east, has been subjected to a months-long bloody campaign by Moscow, inflicting devastating losses on both sides and civilians.

Russia sacrificing mercenary forces as 'live meat' after Wagner Group warlord loses 'Putin's trust' - The infamous Wagner Group has found itself in the crosshairs of not only the Ukrainian army but Russia’s MoD after its mercenary chief lost the trust of Putin.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, once a top ally of Putin’s, is fighting for the survival of his mercenary forces in eastern Ukraine as the fight for Bakhmut continues to rage following months of intense warfare.

"After the battle for Soledar, Yevgeny Prigozhin lost Putin's trust," Wagner expert Oleksander Kovalenko told Fox News Digital. "This is due to the fact that Soledar was captured by Wagner [private military company] PMC at the cost of colossal losses."

Russia admits chances of victory in Ukraine are narrowing - Top Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has suggested that Russia's chances of victory in Ukraine are narrowing.

Peskov, Putin's press secretary, had previously said there was a possibility victory in Ukraine could be achieved for Russia through peace talks, with some conditions remaining nonnegotiable. However, on Monday he said the Russian leader's war goals can now only be achieved by military means.

Russia has maintained throughout the conflict, which passed the one-year mark on February 24, that Crimea, which Putin illegally annexed from Ukraine in 2014, must remain part of its nation in any future peace talks. Putin has also said that four Ukrainian regions that he illegally annexed in September 2022 must also be recognized as Russian.

A Russian missile struck an apartment building in the centre of the Ukrainian city of Kramatorsk, killing at least one person and injuring three, Zelenskyy said.

Zaporizhia - Russian-installed acting governor Yevgeny Balitsky of the occupied Zaporizhia region said the front line in the region is stable but that Russian forces are attentive in anticipation of an attack.

Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts - United Russia Secretary Andrey Turchak announced yesterday that the Russian State Duma will consider a law simplifying the legal recognition of missing Russian soldiers as dead. The bill would consider a written statement from a missing soldier's commander sufficient evidence to declare the soldier dead. The bill would also reduce the amount of time to declare a soldier as missing automatically from two years to six months, after which the soldier's family can petition courts to declare the soldier dead.

Belarusian maneuver elements continue conducting exercises in Belarus. A mechanized element of the Belarusian 6th Mechanized Brigade conducted a combat readiness check on March 13 and will deploy to an unspecified area for further exercises. The Belarusian MoD yesterday announced its military will continue conducting combat readiness checks as part of a planned Belarusian military call-up of Belarusian reservists in March 2023.

Russia will use a Poseidon underwater missile to wipe Britain off the map with a 1,000ft-high radioactive tsunami if NATO troops put boots on the ground in Ukraine, Putin's propagandists claim.

Russian state media has urged Putin to use his underwater nuclear missile to wipe Britain off the map with a 1,000ft-high radioactive tsunami if NATO troops put boots on the ground in Ukraine.

Retired Russian general Yevgeny Buzhinsky called for attacks on Britain with a Poseidon underwater missile that he said would trigger a 1,000ft radioactive tidal wave.

Buzhinsky, chairman of the Russian Centre for Policy Research, said Britain 'will definitely not exist' if Russia unleashed the wrath of the nuclear missile. He also threatened the UK with an attack by the 14-storey high Sarmat 2, Russia's largest nuclear missile, which he claimed would destroy the country.

Vladimir Solovyov, known as 'Putin's voice', smirked as he said that if the Poseidon underwater drone hit Britain, there would be a "tsunami."

The warnings were made as Putin's propagandists discussed Russia's military options after its failure to make meaningful headway in Ukraine.

The propagandists' remarks follow a pattern that has developed on Russian state media since the Ukraine war began of threatening Britain with nuclear holocaust.

Comment – As mentioned elsewhere in today's Update, rising Moscow rhetoric seems to point to a sense of desperation by Russian and Kremlin "experts." Aristotle defined rhetoric as "an ability, in each particular case, to see the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle Rhetoric I.1.2, Kennedy 37).

In modern interpretation, instead of just persuasion, rhetoric is the set of methods people use to identify with each other—to encourage each other to understand things from one another's perspectives.

Obviously what Russian commentators are doing vis-à-vis Putin and the Russian people,

Kremlin spokesman says Americans captured in Ukraine committed 'crimes' - Two Americans captured in Ukraine while fighting with Kyiv's military were "endangering" Russian soldiers and should be "held accountable for those crimes," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Monday in an interview with NBC News.

The interview marks the first time the Kremlin has commented on the cases of Alexander Druke and Andy Huynh, both U.S. military veterans, according to NBC.

"They're soldiers of fortune and they were involved in illegal activities on the territory of Ukraine. They were involved in firing and shelling our military personnel. They were endangering their lives," Peskov told the network, in English.

Containment

Zelenskyy thanks Denmark for \$1bn Ukraine fund - Ukrainian President Zelenskyy expressed his gratitude to Denmark after it said it would create a fund of 7b Danish kroner (\$1bn) for aid to Ukraine. On Twitter, Zelenskyy said, "Sincerely grateful to Denmark's parliament, PM [Mette Frederiksen] and Government for establishing Ukraine Support Fund. More than \$1 billion in military, humanitarian & economic aid to Ukraine is a guarantee of bringing our common victory over the aggressor and the return of peace to Europe closer!"

Dutch Defence Minister Kaja Ollongren says the Netherlands will give Ukraine two minesweepers, drone radars and an M3 amphibious bridge-building system.

Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki yesterday stated Poland could supply MiG-29 multirole fighters to Ukraine within four-to-six weeks. He added Poland is ready to give Ukraine an unspecified proportion of its total fleet of 28 MiG-29 fighters to Ukraine as part of an international coalition.

Slovak Defense Minister Jaroslav Nad previously signaled Slovakia's support for providing Ukraine MiG-29 aircraft on March 9. The Ukrainian Air Force operates MiG-29s and would be able to use them in counteroffensive operations if Ukraine receives them with enough time in advance of its next counteroffensive.

Sweden this morning announced it was sending a further 10 Leopard II tanks to Ukraine shortly.

Norway announced it is joining the US in sending Ukraine 2 more NASAM batteries together with other equipment.

Comment – The US will equip these fighters with the latest air-to-air combat missile platforms in order to bolster air defense capabilities for Kyiv.

Ukrainian soldiers wrap up Leopard 2A4 tank training in Spain - Dozens of Ukrainian soldiers on Monday wrapped up a four-week training in Spain on how to operate the Leopard 2A4 battle tank, of which Madrid is set to deliver six mothballed units to Kyiv this spring.

A total of 40 tank crew members and 15 mechanical specialists underwent training on their use at a military base in the northeastern city of Zaragoza, Spain's armed forces said in a statement.

"It has been intense," Spanish trainer Captain Contreras - who identified himself only by his rank and surname - told reporters, who were allowed access to the drills for the first time.

Contreras said the Ukrainians would be returning home "with a very acceptable knowledge" of the Leopards.

Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

"Invasive species" – Russia is considered an invasive species given its propensity and empirical desire for invading surrounding countries.

According to National Geographic, an invasive species is an organism that is not indigenous, or native, to a particular area and cause great economic and environmental harm to the new area.

A perfect fit.

32 countries have joined a coalition supporting the creation of a special tribunal against Russia for the crime of aggression against Ukraine, according to Ukraine's foreign minister, Dmytro Kuleba.

Last year's blasts on the Nord Stream gas pipelines were carried out at a "state level", Russian President Vladimir Putin alleged on Tuesday.

Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, has voted to approve an amendment that would punish those found guilty of discrediting "volunteer" groups fighting in Ukraine.

US relations dire after drone crash, says Russia - Russia's relations with the United States are in a "lamentable state," and at their lowest level after Washington accused Moscow of downing one of its drones, the Kremlin has said.

The US said a Russian fighter plane caused its spy drone to crash into the Black Sea on Tuesday, marking the first direct encounter between US and Russian forces since Moscow invaded Ukraine.

Comment – We should not anticipate retaliatory or decisive action from the US in this regard. It will incur the usual diplomatic flurry of dialogue exchanges but nothing further. There is too much at geopolitical risk to allow it to trigger anything larger in scope.

Russia says it will retrieve remains of sunken US drone - Russia has said it will try to retrieve the remains of a United States military surveillance drone that fell into the Black Sea.

Kremlin Security Council Secretary Nikolai Patrushev told the Rossiya 1 TV channel: "I don't know whether we will be able to retrieve it or not, but that it has to be done. And we'll certainly work on it. I hope, of course, successfully."

"Secondly, regarding the drone – the Americans keep saying they're not taking part in military operations. This is the latest confirmation that they are directly participating in these activities – in the war," he said.

Syria's Assad expresses support for Russia during Moscow visit - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad (pictured below in Moscow yesterday) expressed his support for Russia in the war in Ukraine during talks with his Russian counterpart at the Kremlin.

In a televised meeting with fighting neo-Nazis and to a Russian

The Syrian leader said Nazis" and was now

He added that he economic results that Syrian formal talks that Syrian more Russian support the country.

Russia's military support for turning point in the brutal civil war in 2011, which had begun as a pro-democracy movement.

Putin, Assad said Russia was "old Nazis" in Ukraine, according translation.

the West had taken in "old supporting them.

envisaged tangible pair spoke ahead of officials hope will bring investments to help

al-Assad was a crucial



Question – Why is al-Assad in Moscow and making statements of support of Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine?

Is it because he fears a waning of Russian support in Syria because of its military weakening and demise in eastern Europe? That he fears this will hasten an end to his despotic regime? That he see's an Israel bent on attack and his ousting? That it may lead to an increase in Turkish activity along his northern border?

Strange how these authoritarian leaders take to the press when under threat.

Putin & Russia

Russia's arms export industry is collapsing - Russia's arms export industry—historically the second most lucrative in the world after the United States—appears to be collapsing under the weight of technological shifts, international political isolation, and its disastrous war in Ukraine, according to new figures released by the world's leading weapons industry watchdog.

Data published by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) on Monday show that Russia's military exports fell by 31 percent over the past five years when compared with the five years previous, threatening Moscow's position as the world's second most influential weapons dealer.

Putin unable to immediately fix control over Russia's information sphere - Speaking at a forum on the “practical and technological aspects of information and cognitive warfare in modern realities” in Moscow, Zakharova mentioned that despite fighting among unspecified Kremlin “elites,” the Kremlin cannot replicate the Stalinist approach of establishing a modern equivalent to the Soviet Information Bureau.

The Institute for the Study of War said Zakharova's statement is “noteworthy” and supports several of ISW's longstanding assessments about the deteriorating Kremlin regime and information space control dynamics.

If Russia loses Ukraine war, this is how Putin will react - Putin may be forced out of power should Russia be defeated in his war against Ukraine, Newsweek has been told.

When he launched a full-scale invasion of neighboring Ukraine, the Kremlin hoped to seize Kyiv in a matter of days.

More than a year on, there appears to be no end in sight. As Russia continues with its push to seize the eastern Donbas region in its entirety, Ukraine is expected to launch a fresh counteroffensive against Russia in the coming months.

On Monday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov suggested that Russia's chances of victory in Ukraine are narrowing, saying that the Russian leader's war goals can now only be achieved by military means, not through peace talks.

Should Putin be unable to win the war on his preferred terms, he may eventually be forced to step down as Russian leader, Boris Bondarev, a former Russian diplomat who resigned publicly over the invasion of Ukraine last year, said.

“Putin can be replaced. He's not a superhero. He doesn't have any superpowers. He's just an ordinary dictator,” said Bondarev, 42, who quit his job as an arms control expert at Russia's diplomatic mission to Geneva in May 2022, and is the only Russian diplomat to have quit publicly over the war.

“And we have if we look at history, we see that such dictators have been replaced from time to time. So usually, if they lose the war, and they could not satisfy the needs of the supporters, they usually went away,” he said.

Bondarev believes that if Russians understand that the war is lost, and Putin has nothing to offer them in exchange, there will be “disappointment and disagreement.”

“They might think they don't need Putin anymore,” he said. “I think that once they say farewell to the delusions, and find themselves in a new reality where Putin cannot deliver anything—only fear and some kind of threat of repression against his own people—that will change the situation.”

Vlad Mykhnenko, an expert in the post-communist transformation of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union at the University of Oxford laid out three potential scenarios for a Russian defeat.

“A lot, if not all, hinges on the manner of the defeat,” Mykhnenko told Newsweek.

- **The first scenario**, a chaotic retreat caused by a "striking Ukrainian offensive on one or multiple fronts" would include a "huge panic amongst 600,000 Russian post-2014 annexation settlers in Crimea, and Russian collaborators in the Donbas, trying to escape."

This would result in a "rapid frontline collapse."

"The situation in Moscow will proceed rapidly, with the siloviki pushing Putin out of power. He would not have a chance to deploy a nuclear weapon, as many fear, for that order will surely be sabotaged on multiple levels," said Mykhnenko.

- **A second scenario** could see World War I-style withdrawal from fighting, said Mykhnenko, "similar to the collapse of the Russian Army in 1916-1917: the current slow, attrition warfare continues for a long time, with mobilized Russian soldiers, poorly equipped and supported, spending months and months in muddy cold trenches under increasingly accurate Ukrainian barrages deserting en masse, leading to the collapse of the front."

Unlike scenario one, this situation would develop slower and less dramatically, providing Putin with enough time to plead for a ceasefire or short-term settlement on almost any terms, said Mykhnenko: "Once again, no nukes will be deployed, as with Russian soldiers deserting, there would not be an army left to utilize any opening a nuclear strike could make."

This scenario could see Putin agreeing to step down gradually "to make space for a new leader, provided the Siloviki (an elite group of Russian businessmen and leaders) give him an immunity from prosecution."

- Mykhnenko said a **third scenario** could see the war in Ukraine rage on for another two years, with growing discontent in Russia, a slow Russian retreat in some places, and troops holding the frontline in others.

"In this case, the Siloviki, joined by economic and financial elites, would try to negotiate a deal with Putin to declare a 'victory,' as in 'standing up to the West,' 'not losing,' 'defending Motherland,' etc., but pushing the baton to a designated successor," he said.

He added: "Unlike in the first two scenarios, this is the one where Putin has [the] most bargaining power and a chance to save his life."

Bondarev suggested that Putin may attempt to present whatever small gains he has made in Ukraine as a victory.

"Maybe if he has a couple of new villages then he can say that is a victory, he defeated Ukrainians, he protected the nation, and also blame Ukrainians and the West for not being willing to negotiate peace on these terms," the former diplomat said. "If Putin is allowed to do this, he can say he won, and he will try to sell it to his audience as a victory."

Bondarev said he isn't sure that Putin will be able to convince the population, however, as "most people don't want war, they want peace."

"Putin will find it quite difficult to convince his own elite that this victory was worth all the losses, and everything that they have lost...I don't feel that they would be very much happy about this, that okay, we can get a few Ukrainian villages, and that should compensate for all the losses," he said.

Russian authorities continue measures to mobilize the struggling Russian defense industrial base (DIB) for a protracted war effort, including measures that will force Moscow to choose between having skilled workers in the DIB and skilled military personnel fighting in Ukraine.

Putin claimed during a March 14 visit to an aviation production plant in Ulan-Ude, Buryatia, that the DIB suffers from a lack of adequately trained personnel and announced a series of reforms to attract more specialists to work at military production plants, including the reallocation of federal assets to housing and increasing pay.

Russian Defense Minister Shoigu visited Tactical Missile Corporation in Moscow Oblast, calling on the plant to double production even after announcing the plant met the requirements of the state defense order.

Putin also announced that the Russian Ministry of Industry and Trade has prepared a list of unspecified specialties to defer from military service, which may suggest that the Kremlin is prioritizing using skilled workers in the production of Russian weapons over having skilled soldiers fight in Russia's military. (**Comment** – We highlighted months ago that the Kremlin forcefully mobilizing hundreds of thousands of workers in all sectors of Russian industry, would create a critical manpower shortage that was destined to harm both Russian state industries and small businesses. Here is proof of how ongoing short-term Moscow thinking is harming the country).

Russian news outlets Interfax and RBK, the latter citing a Russian federal official, reported that the Russian Ministry of Finance is also considering issuing war bonds.

The UK MoD assessed that Putin's March 3 presidential decree on government oversight of the DIB sets conditions for the Russian MoF&I to bypass DIB managers at enterprises that fail to meet Russia's production standards.

The Ukrainian Foreign Intelligence Service reported that Russian defense enterprises significantly have decreased their hiring standards and now accept workers without experience and with histories of drug use, criminal records, and bankruptcy.

ISW has previously reported on Russia's struggle to rejuvenate its DIB amid labor shortages and Western sanctions and its ensuing lack of success in this endeavor.

Russian Federation does not have the 200 billion rubles for a railway to China - The investment program of the Russian federal company "Rosseti" lacks almost 200 billion rubles for the electrification of the railway to China as part of the second stage of the development of the Eastern range of Russian Railways (BAM and Transsib). This is reported by Vedomosti with reference to a company representative.

The government did not say how the deficit will be covered. The modernization of the BAM and the Trans-Siberian Railway is the largest infrastructure project that will have to increase the capacity of the railway to China from 150 million tons of cargo to 180 million tons per year by 2024.

In 2022, 148.8 million tons were transported. In 2023, according to the plan, 173 million tons should be transported.

The cost of the first stage of BAM and Transsib modernization (2013-2018) amounted to 520.5 billion rubles. The second stage (2018-2024) is estimated at 894 billion rubles. The cost of the second stage of electrification will be 267 billion rubles (most of these funds are currently not enough). In total, 428.3 billion rubles were allocated for the electrification program. The project is mainly funded by Russian Railways.

In the Irkutsk region, teachers are forced to deduct part of their salaries to the military - In the Irkutsk region, university professors, schools, and employees of medical institutions are being forced to "voluntarily" deduct part of their salaries "for the needs of the SVO in the territory of Ukraine." This was reported to the editors of Sibir.Realii by teachers from several educational institutions and employees of Irkutsk polyclinics.

According to teachers from the Irkutsk State University and the Irkutsk National Research Technical University, this month the departments handed out application forms to the rector of the university, in which requests were printed "withhold a fixed amount of ... rubles from the salary for the needs of a special military operation on the territory of

Ukraine." The teachers were asked to enter the amount on their own, but the administration of the State University, according to the interlocutors, advised "to donate at least 1,000 rubles."

"At the same time, the average salary at a university is 25,000 rubles," the source commented.

In Irkutsk schools, when distributing forms, the leadership also recommends entering amounts "from 500 rubles," teachers report.

Sanctions

In January, Russia's budget revenues from exports fell by almost four times. In early February, it became known that Russia's budget deficit increased 14 times over the month.

At the end of last year, the authorities planned a budget deficit for 2023 of 2.9 trillion rubles. Already in the first month, Russia has exhausted more than half of this norm. In January, the Russian budget lost 1.8 trillion rubles.

This is 14 times more than last year, and the worst result for the first month of the year in at least the last 25 years.

"We don't have new planes." It will soon be impossible to fly from Kaliningrad to Vladivostok without a transfer - Putin called the decision justified to leave foreign aircraft in the Russian Federation. "If they behave with us in such a boorish way, then to live with wolves is to howl like a wolf," Putin told representatives of the aviation industry.

He also set the task of making the Russian aviation industry competitive. However, experts doubt that this goal is achievable. In the next decade it will not be possible for Russia to build civilian aircraft in the required quantity and quality even in order to fly from Moscow to the Far East – as reported by Sibir.Realii.

"Foreign aircraft in a Russian shell"

The first large-scale aircraft developed in the Russian Federation after the collapse of the USSR was the Sukhoi Superjet 100 which began in 2000, making its first test flight 8 years later.

In 2014, production of aircraft, a symbol of the revival of the Russian aviation industry, reached a maximum of 36 per year. For comparison: in the same year, the American Boeing produced 723 aircraft, the European Airbus - 629.

"Small volumes are associated not with production as such, but with the demand for these aircraft," explains Roman Gusarov, editor-in-chief of the Avia.ru portal. It was impossible to produce more "Superjets" than were bought he said.

This is a short-range aircraft, and its capacity is one and a half to twice less than that of Boeings or Airbuses. It does not replace them, but complements them. This niche is quite small. Therefore, Superjets were produced as much as the market needed.

Starting from 2014, SSJ100 production volumes have decreased: in 2020, 11 aircraft were produced, in 2021 - 12.

There remains a fundamental post-sanctions challenge to confront - to arrange production of the SSJ100 using Russian components. The aircraft to date has been nothing more than a foreign aircraft dressed up in a "Russian shell," with 70% to 90% of components imported from western countries.

No single country in the world builds aircraft entirely on its own. Globalization has assisted the industry with parts moved between subassembly manufacturing points around the globe to final assembly stations in major countries like the US and France.

Russia is no different in this regard, and more vulnerable post sanctions imposed on the country in the last year.

Hopping, skipping and jumping

80–90% of passengers in Russia are transported on Boeings and Airbuses.

Trunk transportation, called the hub system in the US, is key to flying around the Russian Federation.

Planning a completely new and 100%-Russian sourced aircraft, if successful, will take more than 10 years to achieve said Gusarov. The MS-21 medium-haul aircraft being planned for production will place enormous pressure on Russian manufacturing and assembly lines, but is already certified with completely Russian components and even with a domestic engine.

Production was supposed to start this year, but because of sanctions was pushed out to 2024.

Should however, it not be possible to produce the import-substituted MS-21 in required volumes, then it is necessary to revive the production of the TU-214, developed back in the years of the USSR, according to Russian aviation experts.

In the interim Russians flying between the far extremities of the Federation will need to aerially hop, skip and jump across the nation, with limited serviceable aircraft available for direct flight.

Aircraft lessors, insurers jostle in UK court over stranded jets in Russia - AerCap, the world's biggest aircraft lessor, said on Monday it was inconceivable that it would not recover some losses from insurers over jets stranded in Russia, as lessors took their battle for redress to London's High Court.

More than 400 aircraft, worth almost \$10 billion, have been stuck in Russia after Western countries slapped sanctions on the country over the year-old war in Ukraine - and Russian aircraft lessees did not return the jets.

Insurers are balking at payouts, alleging in part there has not been a physical loss of the planes yet, that the jets and engines are no longer subject to a lease agreement and that Western sanctions prevent them from providing cover.

Dublin-based AerCap said it was out of pocket to a "colossal" degree and, along with at least four peers, has lodged a lawsuit that hinges on whether the alleged loss of the aircraft has triggered war-risk insurance policies, which have payout limits, or uncapped all-risk policies.

AerCap, the largest claimant, is suing insurers such as AIG and Lloyd's Insurance Company for \$3.5 billion over the loss of 116 aircraft and 23 engines under its all-risks insurance policy. Alternatively, it is claiming \$1.2 billion under its war-risks policy, court filings show.

China

China, Russia and Iran hold joint naval drills in Gulf of Oman - Naval forces from China, Iran and Russia are staging joint drills in the Gulf of Oman this week, Beijing has said, amid heightened tensions with the United States.

"This exercise will help deepen practical cooperation between the participating countries' navies ... and inject positive energy into regional peace and stability," the Chinese MoD said in a statement earlier today.

Iran, Pakistan, Oman and the UAE all have coastlines along the Gulf of Oman, which lies at the mouth of the strategic Persian Gulf.