

# Conflict Update # 33

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

## Conflict Assessment

### Russia bolstering its invading force -

Russia has reinforced its invading force in Ukraine, adding about 11 battalion tactical groups in recent days, a senior U.S. Defense Department official said Monday.

The reinforcements, as many as 11,000 troops, come as Russia continues to build up for an expected offensive in eastern Ukraine, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to describe intelligence assessments.

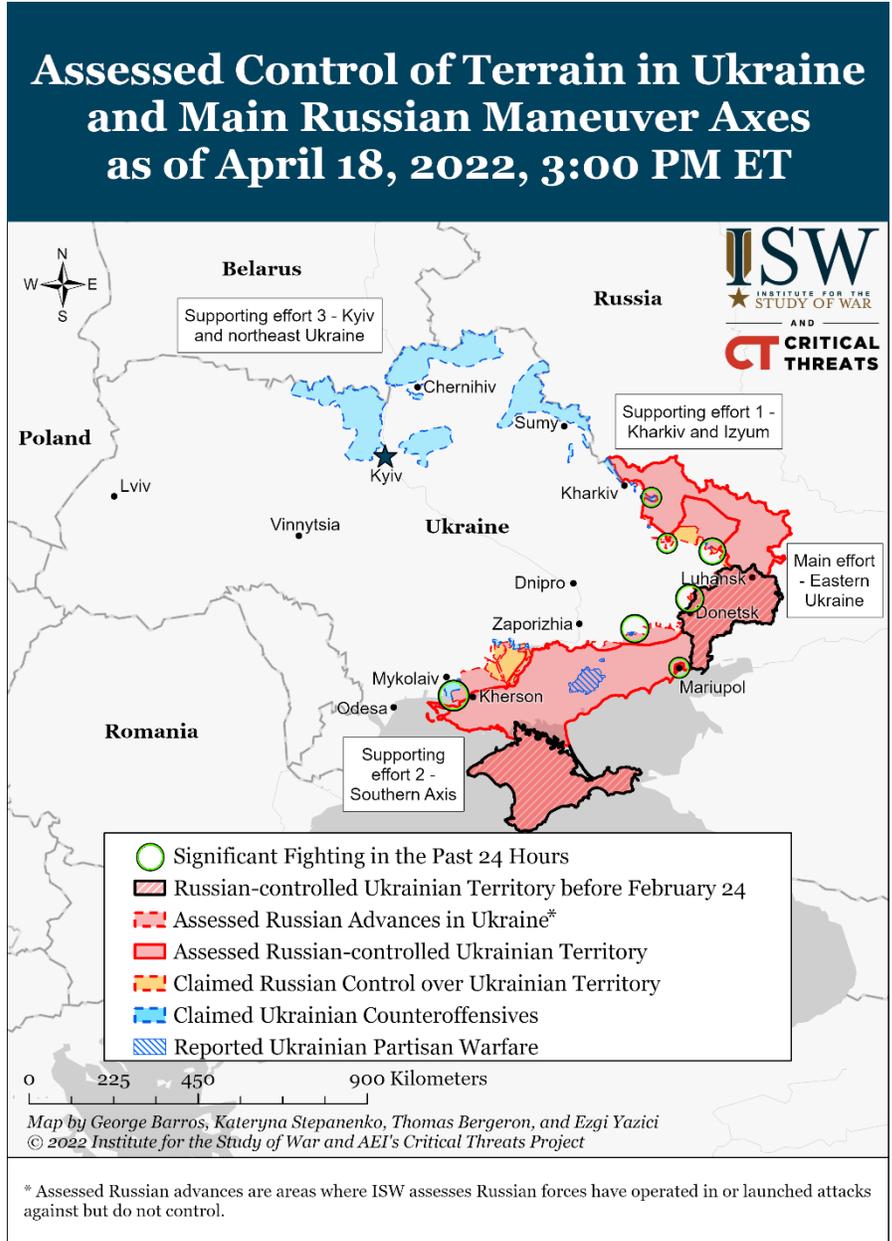
Russia continues to move more heavy artillery, helicopters and command and control units into the region as heavy fighting continues, including near the strategic city of Izyum, the official said.

This is despite the ongoing challenges Russia faces in recruiting additional soldiers – see following article.

**More Russian soldiers refusing to fight in Ukraine – GUR** - The Russian army is reportedly seeing a rapidly growing number of refusals to serve in the military amid the ongoing invasion of Ukraine, the Ukrainian Intelligence Directorate (GUR) claimed on Monday.

The report claimed that in several units, specifically in the 150th Motorized Rifle Division of the 8th Army of the Southern Military District, soldiers refusing to serve amounted to as much as 60%-70% of all soldiers.

This has become an issue for the Russian army, with commanders and officers of the Federal Security Service (FSB) urging refusing soldiers to reconsider, with the GUR claiming they go so far as to threaten to kill the relatives of refusing soldiers.



Notably, Russia has mandatory conscription, where all men aged 18-27 must be drafted for a year of army service. These conscripts are poorly trained and suffer from poor treatment and hazing. According to EUToday, Russian conscripts make just 2,000 rubles a month, which is currently equivalent to under \$17.

**Kremlin is accused of recruiting 'child soldiers' to replace Russian losses** in Ukraine as war takes another sinister turn - The Kremlin has resorted to recruiting children to boost its troop numbers in eastern Ukraine, according to human rights officials.

In a bid to replace the estimated 30,000 soldiers either killed, wounded or captured so far in the war, Moscow is said to be recruiting from youth clubs and conscripting 16-year-olds.

So-called 'patriotic clubs' sprang up in Russian-occupied parts of eastern Ukraine following its invasion in 2014 as part of a campaign to promote the country's culture in Luhansk and Donetsk.

**Russia clearly hasn't learned the lessons of its abortive Afghanistan campaign of 1979-1989.** In Afghanistan lower-ranking officers and sergeants — the ones actually fighting the war — were unable to make any significant decision without getting it approved by higher command. The same is apparently true in Ukraine.

If you can't trust your majors, captains, lieutenants, and sergeants to make decisions in real time, your forces can't function in combat.

**'Remains of Chemical Weapons' Found After Russians Left: Ukrainian Mayor** – A Ukrainian mayor said this weekend that the "remains" of chemical weapons were found after Russian troops withdrew from the northern Sumy region of Ukraine.

Yuriy Bova, mayor of the Ukrainian city Trostianets, said officials found traces of sarin and other chemical substances. Sarin, a clear and odorless substance, is classified as a nerve agent and considered to be among the most toxic and rapidly acting of known chemical warfare agents, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

**Google Maps Removes Blurring For Russia's Military Sites** - Google Maps made Russia's strategic facilities visible to users Monday, revealing the details of the country's military infrastructure.

Searches on Google Maps showed newly accessible images of military bases, intercontinental ballistic missiles launch pads, naval facilities and key command posts all across Russia. "Now everyone can see [Russian military infrastructure] with a resolution of about 0.5 meters per pixel," tweeted the Ukrainian armed forces.

Some of the newly-available images include the Admiral Kuznetsov aircraft carrier, a nuclear weapons store near Murmansk, submarines in the Far East peninsula of Kamchatka, and a military airbase in the Western city of Kursk, just 150 kilometers from the Russian-Ukrainian border.

**'Increasingly desperate' Vladimir Putin** could attack a NATO base to stop the western weapons that are stalling his invasion from getting to Ukrainian forces, ex-national security chief warns.

Vladimir Putin could consider striking a NATO base in order to halt the transfer of arms to Ukraine, a former British security chief has warned.

Lord Ricketts, the Government's first national security adviser, said yesterday that Mr Putin is becoming 'increasingly desperate to choke off the flow of arms' to Ukraine.

He may even do this by attacking aircraft or convoys headed to the country from NATO, Lord Ricketts suggested.

**Russia fires missile barrage at Ukraine in ‘softening up’ before Donbas push** - Russia has unleashed a barrage of long-range missiles against Ukraine, in what analysts described as a “softening up” exercise before a major military push by Moscow to conquer the eastern Donbas region.

Four Russian rockets smashed into the western city of Lviv on Monday, killing seven people and injuring at least 11. Three hit military infrastructure. But the fourth appeared to have missed its target and landed in a car repair workshop.

**Losses, Morale and Counterattacks Stymie Russia’s Donbas Offensive** - A weekend buildup of Russian troops in the eastern Ukrainian city of Izyum was yet another sign of an upcoming Russian offensive in what appears to be the opening maneuvers of a bloodier phase of the war, according to analysts.

Having dispersed from both sides of the Dnieper river north of Kyiv earlier this month, Russian troops appear to be planning a “pincer movement” down from Izyum in the north, and up from Mariupol in the south, in an attempt to push Ukrainian forces out of the Donbas region and deliver a key victory to Russian President Vladimir Putin ahead of May 9 when Russia marks the Soviet defeat of Nazi Germany.

But experts warn that a depleted Russian army struggling with morale problems, Ukrainian counterattacks and supply issues, may fail to achieve its ambitious goals.

“The Ukrainians have the advantage of being on the defensive,” said Robert Bell, a former NATO official and professor at Georgia Tech University, who added that attackers traditionally need a 3:1 ratio over defenders to advance successfully. Ukraine has recently drafted up to 20,000 troops, and with Western supplies of air-defense systems, anti-tank missiles and ammunition, looks able to survive a war of attrition.

## **ORYX Catalogue of Russian equipment losses**

- Tanks (513, of which destroyed: 260, damaged: 9, abandoned: 39, captured: 205)
- Armored Fighting Vehicles (304, of which destroyed: 144, abandoned: 32, captured: 128)
- Infantry Fighting Vehicles (525, of which destroyed: 310, damaged: 2, abandoned: 32, captured: 181)
- Armored Personnel Carriers (98, of which destroyed: 33, damaged: 2, abandoned: 17, captured: 46)
- Mine-Resistant Ambush Protected (MRAP) Vehicles (23, of which destroyed: 13, abandoned: 3, captured: 7)
- Infantry Mobility Vehicles (94, of which destroyed: 55, damaged: 2, abandoned: 5, captured: 32)
- Command Posts And Communications Stations (63, of which destroyed: 30, abandoned: 8, captured: 25)
- Engineering Vehicles And Equipment (114, of which destroyed: 34, abandoned: 15, captured: 60)
- Heavy Mortars (12, of which destroyed: 4, captured: 8)
- Towed Artillery (56, of which destroyed: 10, damaged: 4, abandoned: 5, captured: 37)
- Self-Propelled Artillery (98, of which destroyed: 41, damaged: 2, abandoned: 15, captured: 39)
- Multiple Rocket Launchers (56, of which destroyed: 25, abandoned: 5, captured: 25)
- Anti-Aircraft Guns (4, of which captured: 4)
- Self-Propelled Anti-Aircraft Guns (14, of which destroyed: 5, abandoned: 2, captured: 7)
- Surface-To-Air Missile Systems (52, of which destroyed: 26, damaged: 1, abandoned: 7, captured: 18)
- Radars (10, of which destroyed: 4, captured: 6)
- Jammers And Deception Systems (7, of which destroyed: 3, damaged: 2, captured: 2)
- Aircraft (22, of which destroyed: 21, damaged: 1)
- Helicopters (35, of which destroyed: 31, damaged: 2, abandoned: 1, captured: 1)
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (34, of which destroyed: 22, captured: 12)
- Naval Ships (4, of which destroyed: 2, damaged: 2)
- Logistics Trains (2, of which destroyed: 2)
- Trucks, Vehicles and Jeeps (834, of which destroyed: 517, damaged: 18, abandoned: 63, captured: 236)

## ORYX Catalogue of Ukrainian equipment losses

- Tanks (124, of which destroyed: 49, damaged: 1, abandoned: 9, captured: 65)
- Armored Fighting Vehicles (75, of which destroyed: 28, abandoned: 4, captured: 44)
- Infantry Fighting Vehicles (88, of which destroyed: 42, damaged: 3, abandoned: 9, captured: 34)
- Armored Personnel Carriers (47, of which destroyed: 12, damaged: 1, abandoned: 3, captured: 31)
- Infantry Mobility Vehicles (64, of which destroyed: 20, damaged: 1, abandoned: 1, captured: 42)
- Engineering Vehicles (12, of which destroyed: 2, captured: 10)
- Towed Artillery (26, of which destroyed: 8, damaged: 3, abandoned: 3, captured: 12)
- Self-Propelled Artillery (23, of which destroyed: 10, damaged: 4, abandoned: 1, captured: 8)
- Multiple Rocket Launchers (15, of which destroyed: 10, captured: 5)
- Anti-Aircraft Guns (2, of which captured: 2)
- Self-Propelled Anti-Aircraft Guns (2, of which captured: 2)
- Surface-To-Air Missile Systems (43, of which destroyed: 36, abandoned: 1, captured: 6)
- Radars And Communications Equipment (18, of which destroyed: 9, damaged: 3, abandoned: 1, captured: 5)
- Aircraft (18, of which destroyed: 17, damaged: 1)
- Helicopters (5, of which destroyed: 4, captured: 1)
- Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (14, of which destroyed: 12, captured: 2)
- Naval Ships (15, of which destroyed: 3, captured: 12)
- Trucks, Vehicles and Jeeps (243, of which destroyed: 109, damaged: 5, abandoned: 5, captured: 124)

Special thanks to Дмитро Путятя (Dmytro Putiata), Calibre Obscura, Michal Niebyl, Ukraine Weapons, David Chang, Instant Reporter, Cyrano7, LotA, ZOKA, Brain Dias, Aldin, Niklas Bartels, Mukhtar Magomedov, Zloneversleep, Chebik and James Ford.

## Post-Conflict

**Changing face of military spending and execution** – a fast-expanding understanding of unfolding military equipment, usage and expense is starting to permeate through global military powers and manufacturers coupled with dramatically different tactical approaches.

- **Tactical** – it is now clearly understood that the historical battlefield convention of matching force against force is outdated. Just as the British came to painfully understand that single snipers could pin down entire battalions during the Second Boer War in South Africa in 1898, so too are global powers rapidly figuring out developing changes in tactical warfare, as they unfold before their eyes.

Rapid deployment, mobile re-deployment and smart weaponry will become the future. Supported by long-range artillery and missile power as initial bombardment to soften targets, tank warfare has changed.

A (relatively) low-cost man-held and mobile weapon can destroy a multi-million piece of field equipment such as a tank or armored personnel carrier.

It is literally a new form of guerilla warfare, except combatants are armed with much more lethal weapons. And they are extremely mobile.

These new weapons scale heights and then descend upon a target, locked in through smart technology, and destroy it from the sky. Witness the massive damage being incurred by Russian tanks, where their turrets are blown completely off the hull, where projectiles enter the tank, explode and detonate the ammunition inside the vehicle.

- **Cost to replace** – the US and China will adapt and redefine their military profiles and design capabilities. Russia will be unable to do so as the Ukrainian war will deplete their financial wherewithal to follow any similar path. The US is ensuring that the expense incurred by Russian military forces and Russia itself is so punitive, that there will be little left to reconfigure their military power.

Intermediary military powers and weapon manufacturing countries such as Israel and Turkey will similarly learn these lessons and adapt.

- **Unmanned vehicles** – will be the order of the day where guided air, land and water vehicles are deployed without human complement. This requires the latest electronic gadgetry and technology, something Russia is woefully short of as is China. Taiwan manufactures by far the most chips in the world, based on American technology and development. China, without access to Taiwanese technology, will find itself some 25 to 30 years behind the US in this field. This is something that is unpalatable for the Chinese, and they will seek to access Taiwanese fabs and technology. Precisely how they do so remains to be seen.
- **Multi-purpose stealth craft** – these will be developed with the objective of providing close ground support for agile soldiers in need of firepower. The American F35, equipped with a powerful electronic-warfare and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance suite has been developed with just this purpose in mind. Those capabilities, which allow the F-35 to gather and distribute real-time battlefield information to friendly forces, have earned it the nickname "the quarterback of the skies."
- **Percentage of GDP on defense** – although it appears at face value that the US spend the most on defense as a percentage of GDP, this is a bit misleading. A significant portion of American defense cost is for salaries and maintaining overseas bases, whereas Chinese defense expenses are directed solely at increasing its defense forces. If you further consider that production cost in China is much cheaper than in the US, the gap narrows very quickly to be just about on par between the two superpowers.

In 2020, Chinese total investment in R&D exceeded 2.4 trillion yuan (US\$400 billion), roughly 54% of total US R&D expenditure and 2.1 times of that of Japanese expenditure, firmly ranking it second in the world. From 2016 to 2019, Chinese R&D expenditure increased by 11.8% annually, and the growth rate was much higher than that of the United States (7.3%) and Japan (0.7%). The number of Chinese patent applications in the world has surpassed that of the United States and Japan in 2021.

In the 13th 5-Year Plan unveiled in the annual Congress meeting, the Chinese government will keep an annual increase rate over 10% for expenditure in R&D in the next five years.

Comparing percentage of GDP is somewhat of a misnomer and not an accurate reflection of relativity.

- **Raw materials** – access to raw materials and strategic minerals will become an increasingly troubled path as the world re-aligns behind a new global family strategy. Developing countries view the Western response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine as hypocritical and self-serving. Take note of the "abstentions" in recent UN votes and one can see the widening gap in strategic association.

China, and to a lesser degree Russia, has been very active in soliciting and encouraging bi-lateral relations with 3<sup>rd</sup> World countries where they invest huge sums in order to gain "friends" as well as access to raw materials, strategic minerals and future food production capacity.

Its BRI has seen multiple countries join in the hope of increased welfare and benefit. There is a dark side of this initiative with deep "hooks" in the agreements – these are still to be felt by participants. Consider the Sri Lankan dilemma as it presently unfolds. The country is in serious jeopardy and is fundamentally hooked into China without possible strategic escape.

The matter remains though that China has adopted a very long-term approach to the strategic issues and has a head-start on the US and EU.

**New World Order** - China and Russia have long been intent on developing a new World Order, one where the US\$ is sidelined and institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF are not so instrumental in global financial affairs.

China and Russia some time ago agreed payment in Rubles and Ruan, Saudi Arabia appears to be following suite, with India moving closer to such arrangements.

China will move to enlist support from the ASEAN nations, Africa and South America in its pursuit of this new global arrangement. They view the Saudi move as the first domino to fall in this direction.

But, the Russian invasion of Ukraine, ostensibly planned to be a rapid realignment of Central Europe, has proven too damaging from a strategic Chinese perspective.

Russia on the other hand has different designs on Europe and how it is aligned. Putin views Ukraine as nothing more than a step in a journey to recovering what he believes is an American move for global domination. This is particularly short-sighted as he is missing the wolf at the door – China.

Politically, the United States is facing the fact that Russia and China have fundamentally changed since the Cold War. Russia has dominated Europe for years through unprecedented energy leverage, and China has become a huge economic superpower holding the pulse of the global economy. The Biden administration is trying to make the best of Ukraine’s war by bringing Moscow under pressure and furthering its international isolation.

The United States is even planning for the aftermath of the fall of Kyiv and the possible transfer of the Ukrainian capital to the western city of Lviv near the Polish border, and with the full support of Ukrainian defenders, seeks to increase Russia’s military and economic spending to bring Putin to its knees.

Miscalculations in the planning and executing stages have thwarted the Russian military from fully invading Ukraine. The United States is seeking this golden opportunity to separate Moscow and Beijing via the pressure of war and economic sanctions. Biden’s strong support of Ukraine is communicating this message with China that, as in the Cold War, new blocs and spheres of influence can be defined.

The other bloc includes countries with energy resources. Until just a few weeks ago, few could have imagined that the United States and Venezuela as well as Europe and Qatar enter into serious negotiations on the purchase of oil and gas. Thus, the United States’ determination to sanction Russia’s oil sales and cut off its access to all sales revenues is indicative of the Biden



administration and Congress's collaboration in devising a comprehensive and multifaceted plan to counter Russia. (eurasiaview).

Chinese technology is being spread across the world, as can be seen in the graphic above. A large share of countries around the world are now using Chinese AI surveillance technology, including facial recognition technology, in full or in part. This is according to a report by Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Many countries are combining Chinese tech with U.S.-made surveillance tech, among them the U.S. and China themselves, but also India, Australia, Brazil and several European countries.

- **Energy** – The present EU dependence on Russia will dissipate through both switching to alternate sources of fossil fuel and developing “green” energy. This will push Russia to replace EU demand with Chinese customers, but at the risk of China maintaining a dependence on fossil fuels, contrary to its position of being a world leader in green energy development.
- **Nuclear threat** – all of the above pales when considering that Russia, if pushed into a corner of its very existence, may resort to further nuclear threatening and posturing, except it may deploy actual threats into execution. Not seen since August 1945, any use of nuclear weaponry, whether tactical or massive, will change the scope and palette of international rules.

All part of what is termed “The Great Game.”

## Russian Strategy

**Russian access to ports** – Russia has a dearth of access to seaports of significance. It has ports in the Baltic (Murmansk and St Petersburg) and the Black Sea (Sevastopol). This can be seen from the map alongside. Sometimes a single map can reveal the most important thing about a country. In the case of Russia, it is this map.

One of the keys to understanding Russia's strategy is to look at its position relative to the rest of Europe.

The European Peninsula is surrounded on three sides by the Baltic and North Seas, the Atlantic Ocean, and the Mediterranean and Black Seas. The easternmost limit of the peninsula extends from the eastern tip of the Baltic Sea south to the Black Sea.

In this map, this division is indicated by the line from St. Petersburg to Rostov-on-Don. This line also roughly defines the eastern boundaries of the Baltic states, Belarus and Ukraine. These countries are the eastern edge of the European Peninsula.

Hardly any part of Europe is more than 400 miles from the sea, and most of Europe is less than 300 miles away. Much of Russia, on the other hand, is effectively landlocked. The Arctic Ocean is far away from Russia's population centers, and the few ports that do exist are mostly unusable in the winter.



All of Russia's access to the open sea, aside from the Arctic, is controlled by the EU. European Russia has three potential points from which to access global maritime trade. One is through the Black Sea and the Bosphorus, a narrow waterway controlled by Turkey that can easily be closed to Russia. Another is from St. Petersburg, where ships can sail through Danish waters, but this passageway can also be easily blocked. The third is the long Arctic Ocean route, starting from Murmansk and then extending through the gaps between Greenland, Iceland, and the United Kingdom.

During the Cold War, air bases in Norway, Scotland, and Iceland, coupled with carrier battle groups, worked to deny Russia access to the sea. This demonstrates the vulnerability Russia faces due to its lack of access to oceans and waterways.

It also reveals why Russia is, for all intents and purposes, a landlocked country. A country's access to the sea can greatly influence its economic and political strength. For Russia to extend its sphere(s) of influence it desperately needs to gain access to open seaports, particularly warm-water ones.

Most of its population lives in the western side of the country, hamstrung by being landlocked as shown above in the population density map.

The heartland of Russian agriculture is to the southwest as shown to the right. Northern Russia's climate cannot sustain extensive agriculture, which makes the Russian frontier with Ukraine and the Russian frontier in the Caucasus and Central Asia all the more vital. As with population, Russia's west and south are its most vital and productive agricultural areas.

The primary focus and vulnerability of Russia is in the west... with a secondary interest in the Caucasus. Siberia looms large on a map, but most of it is minimally populated and of little value strategically.

As a land power, Russia is inherently vulnerable. It sits on the European plain with few natural barriers to stop an enemy coming from the west. East of the Carpathian Mountains, the plain pivots southward, and the door to Russia opens.

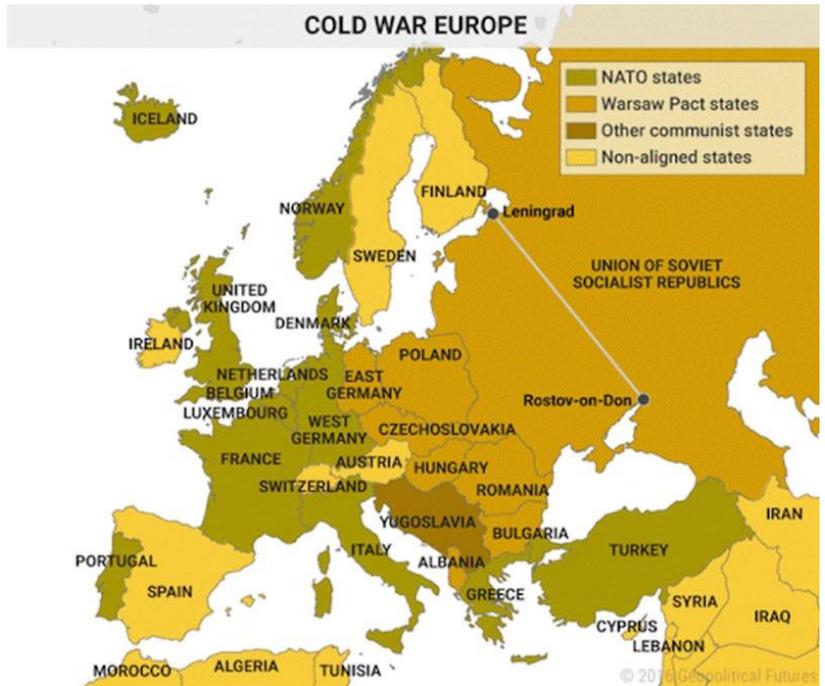
In addition, Russia has few rivers, which makes internal transport difficult and further reduces economic efficiency. What agricultural output there is must be transported to markets, and that means the transport system must function well. And with so much of its economic activity located close to the border, and so few natural barriers, Russia is at risk.



In Cold-war Europe, Russia was positioned far more west than is currently the case, as can be seen in the map alongside.

Putin and Russian strategists are keenly aware of their historical geopolitical borders and will strive to expand westward. That is why Ukraine may merely be a step in an expansionist drive and strategy. Russia will continue to seek further control, forcing expansion through first the Baltic countries, followed by the Balkans.

Viewing the map below, one can see Russia's desired western boundaries, to the west of Moldova, including the Baltic states and pieces of Poland and Romania, in order to create the extended buffer zone between its current borders and what they view as where they should be.



With regard to the Balkans, Serbia is a staunch ally of Russia, central in the Balkan zone and host to open hostilities with Bosnia-Herzegovina which may provide a trigger point for conflict.

This may explain China's delivery last week of HQ-22 surface-to-air missile systems to Serbia.

Should this be the case, it bodes ill for the immediate and medium term future in east and central Europe.

Russia certainly may have strategic rationale for wanting to both move its zone of control westwards and to access additional ports to empower its agricultural and population density and extend its safety zone, but Ukrainian resistance appears to have stymied these geopolitical desires, and in fact may have permanently damaged their plans.

Much remains to be seen during the looming east Ukrainian battles for control of the Donbas. If successful, Russia more than likely will pause to regroup and then again advance into western Ukraine.



## Containment

**Lend-Lease** - The US decision to establish a lend-lease program for Ukraine not only is "a very strong signal" that it will be supporting Ukraine over the long haul but also that an indication that the West is beginning to appreciate the crimes Putin's war in Ukraine is committing that that in Russia itself is in deep trouble.

Most people have focused on the way in which this new program will help Ukraine, not only by making it far easier for Kyiv to acquire more weapons but to begin training on those it may receive in the future, the director of Kyiv's Center for International Security says

Lend lease is based on the proposition that the conflict will last for some time and that the West has to be in a position to ramp up assistance as needed and not be limited by Ukraine's own ability to pay. That is perhaps the most important aspect of this program, Kravchenko continues, because it shows that the West will support Ukraine to the end.

"It is possible," he says, that "the Russian economy will die much sooner. I would like to believe this and then the flow of money for Russia's war will run out and centrifugal movement in Russia itself among the elites will begin, possibly among the second echelon of generals who will end this insane war."

It is plainly drawing a line of future European alignment, underscored by Ukraine completing the documentation for joining the EU earlier today.

## Humanitarian

**Russia uses Ukrainian children as human shields – GUR** - There have been numerous reports of this occurring, either as hostages to make sure civilians don't share Russian troop movements to the Ukrainian army or to ensure that Ukrainian forces don't fire on Russian equipment columns.

Incidents of this occurring have been reported throughout the country, though the GUR specifies cases in the Sumy, Chernihiv, Zaporizhzhia and Kyiv oblasts.

**Atrocities in Ukraine war have deep roots in Russian military** - The brutality of Moscow's war on Ukraine takes two distinct forms, familiar to those who have seen Russia's military in action elsewhere.

There is the programmatic violence meted out by Russian bombs and missiles against civilians as well as military targets, meant to demoralize as much as defeat. These attacks recall the aerial destruction in 1999 and 2000 of the Chechen capital of Grozny and, in 2016, of the Syrian rebel stronghold of Aleppo.

And then there is the cruelty of individual soldiers and units, the horrors of Bucha appearing to have descended directly from the slaughter a generation ago. It has always been difficult to explain why soldiers commit atrocities or to describe how the orders of commanders, military culture, national propaganda, battlefield frustration and individual malice can come together to produce such horrors.

In Russia, however, such acts are rarely investigated or even acknowledged, let alone punished. That leaves it unclear how much the low-level brutality stems from the intent of those in charge or whether commanders failed to control their troops.

Combined with the apparent strategy of bombing civilian targets, many observers conclude that the Russian government - and, perhaps, a part of Russian society - in reality condones violence against civilians.

Back then, Russian investigators stated that the killings in Novye Aldi might have been perpetrated by Chechens dressed up as Russian troops, people and victims recall. Now, the Kremlin says any atrocities in Ukraine are either staged or carried out by the Ukrainians and their Western "patrons," while denouncing as a "Nazi" anyone who resists the Russian advance.

Earlier today Putin awarded the battalion stationed in Bucha where atrocities are being investigated. He commended them for actions "in defense of the Motherland."

**Russian forces want to "wipe out" Mariupol and other cities** - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said late Sunday that Russian troops "are destroying Mariupol" and "want to wipe out" cities in eastern Ukraine.

This is supported by the manner in which Russian forces are utterly destroying Ukrainian villages and smaller cities. They pulverize them with artillery and missile fire, then enter the and either kill the citizens or forcibly deport them to remote Russian areas.

It appears to be a planned approach to devastate the country and render it "identity less." This does not portend well for either future offences or any peace talks.

**Reports Continue To Surface Of Ukrainians Forcibly Relocated To Russia** - Ukrainian officials have accused Russian forces of transporting hundreds of thousands of civilians from shattered Ukrainian cities, taking their documents, and putting them in so-called "filtration camps" in Ukraine's separatist-controlled areas, before moving them to Russia.

According to Ukrainian authorities, many of those civilians are believed to have come from Mariupol, which has been devastated by Russian bombardment since Moscow invaded Ukraine on February 24 and is the epicenter of a brutal war of attrition that has seen Russian troops take control of large parts of the damaged city.

## Impacts

**Internal Russian dissent** - At Russia's domestic level, payment companies like Visa, Mastercard, and Apple Pay have also suspended all operations in Russia in a bid to instigate social discontent and create serious challenges to Putin's government. In fact, there is nothing worse than social discontent for a country at war with a foreign adversary. This problem can spread rapidly across Russia, weaken the military's morale, and lead to serious internal unrest that could pose a serious threat.

**Putin demands ownership of Jerusalem landmark in angry letter to Bennett** - Revival of the dispute over the Alexander Nevsky Church, promised by former Prime Minister Netanyahu to Putin after the release of an Israeli from Russian prison in 2020, comes as Russia expresses anger at Israel's position over its invasion of Ukraine. Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded late on Sunday in a letter to Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, that the Alexander Nevsky Church, in the Old City of Jerusalem, be immediately transferred into Russian hands, after it was promised by former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

**U.S. officials preparing for potential Russian cyberattacks** - This past week, the U.S. government issued an urgent warning about dangerous new malware that could cripple industrial systems worldwide. It comes on the heels of Ukraine withstanding an attempt by Russian hackers to knock out power to 2 million people in that war-torn country. The Biden administration has been releasing sensitive intelligence and dire warnings that the Kremlin is preparing to launch a new generation of cyberattacks on American soil. U.S. cyber defenders tell us they are now watching Russian state actors probe some of our most critical systems and are bracing themselves — especially at the Department of Homeland Security — with an initiative called "Shields Up."

**Russia and China nightmare as UK scientists analyze secrets of Putin's prized fighter jet** - British and American scientists are analyzing the secret long-range targeting mechanism of Russia's most advanced fighter jet, sources confirmed last night.

And their findings could make a "huge difference" in how the West conducts air-to-air combat with both Russia and China. Ukrainian troops shot down the Sukhoi Su-35S (dubbed Flanker by NATO) using short-range missiles two weeks ago. Specialists with the Ukrainian Air Force were able to retrieve vital and hitherto classified elements from its burnt-out remains and informed British intelligence.

The Flanker is Russia's equivalent to the F-35 fifth generation multirole fighter which is currently used by the RAF and 14 other NATO nations - though it does not possess stealth technology.

## Sanctions

**An 80-km line of trucks at the Polish border is trying to escape EU sanctions** - On April 16, the line of Russian and Belarusian trucks hoping to leave the EU before sanctions took effect stretched for 80 kilometers (50 miles) at the border of Poland and Belarus, at a border crossing in the Polish town of Koroszczyn.

**Moscow Mayor Says 200,000 Jobs At Risk In City As Western Companies Leave** - Some 200,000 people risk losing their jobs in the Russian capital because Western companies have suspended operations over the invasion of Ukraine, Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said on April 18.

Experts predict that the worst economic impact of Western sanctions is still to come and expect Russia to plunge into a deep recession.

## Widening of war front

**Taiwan's Fighting Spirit: 'Rational Assessment Does Not Favor Beijing'** - Taiwan's military preparedness and will to fight has received renewed attention, following what some outlets, such as The New York Times, have called Ukraine's "tenacious" defense against Russian aggression.

"The Taiwanese people endured 50 years of Japanese colonialism and emerged with their own identity. They endured 38 years of martial law under Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang government, emerged with their own identity, and rapidly transformed into a strong, resilient democracy from the grassroots up," Yates said. "While Beijing may have the ability to impose pain and destruction, it will meet with resistance it has never experienced and is unlikely to be able to hold any gains over time."

**Chinese Pacific island strategy** – China believes its naval capability includes weaponized islands scattered throughout the South China Sea. Dong Feng-21 missiles, with a range of 1,000 miles are placed on the islands, far beyond the range of any US carrier-launched aircraft, limiting the effectiveness of the US naval arm.

Some of these islands are reclaimed from the seabed, where coral reefs are reinforced with a material China developed decades ago, then nurtured and built upwards, until eventually they can expand them further for sufficient space upon which to locate missiles and air bases.

**China War With U.S. on the Horizon, Chief Propagandist Says** - One of China's most well-known state media personalities has called for a sea change in the public's attitude on war with the United States, a prospect he believes is increasingly likely over Taiwan.

In a commentary published on Saturday, Hu Xijin, the former editor of nationalistic tabloid the Global Times, describes a "real sense of crisis in Taiwan," where he says the public is more psychologically prepared for war than China.

"As the situation in the Taiwan Strait deteriorates, we must prepare for a military struggle," Hu wrote, urging Chinese citizens to be "ready to face major challenges and hardships" as a result of a hypothetical U.S.-China clash over the orientation of Taiwan, an independent state with limited recognition, which Beijing claims is part of its territory.

The former editor said trust between China and the America was now "nonexistent." Last year, Hu says, a series of dramatic military maneuvers near Taiwan left Beijing with a "psychological advantage" over Taipei—but Russia's war in Ukraine has changed that.

**Australia, US grapple with Solomon Islands tilt to China** - A re-alignment of alliances for the Solomon Islands would change the military calculus of the southern Pacific. Should Chinese defense forces regularly visit that would give them a base of operations about 1,200 miles from the eastern coast of Australia and smack in the middle of thousands of Pacific islands.

The American embassy in Honiara, capital of the Solomon Islands, has been shuttered since 1993. Now, the US is scrambling to reopen as quickly as it can in the face of China's increasingly successful campaign to tighten relations with the tiny but incredibly strategic island state.