

Conflict Update # 214

October 17th, 2022

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 65,320 (+320) soldiers killed, 2,537 (+8) enemy tanks, 5,205 (+12) armored combat vehicles, 1,599 (+10) artillery systems, 366 (+1) MLRS systems, 187 (+1) air defense systems, 268 (+0) warplanes, 242 (+0) helicopters, 1,241 (+17) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 316 (+0) cruise missiles, 15 (+0) warships/cutters, 3,969 (+10) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 76 fuel bowsers (+0) and 144 (+1) units of specialized equipment.

Key Takeaways

Apparent Iranian-sourced "kamikaze" drones attacked Kyiv earlier this morning, while other Russian missile and drone strikes hit residential buildings and critical infrastructure elsewhere in the early morning hours, knocking out electricity for hundreds of cities across Ukraine. These latest attacks on civilian areas come nearly eight months into Moscow's invasion of its democratic neighbor.

The weapons appear to have been Iranian-made Shahed-136s (Russia refers to them as "Geran-2" drones), which U.S. officials warned in July that Russian officials were acquiring. They are much like apparent Iranian-sourced drones that Iran-backed Houthis in Yemen used to attack Saudi Arabian oil refineries and infrastructure last year, as the Wall Street Journal reported last December, with one U.S. official describing the weapons as "\$10,000 flying lawn mowers."

Some of the war's hottest front lines are in the eastern Donbas cities of Soledar and Bakhmut, "where extremely heavy fighting continues," Ukrainian President Zelenskyy said in his evening address Sunday. "The occupiers threw everyone they could against our forces, including 2,000 'prisoners,' they are among the mercenaries right there"

Ukraine offers \$100,000 bounty for former Donetsk separatist commander

Igor Girkin was also wanted by the Netherlands for participating in the downing of Malaysia Airlines Flight MH17 over Ukraine, which killed 283 people (see white star in the map alongside for where the plane was shot down by Ukrainian separatists).

Ukraine's Defense Ministry's Main Intelligence Directorate announced a reward of \$100,000 on Saturday for the capture of Igor "Strelkov" Girkin.

He is a former Russian FSB agent and a key figure in Russia's initial



occupation of Ukraine in 2014, when he led Kremlin-backed separatists to seize Slovyansk, in the Donetsk Oblast.

A former Russian intelligence officer who once boasted he had “pulled the trigger of war” in Ukraine, Girkin served as the leader of the Kremlin’s forces in Slovyansk in the first months of the 2014 conflict. Going by the pseudonym Igor Strelkov (which means “shooter” in Russian).

Ukrainian soldiers unleash Czech 'Vampire' rocket system on Russian forces - Ukrainian soldiers are using heavy weapons supplied by the West to push back against Russian forces in intense battles in the Donbas. The Czech RM-70 Vampire rocket system has been deployed by Ukrainian troops in front-line battles in the Donetsk region, a hotly contested territory in Russia's war against Ukraine.

Anton Herashchenko, an official advisor and a former deputy minister at the Ukrainian Ministry of Internal Affairs, said: "Czech beauties-vampires are a joy to the eyes! Such Vampires are not afraid of daylight. And in general, no one is afraid!

"And they react to the Russian occupiers with lightning speed and on the spot."



The Czech Republic has donated an unspecified number of war machines to Ukraine since the Russian invasion began.

The main role of this artillery rocket system is to engage area targets, such as concentrations of troops and armored vehicles, artillery batteries, and other targets.

The RM-70 Vampir follows the lines of the original Czechoslovak RM-70 and can be seen as a heavier version of the popular Soviet Grad artillery rocket system. It has 40 launching tubes for 122 mm rockets. A standard HE-FRAG rocket is 2.87 m long and weights 66.35 kg. Its

warhead weights 18.4 kg. Maximum range of fire is 20 km. The RM-70 fires Czech-produced rockets, however it also compatible with all standard 122 rockets, developed for the Soviet Grad artillery rocket system. Rockets with various warheads are available, including incendiary, smoke, illumination warheads. Also there are cluster warheads with anti-tank or anti-personnel submunitions, as well as specialized warheads. It is claimed by developers that a full salvo of 40 rockets covers an area of up to 70 hectares, firing from 20 kilometers away.

It blankets an area with devastating effect, enhanced even further with use of compatible NATO rounds.

'The 300s became 200s' - Baikal Battalion crushed in Ukraine while Buryatia authorities stay silent, relatives say - Before Putin's “partial mobilization” was announced, authorities in various regions across Russia — especially in the ethnic republics — created battalions recruiting “volunteers,” promising them large payouts. One such outfit was the Baikal battalion which was to consist of the residents of the Siberian region of Buryatia. However, according to Novaya Gazeta Europe, the recruitment effort fell through: ads circulated on all local pro-Kremlin media and blogs showed that only a few dozen people showed up. The regional authorities say that the battalion's command staff has been fully recruited, but there remains “a need for soldiers to form the unit.”

After they were sent to the front line, no official news about the battalion's condition has been published, and the fate of the “volunteers” is known to their relatives only through scraps of information and rumors. Some have been unable to contact their relatives in the battalion since late September, and the regional authorities remain silent.

Novaya Gazeta Europe found out that most of the battalion's troops died on 28 September during the battle for the village of Petropavlivka in the Kharkiv region of Ukraine, which the Ukrainian President Zelenskyy said had recently been liberated. We spoke to the Baikal battalion's relatives.

“They were crushed in Petropavlivka, my nephew died, he burnt to death in a tank, a mine fell from a drone on 28 September. Our guys who were there on the 28th, I don't know how many came in, but very few came out, [Ukraine] crushed them badly. They were driving two IFVs and they took the hit. [Irina starts to cry as she talks about it - editor's note .] They saved 39 people.

The thing is that the machinery is on Ukrainian territory, they can't pull them out to at least bury what's left of the dead. We want them to be awarded posthumously.

They took the fire, diverting it so that our boys, who were left behind, could take the wounded from the battlefield. Of course, they had to retreat, because the forces were unequal, [the Ukrainian] outnumbered them. It was the Buryat Baikal battalion, and the dead were mostly guys from Buryatia. It was the Baikal battalion that was there. My husband said it was just a meat grinder, as if the devil had descended from the skies above. My husband says he learned to pray for the first time. He was a non-believer, he said he had already said goodbye to everyone. There were a lot of wounded, he said, he wished there were more tourniquets. He said that a guy had both his legs blown off and said that while he was applying a tourniquet on one of them, a silent mine was dropped from a drone, and all the '300s' next to him turned into '200s'. (300 is Russian military code for the wounded, while 200 is code for the dead - translator's note). The wave knocked him back. His hair must've gone grey, he said, and he was just carried out, as my legs weren't moving, and he had no strength.”

According to Irina, Timofey wasn't wounded, but he would not tell her where he was now and how many of the battalion were left, as they were commanded not to. Asked whether the man plans to return after that, Irina answers that she doesn't know: “But he said: I won't leave my guys, I'll be here till the end. He also said, verbatim: 'I'm going to throw that ----- TV away when I get back'. He said that only 10% of [what they say on the TV] was the truth. He went there saying that he was a patriot and that he was going to protect people.”

The European Union is seeking concrete evidence for any Iranian involvement in Russia's war on Ukraine, the bloc's top diplomat, Josep Borrell, said on October 17.

Anger over Russia's battlefield defeats bursts into the open, posing a challenge for Putin - For weeks now, on the uncensored Telegram channels of hardline nationalists and Russian military bloggers, there's been a litany of angry criticism of Russia's military commanders amid Ukrainian counteroffensive successes.

Criticism is now bursting into wider Russian public view, hitting the front pages of some of the biggest newspapers.

That's a serious problem for Russia's military brass — and potentially for the Kremlin.

“I wouldn't predict a palace coup imminently. If there were one, we'd almost be the last ones to know about it, these things happen pretty swiftly when they do,” said James Nixey, who heads the Russia and Eurasia program at the Chatham House think tank in London. “But obviously, there is increasing discontent in upper Russian echelons about the course of the war, and that is being manifested in various ways, people can't hold it in.”

“The problem is Putin’s grip in all sorts of ways is too strong for people to mobilize and consolidate and form an alliance, to move against him,” he told RFE/RL. “I personally think...the Russian elite has never been as at risk of collapse quite frankly than it is now.”

Over the 23 years Putin has been in power, Russia’s once freewheeling media has been squeezed into submission. After the February 24 invasion, he signed legislation that in many cases criminalizes independent reporting on the war, as well as criticism and dissent, by outlawing “discrediting the armed forces.”

That dovetailed with closure of some of the country’s best-known independent outlets, like the Ekho Moskvyy radio station Novaya gazeta. Even Internet resources and social-media companies like Facebook, Twitter, and VK have been censored or brought to heel.

Prior to Putin’s September 21 announcement of a “partial” mobilization, Igor Girkin, a notorious former intelligence officer who played an instrumental role when war first erupted in the Donbas in 2014, had been an outspoken critic of the Russian military for weeks, and had also spent weeks calling for Putin to order a full mobilization. (See article above regarding the Ukrainian \$100,000 reward for Girkin).

On October 2, a day after the Russian Defense Ministry confirmed the withdrawal from Lyman, Girkin posted a photograph of General Valery Gerasimov, the head of the armed forces’ General Staff — and lambasted him. He also ripped into the top commander of the Central Military District, Colonel General Aleksandr Lapin, and even Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, whom Girkin has repeatedly derided as a “plywood marshal.”

Amid a chaotic call-up, Russian draftees are returning home in body bags. now Putin says mobilization is ending - As Putin's unpopular mobilization drive extends into its fourth week, body bags containing the remains of draftees have begun to arrive back home, compounding fear and disgruntlement among citizens over a process that has appeared disorganized and arbitrary.

Timur Akhmetshin, a 34-year-old whose son just started first grade, was one of the five draftees from the Urals confirmed to have been killed, leaving his family devastated. His mother has suffered a stroke and his son is heartbroken, says his wife, Maria Akhmetshina.

Aleksei Martynov, 28, a Moscow city government official, was drafted on September 23 -- and was killed in battle less than three weeks later.

Public Backlash

Struggling to contain the repercussions of the move, the government quickly passed laws promising draftees high salaries as well as compensation and debt forgiveness in the case of injury or death.

Jonathan Haslam, professor emeritus of the history of international relations at Cambridge University and a Russia expert, told a conference on October 16 that Putin had been "forced to cut short" the mobilization drive because of public backlash. "If the elderly get on the street because of the deaths of unwilling conscripts in Ukraine, in the end, the pressure may build" and undermine Putin's hold on power, he said.

Ukraine returns 108 women POWs in major prisoner exchange with Russia - President's Office Head Andriy Yermak reported that 108 Ukrainian women were freed from Russian captivity on Oct. 17.

He said the released Ukrainian prisoners include 37 soldiers from Azovstal, 11 officers, and 85 privates and sergeants, with 12 civilians.

"Among those released were (also) women illegally imprisoned before the large-scale invasion," Yermak said. "Now, all the women will undergo medical checks and rehabilitation. They will hug their relatives and their children and recover."

The latest prisoner swap is the largest exchange since Sept. 21, when 215 prisoners of war, including Azovstal defenders, were returned from Russian captivity.

Among those released in September were 124 Ukrainian officers, including high-profile commanders such as lieutenant colonel of the National Guard of Ukraine Denys Prokopenko, Azov deputy commander Sviatoslav Palamar, as well as the commander of the 36th marine brigade Serhii Volynskiy. All of them were the faces of the Azovstal defense.

President Zelenskyy said 'We do not forget about any of our people, we have to return them all.'

The very soft underbelly of Putin's mobilization – Russia is not blessed with the most productive industrial and agricultural machinery in the world. In fact, it is in an appalling state of affairs, with agriculture around 60% of western efficiencies and output per acre.

Small businesses across Russia, like most countries around the world, drive local employment, personal wealth and job creation, essential in growing community and country.

Mobilization has gutted these sectors almost entirely - agriculture, industry and small business.

State bully troops move around "Shanghaiing" distraught citizens into hastily created battalions, such as the Baikal Battalion mentioned above. Bad enough by removing essential labor from all means of production, the real damage, aside from fatalities and injuries to these forcibly enlisted folk, is in devastating Russian society and earning capacity.

It is going to take years, if not decades, for this to recover and once more act as a multiplier in Russian commerce, business, society and family.

Now left without fathers and husbands, either serving or, as Russia defines it, "irrecoverable," survivors will need to find new avenues of income in order to feed themselves, pay bills and clothe kids, never mind accumulate wealth and generate individual and societal security.

As in Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Putin has gutted the bottom tier – security - without which there is no basic point of departure in advancement to higher hierarchical achievement.

The damage to this, the backbone of Russian society, is huge, immediate, and devastating.

Amid mobilization rumors for Putin's war next door, Belarusian mothers scramble to 'hide the children'

When tens of thousands of Russian troops poured across the border into Ukraine at the start of Russia's unprovoked invasion in late February, including from Belarus, Alena felt more than just fear.

"He is my air, the meaning of life," she said of her only son, who was conscripted into Belarusian military service in May 2021. "I felt more than just fear for my son. I don't even know how to describe it. It was wild horror. I was hysterical, just sobbing in the restroom at work."

Thankfully, Alena said, her son reassured her that he was safe. And a "zampolit," the Soviet-era term for political commissars within Belarus's military, soon told her that no one was sending any Belarusians anywhere.

Now, nearly eight months and tens of thousands of Ukrainian and Russian casualties later, as Moscow's invasion grinds on and the rest of the region girds against the spread of the conflict, Alena and thousands of other mothers of Belarusian conscripts again fear for their sons' safety.

After a weekend meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Lukashenka this week accused Ukraine, Poland, and NATO of "trying to drag us into a fight."

But moves by him and other Belarusian officials this week have sparked public fears that they are planning a hushed mobilization as pressure from Moscow grows on Minsk to more actively support Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Speaking as the mother of a fighting-age Belarusian amid fresh rumors of mobilization, Alena said, "The unrest in us all was, and will be, and won't be going anywhere."

Russia a State Sponsor of Terror

EU Parliament to vote on recognizing Russia as state sponsor of terrorism - The EU Parliament voted in favor on Oct 17 of a proposal put forth by the Sweden Democrats European Conservatives & Reformists to hold a debate on adopting a resolution to recognize Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism

201 members voted in favor, 99 against, and another 61 abstained, European Pravda reported. The resolution is scheduled for a vote at the end of November.

Comment – This will more than likely not see support from the US, as it will view such an escalation as part of a sequence of increasing retaliatory actions against Russia, each a tactical and incremental step following preceding steps.

They will not object to such a vote, but tactically will view it as geopolitically premature.

Humanitarian

187 bodies exhumed at mass burial site in Lyman, Donetsk Oblast. Oleksandra Havrylko, a spokesperson for Donetsk Oblast police, said that 35 of the exhumed bodies are soldiers, and the rest are civilians. Some were killed by explosions, but others could have been murdered, she said. The exhumation work is still ongoing; about 40 graves remain unexamined. Those buried at the site were killed during the Russian occupation of Lyman before it was liberated by Ukrainian troops in early October.

UN Reaction to Russian indiscriminate civilian attacks - The new United Nations human rights chief says the recent escalation of Russia's war in Ukraine is "deeply troubling," especially reports of kamikaze drone attacks in urban areas.

Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine and the economic impact of the conflict have thrown an additional 4 million children into poverty across Eastern Europe and Central Asia, according to UNICEF.

Putin

Not going nuclear: Putin's other options for escalation with the West - President Biden turned heads by warning Putin is "not joking" when he issues thinly veiled threats of using weapons of mass destruction as his invasion of Ukraine struggles, potentially threatening his 23-year hold on power.

But analysts say Putin may be more likely to use other, less kinetic means to intimidate the West to curtail its support for Ukraine, such as targeting critical offshore energy pipelines and data cables, as well as satellites orbiting Earth.

"All of these methods of attack would be more logical for Russia to pursue" than a direct military attack on NATO facilities or use of a nuclear weapon, said Sean Monaghan, an analyst at the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies who previously served at the British Defense Ministry.

For one thing, Monaghan said, a Russian strike targeting a weapons supply route in a NATO country such as Poland would trigger the 30-member Western military alliance to respond.

“The war with Ukraine is not existential [for Russia]. It’s a war of choice,” he said. “A war with NATO would be existential.”

In the case of undersea energy pipelines, there are accusations Russia has already carried out such an attack.

Blasts that hit two Russian natural gas export pipelines to Germany late last month were a sign of things to come, Monaghan said, calling it a “precursor to more brazen hybrid attacks.”

On October 8, damage to cables on land caused an hours-long stoppage of all rail traffic in northern Germany. The state-owned railway operator blamed “sabotage” and launched an investigation into who was behind the interference.

Monaghan said attacks against such critical infrastructure are deniable and ambiguous and “purposely do not cross the threshold of divisive [military] response,” he said.

William Courtney, a former career diplomat who took part in U.S.-Soviet defense talks, also said Russia is more likely to escalate by attacking a pipeline, Internet cable, or satellite.

In addition to other factors, a strike against Poland might not be successful, he said — the country has strong armed forces and is on high alert.

“Rather than strike a NATO member, Russia might look at a target that is more ambiguous in terms of how NATO would respond,” said Courtney, who is now an analyst with Washington-based RAND Corporation think tank.

Russia has carried out major hybrid attacks against NATO members and other countries in the past.

In 2007 Russia launched a weeks-long, coordinated cyberattack against Estonia, targeting websites of the Baltic nation’s government, banks, telecommunications companies, Internet providers, and media outlets after Tallinn relocated a controversial Soviet war memorial that had stood in the center of the city. At the peak of the attack, bank cards and mobile-phone networks were temporarily frozen.

Russia has been suspected in other incidents.

In 2021, underwater cables off Norway’s coast were severed and removed. The sensors attached to the cables had the ability to pick up information about Russian submarines, leading some to believe that Moscow may have been behind the incident.

Then, on January 7 of this year, one of two undersea fiber-optic cables that provide Internet and communications links between mainland Norway and the Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic Ocean was knocked out.

Also in January, Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, the chief of Britain’s Defense Staff, raised concerns about the “phenomenal increase in Russian submarine and underwater activity” over the past two decades.

In an interview with The Times of London, he said Russia has the naval capability to put at risk and “potentially exploit” undersea cables.

Monaghan said although subsea communications networks are resilient, there is still a large amount of data traffic that goes through a small number of cables under the Baltic Sea, the North Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean.

Russia’s potential targets are not just below the sea.

Last November, Russia carried out its first test of a direct-ascent anti-satellite missile (ASAT), destroying a Soviet-era target in low-Earth orbit and raising concerns abroad about its space capabilities. The weapon was fired from the Earth’s surface as the satellite passed overhead.

Konstantin Vorontsov, head of Russia's delegation to the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs, said last month the uses of commercial and civilian satellite assets by the United States and its allies to assist Ukraine "constitute indirect involvement in military conflicts" and "quasi-civilian infrastructure," as he put it, "may become a legitimate target for retaliation."

Ukraine's forces have relied heavily upon satellite Internet access to carry out operations against Russian forces.

German intelligence believes Putin might use nuclear weapons in Ukraine and organize political assassinations in Germany.

Bruno Kahl, President of Germany's Federal Intelligence service, Thomas Haldenwang, head of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution, and Martina Rosenberg, head of the Military Counterintelligence Service have informed the Bundestag, the country's parliament, that Russia may use nuclear weapons against Ukraine and organize political assassinations in Germany, Der Spiegel reports.

Kahl and Haldenwang made the statements before the Bundestag, which meets publicly once a year to listen to assessments of the current situation from intelligence leaders.

Haldenwang said that "the Ukraine War had changed the rules of the game" in all domains of the country's politics and bears direct menace to Germany's internal security. He also added that 40 Russian spies were deported from Germany in April, but there are many more left.

Russia's secretive agencies have received "a higher clearance level" of operations in Germany, he says. Haldenwang's agency believes that Russia's agents might organize political assassinations in Germany.

Kahl warned Putin may use "sub strategic nuclear weapons" in Ukraine and then force Ukraine to sign a peace treaty on unfavorable conditions. There are no signs that the Russian side may agree on a compromise solution, he says.

NATO

Let's not forget the ramping up of NATO military matériel, forces and defensive missile batteries in the immediate aftermath of Russia's February 24th invasion of Ukraine.

Caught short on capability, the US and EU nations rapidly built up, transferred and readied huge troves of military capability across the EU and around Russia in Greece, Alaska, Japan, South Korean and other satellite zones.

These are still in place and in a state of readiness.

Putin and the Kremlin are no doubt keenly aware of this NATO capability which, coupled with a solid supply chain and re-supply manufacturing base, provides a stern caution against any European folly by Russia.

The "Kremlin Effect"

Russia's war against Ukraine continues to push neighboring countries to do things that were previously unthinkable or at least extremely unlikely. The '**Kremlin Effect**' appears to show little signs of abating anytime soon.

Vladimir Putin is changing the world, there is no doubt about that. But the changes underway are almost certainly not what Russia's autocratic ruler had in mind when he ordered his military to invade Ukraine in February.

Indeed, with every passing week it seems, Russia's choices undermine its own standing in the world, by either eroding its economic hold over wealthy and poorer nations alike or tossing out diplomatic clout it has taken decades to amass.

The last ten days have been no exception.

'Europe's other war' between Armenia and Azerbaijan is a case in point. A shaky ceasefire achieved after bloody fighting a couple of years ago was broken again in September, when Baku's forces attacked Armenian territory proper.

It risked turning into a full-fledged conflict on Armenia's internationally-recognised territory rather than land within Nagorno Karabakh, a breakaway province heavily disputed between the two sides.

Russia acted as mediator between Yerevan and Baku, as well as stationing 'peacekeeping' troops in the region. But with Moscow's attention elsewhere, that status quo is changing.

Last week, at the inaugural meeting of the European Political Community, leaders Nikol Pashinyan—a former journalist who was swept to power in Armenia's 2018 revolution—and Ilham Aliyev—the latest of a political dynasty that has ruled Azerbaijan since the 1990s—sat down to chat.

The tete-a-tete was of course not chaired by Putin or his chief diplomat Sergey Lavrov. Instead, Emmanuel Macron—with European Council head Charles Michel as co-pilot—led the talks.

How effective this fresh attempt at peace will pan out to be still remains to be seen but it marks a dramatic shift in how the Caucasus region handles its affairs and farms out its mediation requests.

The geopolitical optimist might even suggest that this is the first stage in a stronger rapprochement between the EU and the two nations. Azerbaijan is already upping its fossil fuel exports, while Armenia is covered by a fairly comprehensive partnership agreement.

Putin has little to offer either Baku or Yerevan, while Brussels and other European capitals do.

Green Knight

Moscow's predictable weaponization of energy exports has also shifted the needle in a big way. In the early days of the war, there were calls for the EU's Green Deal to be scaled down, put on the back burner or even shut down completely.

None of those options has come to pass and, if anything, it has steeled resolve across the bloc. Yes, a lot of Russia's gas imports were replaced with hydrocarbons sources elsewhere, but the green transition has also been turbocharged.

Politico Europe quite rightfully ranked Putin top of their list of biggest influencers on green policies earlier this week, scoring him highly for influence but zero out of ten for vision.

Look no further than Estonia for tangible proof of this impact. Its parliament last Thursday voted in favour of running the country's electrical system completely on renewable power by 2030. The target was previously 40%.

With a population of only 1.3m, but this is still a massive decision. The government is not exactly stacked with climate-sensitive politicians either, this green shift was purely driven by a desire to insulate the country from Russian influence.

How will Estonia achieve it? Fresh tenders for renewable energy will be launched, permitting procedures sped up and new incentives provided for wind farms.

Its most polluting energy source, oil shale, was already supposed to be phased out by 2035. A culturally-sensitive issue, given the number of ethnic Russians who work in the industry, that date will likely be brought forward the more clean energy becomes available.

There could be a sting in the tail as Estonia sources a chunk of its power from biomass—essentially burning polluting wood—so if that figure increases dramatically there will be big problems.

But where there is a will—especially political will—there is more often than not a way. Estonia has even recently dabbled in using small nuclear reactors, which could potentially offer more zero-carbon power.

Russia's list of unintended achievements continues to stack up. A potential second round of joint borrowing by the EU, Denmark joining the bloc's defence treaty, Bosnia getting a sniff of membership candidacy... what's next?

Containment

Ukraine to receive first NASAMS air defense systems from US soon. Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov added that the U.K. and the Netherlands had also promised to provide more surface-to-air missiles. Ukraine is also in talks on acquiring Crotale air defense systems from France, he said.

EU raises its military assistance for Ukraine to 3.1 billion euros. The EU has also agreed to launch the Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine to provide individual, collective and specialized training to Ukraine's Armed Forces, according to EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell on Oct. 17. "Russia's latest indiscriminate attacks will not shake our determination to support Ukraine, it will only reinforce it," said Borrell.

7th Army Training Command balances Ukraine training, Nordic security - The U.S. Army's largest overseas training command is continuing to provide support for Sweden and Finland in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which drove the Nordic pair to join NATO, officials confirmed.

"Admittedly, their movement from partner to ally is going to expand what has already begun under their status as a partner," Brig. Gen. Joseph Hilbert, the head of 7th Army Training Command, said in an interview with Army Times. "We've already got a pretty good basis of knowledge on the capabilities and training areas up there."

As a direct message to Russia, in response to its brutal assault on Ukraine, Sweden and Finland applied to join the 73-year-old Western-aligned defense pact. While the two have long been partners to NATO, participating in various multinational exercises, they no longer consider their history of nonalignment to be in their best interest while aggression in the region continues to escalate.

On Aug. 3, the U.S. Senate ratified the ascension of the Nordic countries to receive NATO status in a rare, overwhelmingly bipartisan vote. However, all 30 current NATO members must approve the transition for it to occur, and a few holdouts remain, including Turkey, which is skeptical over arms embargoes and domestic security concerns.

'Time' to send military aid to Ukraine, says Israeli minister amid report Iran said to supply missiles to Russia - An Israeli Minister yesterday urged the country's government to provide military aid to Ukraine amid reports that Iran will supply Russia with ballistic missiles during the ongoing conflict.

"This morning it was reported that Iran is transferring ballistic missiles to Russia," tweeted Israel's Diaspora Affairs Minister Nachman Shai. "There is no longer any doubt where Israel should stand in this bloody conflict."

"The time has come for Ukraine to receive military aid as well, just as the USA and NATO countries provide," he demanded.

Shai's comments were triggered by a report in the The Washington Post that Iran plans to send Russia surface-to-surface missiles to help build up its dwindling arsenal to strike Ukrainian cities and military positions. According to two unnamed officials, Iran is readying a first shipment of Fateh-110 and Zolfaghar missiles, two short-range ballistic missiles capable of hitting targets at distances of 300 and 700 kilometers. Since Russia invaded the Ukraine in February, Moscow has deployed Iranian-made drones to hit civilian infrastructures and energy installations.

While Israel has condemned Russian attacks against Ukraine and is said to share "basic intelligence" with Kyiv about Moscow's use of Iranian-made Shahed "suicide" drones, it has declined to provide military aid to the war-torn country limiting its assistance to humanitarian aid. Israel seeks to avoid jeopardizing its ability to conduct operations in Syria's skies against Iranian targets, which depend on coordination with Moscow.

Ukrainian President Zelensky has repeatedly criticized Israel for failing to send Kyiv anti-missile systems, such as the Iron Dome defense system, to help counter Russian attacks.

Commenting on the Post report, Ukraine's ambassador to Israel Yevgen Korniychuk raised concerns about Iran's intentions to sell more "lethal kamikaze drones and medium-range ballistic missiles" to Russia.

"Russia finally turned into a terrorist state and actually joined the "axis of evil." which threatens not only Ukraine, but also the rest of the civilized world, of which Israel is a part," stated Korniychuk. "What other persuasions, proofs, and arguments are needed for the Israeli authorities to make a logical and pragmatic decision regarding more active opposition to the formed "Russian-Iranian alliance" by providing Kyiv with relevant weapons?"

France ramps up war support for Ukraine, rebuilds armories - France yesterday pledged air defense systems to protect Ukrainian cities against drone strikes, as well as an expanded training program for Ukrainian soldiers, as it seeks to puncture perceptions that French President Emmanuel Macron's government has lagged in supporting Ukraine militarily against the Russian invasion.

Up to 2,000 Ukrainian soldiers will be embedded with military units in France, rotating through for several weeks of combat training, more specialized training in logistics and other needs, and training on equipment being supplied by France, Defense Minister Sébastien Lecornu, said in an interview published in Le Parisien.

"We are noting the fact that the war, alas, will last," the newspaper quoted the minister as saying. "A new generation of soldiers must also be trained, to last the distance."

France had previously trained Ukrainian artillery troops to use Caesar self-propelled howitzers it has supplied.

Senate to add \$10 billion in Taiwan aid, scale back arms sale reform - The Senate's annual defense authorization bill will now include \$10 billion in military aid for Taiwan — more than double the initial amount proposed — even as it scales back language intended to help address the \$14 billion backlog of arms sales the Asian nation already made from the U.S.

Senate Armed Services Chairman Jack Reed, D-R.I., included a modified Taiwan defense package as part of a massive bipartisan amendment he filed last week to the fiscal 2023 National Defense Authorization Act. The full Senate is expected to vote on the NDAA, including the Taiwan defense provisions, when lawmakers return to Washington after the November midterm elections.

Lawmakers seek emergency powers for Pentagon's Ukraine war contracting - Bipartisan legislation introduced in the Senate would grant the Pentagon wartime procurement powers, allowing it to buy high-priority munitions using multi-year contracts to help Ukraine fight Russia and to refill U.S. stockpiles.

The Senate Armed Services Committee's chairman, Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., and ranking member, Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., proposed the legislation as an amendment to the annual defense authorization bill, which the Senate is expected to vote on in November. It was offered instead of the critical munitions acquisition fund that the Pentagon and some lawmakers sought for the same purposes, before Senate appropriators rejected it.

But it extends far beyond what the U.S. needs to replenish stocks sent to Ukraine. For instance, it authorizes contracts to procure up to 20,000 Stinger anti-ship missiles and 25,000 Javelin anti-tank missiles. That far exceeds the approximately 1,400 Stingers and 5,500 Javelins that the U.S. has sent to Ukraine from its stocks.

"These numbers are much larger than just replenishing stocks," said Cancian. "These are huge numbers. They are not driven by what we've given to Ukraine, but sort of related to what we've given to Ukraine."

“This isn’t replacing what we’ve given them,” he added. “It’s building stockpiles for a major ground war in the future. This is not the list you would use for China. For China we’d have a very different list.”

The amendment also authorizes buying up to 30,000 AGM-114 Hellfire missiles; 36,000 AGM-179 Joint Air-to-Ground Missiles; 1,000 Harpoon missiles; 800 Naval Strike Missiles; and 10,000 Patriot Advanced Capability - 3 air defense system and 6,000 MGM-140 Army Tactical Missile Systems.

The proposed legislation also authorizes contracts for 20,000 AIM-120 Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air missiles, which Ukraine has not fired extensively – if at all. Britain announced last week that it would donate these AMRAAM rockets to Kyiv for its use in the Norwegian Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile System, which the United States has pledged to provide in the future via the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative.

Sanctions

Putin tried for years to stop his military from using western parts — and mostly failed - Even before sanctions cut off access to vital components and technologies for Russia’s defense industry, an internal Russian government review found years of attempts to reduce reliance on imports had largely failed.

Previously unreported assessments show a program with specific targets was put in place from 2019 to slash Russia’s dependence on Western parts for its arsenal by 2025 — everything from radar to advanced submarines to anti-missile defense systems. But an internal review of the plan 10 months before Putin invaded Ukraine found it was falling short on almost every metric.

Conversations with European officials including those familiar with the audit report highlight the protracted struggle by Russian companies and the trade ministry to move away from parts supplied by NATO member states and Ukraine. One of the Russian assessments explicitly warned the state’s defense procurement program could fail under a tougher sanctions regime, a European official said, asking not to be identified discussing sensitive matters.

Information on Russia’s challenges sourcing components has been shared among a number of Western governments and fed into the discussions on trade penalties imposed since late February.

Shortages of modern weapons have forced Russia to rely on models dating to the Soviet era, many of which are less accurate and reliable, according to US and European officials. They said the Kremlin is unlikely to be able to sustain the kinds of massive assaults on Ukrainian infrastructure seen this week, despite Putin’s threats to continue escalating.

Russia is struggling to resupply its troops on the ground, has suffered heavy losses of tanks and aircraft, and is burning through its missile arsenal, those officials say. In Russia, senior officials have repeatedly said they are able to resupply their forces in Ukraine and Putin on Friday said he had no regrets about the invasion.

Since the war broke out the US, the European Union and others have also hit Moscow with hefty sanctions, including penalties designed to cut off access to semiconductors and other key components used in high-tech weaponry.

“The costs to Russia — in people and equipment — are staggering,” Sir Jeremy Fleming, the director of Britain’s signals intelligence agency, said this week of the war in Ukraine. “We know — and Russian commanders on the ground know — that their supplies and munitions are running out.”

The import substitution program was set up in 2014 in the aftermath of Russia’s previous invasion of Ukraine and accelerated with detailed targets set from 2019. But what has been described to Bloomberg as a 20-page audit by the office of Russia’s prosecutor general in April 2021 — covering a mammoth 177,058 components used in 278 types of military equipment — found widespread shortcomings. In 2020 alone, Russia had hoped for 18,047 substitutions covering 43 types of equipment but only managed 3,148 replacements across five items, the people said.

Kremlin officials have repeatedly said the import-replacement efforts across the economy have missed targets: Putin remarked in 2019 that, “in a number of cases as practice shows, obvious mistakes were made in the planning and organization of work on import substitution.”

One European official said the expectation is for a further degradation of Russian equipment and its armed forces more generally. Some of Russia’s more advanced weapons are dependent on foreign components, such as cruise missiles, TU-22 bombers, submarines, the air defense system Nudol, and anti-aircraft radar.

Last year’s assessment, which includes an extensive list of examples, also found that billions of rubles worth of contracts with Russian entities were running late, the people said. The relevant ministries were unable to control the process and foreign components, including chemicals, specialist materials and electronics, were being covertly used in a number of development projects, according to one of the documents they cited.

Authorities have clearly recognized the extent of the problem.

The 2021 inspection includes issues with the following, the people said:

- The anti-missile and ballistic missile defense system 14Ts033 Nudol, where 1,548 tasks to substitute components were set but only 0.3%, including the supply of spare parts, had been achieved so far. The plan was to replace 30 components with domestic analogues, but that work had not started.
- Early warning, long-range radar systems 1L119 Nebo-SVU and 55Zh6UM Nebo-UM. Work on replacing foreign components with domestic analogues had not started as of 2021, with targets to import spare parts met at 20% and 0.7%, respectively.
- GT-01 Murmansk-BN, a communications intelligence and jamming system that Russia claims has a range of 1,000km. At least 111 of its components were from EU and NATO nations and needed to be replaced, while the development of domestic equivalents had not started.
- Failure to meet targets for:
 - Yasen-class nuclear attack submarines, Russia’s quietest attack submarines, and older project 971M Akula-class submarines.
 - TU-22M3 bombers and Su-34 fighter bombers, alongside multiple types of missiles including guided air defense missile 9M96.
 - The IL-96 aircraft, a type of airplane also used by Putin to travel abroad.
 - Project 22350 class frigates, one of the more modern Russian vessels.
 - The air defense missile system Buk-M3.
 - Ka-52K attack helicopters.
 - Forpost drones.

The audit showed that nearly 100 contracts signed with Russian research institutes to develop domestic components since the annexation of Crimea had been delayed, the people said.

Attempts to replace Ukrainian components also underperformed in 2020, with 212 replacements on four types of equipment against a target of 260 substitutions for 12 types of equipment.

The same year, Moscow was able to establish a strategic supply of spare parts for just over a third of the 7,244 projects it had envisioned, the people said, citing the assessment. And of the 484 projects targeted for supply chain changes, only five saw progress.

“A reliance on Western components won’t stop Russia’s military machine but it will substantially slow down the pace at which Russia can regenerate military power,” according to Sidharth Kaushal, a research fellow at the Royal United Services Institute.

US to strengthen sanctions against Iran. Washington plans to impose further sanctions against Tehran for helping Russia in the war against Ukraine, Politico reported, citing an undisclosed U.S. official.

Critical Minerals

How North America plans to secure supplies of critical minerals - Miner Rio Tinto has partnered with the government of Canada to invest in the supply of critical minerals in North America.

The company said it would spend US\$537m over the next eight years at its Rio Tinto Fer et Titane (RTFT) operations in Sorel-Tracy, Québec, with the aim of decarbonizing and “reinforcing Rio Tinto’s leadership as a North American supplier of critical minerals for key growth sectors such as electric vehicles, 3D printing and aerospace”.

A Rio Tinto spokesperson told Supply Management: “This is a collaboration with the government of Canada to strengthen the critical minerals and metals value chains in Canada and the United States.”

Alongside Rio Tinto’s investment, the Canadian government is investing up to C\$222 million (US\$162 million).

The announcement follows a report by Canada’s National Supply Chain Taskforce 2022, which found longstanding weaknesses in the country’s supply chain were harming critical supplies.

The report stated as the global market wrestles with “rapidly changing trade patterns, human and climate-caused transportation supply chain disruptions, shifting geopolitical risk, and increased consolidation in major transportation modes,” stakeholders must act decisively to make supply chains “more agile, flexible, resilient, competitive and efficient.”

Impacts

Fiona Hill: ‘Elon Musk is transmitting a message for Putin’ - Despite the setbacks Russia has suffered on the battlefield, Fiona Hill, who served as an adviser to former President Donald Trump, thinks Putin is undaunted. She sees him adapting to new conditions, not giving up. And she sees him trying to get the West to accede to his aims by using messengers like billionaire Elon Musk to propose arrangements that would end the conflict on his terms.

“Putin plays the egos of big men, gives them a sense that they can play a role. But in reality, they’re just direct transmitters of messages from Vladimir Putin,” Hill says.

But while Putin appears to be doubling down in Ukraine, the conflict poses some real dangers to his leadership. He has identified himself quite directly with the war, Hill notes, and he can’t afford to look like a loser. If he begins to lose support from Russian elites, his hold on power could slip.

The West has come a long way since February in understanding the stakes in Ukraine, Hill says, but the world still hasn’t totally grasped the full challenge Putin is posing. Putin must be contained, Hill says, but that won’t happen unless and until international institutions established in the wake of World War II evolve so they can contain him. And that conversation is only just beginning.

“This is a great power conflict, the third great power conflict in the European space in a little over a century,” Hill says. “It’s the end of the existing world order. Our world is not going to be the same as it was before.”

Comment – Has Putin threatened Musk that he will attack Starlink satellites, considering them as providing support to Ukraine?

Billionaire investor Bill Ackman joins Elon Musk calling for a Ukraine cease-fire that includes major concessions to Russia - Billionaire investor Bill Ackman has joined industrialist Elon Musk in openly saying that Ukraine should surrender any claims over Crimea in exchange for an end to hostilities with Russia.

The Pershing Square hedge fund manager is the latest wealthy businessman to favor a cease-fire, urging U.S. military support continue only so long as Ukraine needs to return its borders to what they were prior to the invasion in February—but after Russia’s annexation of Crimea eight years ago.

“If we return to the status quo ex ante [sic] 2/24, Russia is not rewarded for its aggression and Ukraine can immediately begin to rebuild with support from the West,” he posted late on Sunday. “Thousands of lives will be saved, and resources can be invested to rebuild Ukraine rather than in a war that will only lead to more destruction and death.”

Musk and venture capitalist David Sacks, a former PayPal senior executive, have recently been arguing in favor of an end to hostilities involving Ukraine concessions to major Russian demands.

Sacks argued in a series of tweets on Sunday that the U.S. should propose an armistice based on the territory that existed before the Ukraine invasion, and Ukraine should promise not to join NATO.

Late on Sunday night, Ackman supported Sacks’ call that the military alliance guarantees Ukraine would not be allowed to join. “Ukraine has proven it can defend itself without NATO membership. Properly armed it will deter future aggression,” he wrote.

Comment – Chamberlain returns. Naïve in matters geopolitical and ingenuous appeasement. These fellows should rather stay in the investment sector and leave matters of genocide and threatened Ukrainian extermination to those more experienced and uninvested.

US artillery officials nudging European armies to link their big guns - U.S. Army officials overseeing long-range weaponry are urging their counterparts in Europe to link artillery capabilities with those of NATO members, as the war in Ukraine highlights the importance of the weapon.

The push comes amid a growing belief that defending the alliance rests in large part on interoperability among friendly militaries. In the case of field artillery, that means synchronizing weapons and sensors of weapons of different countries so they can engage targets as one force.

Maj. Gen. Stephen Maranian, commanding general of the U.S. Army’s 56th Artillery Command in Germany, said he and his staff have been fanning out to allies in Europe to gauge their plans and capabilities when it comes to fires, and what obstacles exist to netting the systems for greater combat punch.

“What we’re seeing from watching what’s happening to our east is fires formations are very relevant in 2022 and in the future,” he said this week at the annual convention of the Association of the United States Army in Washington. As a result, he added, nations want to invest in modernized artillery.

Russia’s war against Ukraine has featured long-range fires as key element of combat since 2014, when Moscow’s forces established a front line in the Donbas region following the annexation of Crimea. The full-scale invasion in February 2022 saw Russia throw even more of the weapons at the front lines.

Western countries, in turn, have supported Ukraine with limited amounts of their own weapons, including HIMARS and M777 howitzers from the U.S., CAESAR guns from France, the self-propelled Krab from Poland and Panzerhaubitze 2000 from Germany and the Netherlands. Weapon stocks in Europe are low, however, and most nations have said they are sending only what they can spare while maintaining a credible national defense.

Maranian said U.S. Army officials are piggy-backing on the service's exercise campaign in Europe to test new concepts for linking artillery forces. At this year's iteration of the Dynamic Front drill in July, for example, participants put on a "proof of principle" to that end at the Grafenwöhr training area in Germany, he said. The event paired a U.S. artillery brigade with a multinational fires brigade comprised of 11 nations, with NATO's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps providing command and control.

Comment – As mentioned in previous Updates, the US and Israel both used the Angolan War as a test theater for new weapon development with smart weapons, radio technology, anti-landmine development and counter-Russian techniques all benefitting tremendously from the development, testing and analyses experience during the 1980's war alongside South African and UNITA forces.

Russian mobilization and annexation

Russia's military draft descends into workplace raids, demoralizing 'fratricide' attacks at training bases

Putin said Friday that his unpopular military mobilization effort had already pressed 220,000 men into service, sent 16,000 of them to the Ukraine front, and would be completed within two weeks. Reports are flooding social media of Russian troops having to buy their own armor and arriving at the front line with little to no training.

At least six newly drafted conscripts have already been confirmed dead from Ukraine combat — five soldiers from the Chelyabinsk region and an official in the Moscow government — but the number is almost certainly higher. And at least 11 "volunteer" soldiers were killed, and 15 others wounded by two gunmen at a military training base in Russia's Belgorod region on Saturday, Russian media reported.

Ukrainians in occupied Luhansk are being "forcibly registered" into Russia's military, Kyiv's military said Monday, which continues a trend known to be in effect for several weeks.

China

'This is World War III': expert breaks down China's 'hybrid warfare' against the US - The CEO of a business warfare and counterintelligence company issued a chilling warning Thursday about the threat posed by the Chinese Communist Party and called on Americans to change their behavior and attitude toward China's communist regime.

"It's not just military. I'd like to back it up all the way to hybrid warfare. Hybrid warfare is weakening your enemy by all means necessary—except for warfare, not conventional warfare," Casey Fleming, chairman and chief executive officer of BlackOps Partners, told an audience at The Heritage Foundation on Capitol Hill. (The Daily Signal is Heritage's multimedia news organization.)

Fleming said over 100 methods of hybrid warfare exist, citing fentanyl, a highly-lethal synthetic opioid, and the popular Chinese-owned app TikTok, which he described as a "weaponized military application in the hands of our children."

"This is World War III. It's 1939 all over again. You've got four nation-states ... plus a terrorist organization, allied against the free world," Fleming said during a panel discussion following a preview of Epoch Times' upcoming documentary "The Final War," which takes a deeper look into the threat of the communist regime led by Chinese President Xi Jinping since 2012.

"And it's been going on, as it was mentioned in the [Epoch Times] documentary, it's been going on [using] all methods except military at this point," Fleming said.

Fleming, who also was the founding managing director of IBM's cyber division and a managing director for global strategy at London-based profession services company Deloitte, said:

Yes, they're building up their military significantly and very rapidly. But everybody needs to understand, hybrid warfare is going on in your classrooms. It's going on in your living rooms.

It's going on in your hotels. Everywhere you are. Understand, anything that we do, any business we do with China is being weaponized against us. OK? And from a cyber perspective, you name it. I mean, it's everywhere.

Fleming called on the Heritage audience for "The Final War" to take action by standing up for the U.S. against the Chinese Communist Party:

I hope it changes your behavior tomorrow morning, and I hope it also changes your behavior to stand up for your country and get this word out to absolutely everyone.

I would also like to say, when you're at war, there is no Left. There is no Right. There is no black person. There is no white person. We're all in this together, OK, and we're at war.

China has stopped sales of LNG to Europe to make sure its own households have enough gas for the winter - Beijing has reportedly told state-owned natural gas importers to halt resales of cargoes to buyers in Europe and Asia, to make sure China has enough supply for domestic needs this winter.

The National Development and Reform Commission has spoken to Chinese energy giants PetroChina, Sinopec and CNOOC to ask them to stop the shipments of liquefied natural gas, Bloomberg reported Monday, citing people with knowledge of the matter.

An economic slowdown in China after Beijing imposed a strict zero-COVID policy dampened local demand for gas, leaving its importers with a surplus of natural gas that they resold to Europe and elsewhere.