

Conflict Update # 353

February 11th, 2023

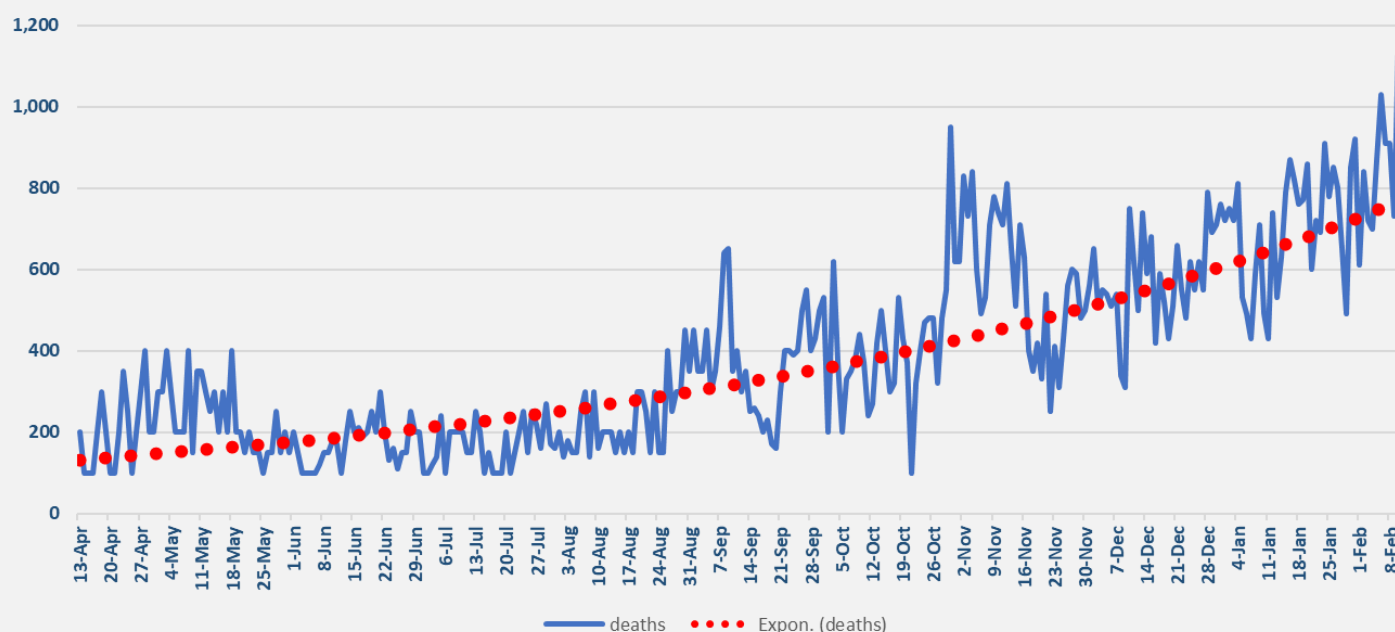
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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 133,880 (1,140) soldiers killed, 3,267 (+9) enemy tanks, 6,474 (+3) armored combat vehicles, 2,270 (+19) artillery systems, 463 (+0) MLRS systems, 234 (+1) air defense systems, 295 (+0) warplanes, 286 (+0) helicopters, 1,997 (+27) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 857 (+61) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,134 (+8) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 214 (+3) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways

Russian troop deaths by day



Russian death toll – Yesterday saw the highest death toll among Russian troops since their illegal invasion commenced with 1,140 killed and approximately 3,340 injured. Their troop attrition rate over the past week is running at close to **one thousand killed and three thousand injured per day!**

Extrapolated that translates into a fully-blown military force such as Russia's of 900,000 being obliterated – entirely – within 222 days – entirely eliminated and as we know, as the force degenerates the attrition rate increases exponentially. Therefore, at this rate, Russia can field an army for around **6 months**.

Either Putin mobilizes another round of recruits or resorts to unconventional weapons.

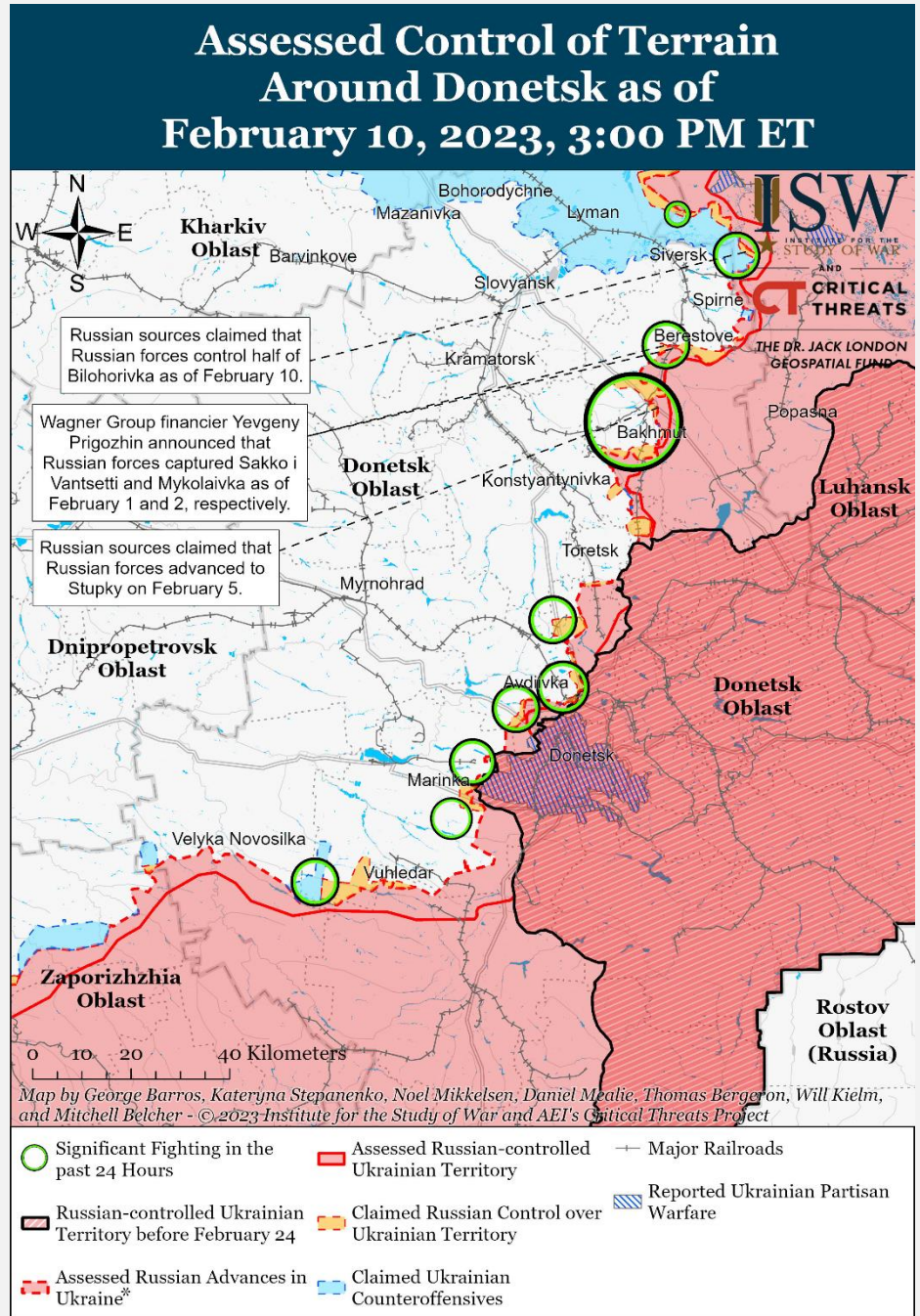
Russian forces yesterday launched another massive series of missile and drone strikes across Ukraine - Ukrainian military sources reported that Russian forces launched over 100 missiles against critical and civil infrastructure throughout Ukraine including S-300 surface-to-air missiles in ground attack mode and air and sea-based Kh-101/Kh-55 and Kalibr-28 cruise missiles. The Ukrainian General Staff (UGS) noted Russian forces also launched seven Shahed-type drones and that Ukrainian air defense intercepted 61 of the cruise missiles. Ukrainian Air Force

spokesperson Yuriy Ihnat noted that Russian forces struck Kharkiv Oblast with S-300 missiles from the direction of Belgorod Oblast and Tokmak, Zaporizhia Oblast. Russian milbloggers widely lauded the wave of strikes and claimed they hit energy infrastructure in Kyiv, Khmelnytskyi, Dnipropetrovsk, Pavlohrad, Vinnytsia, Zaporizhia, Odesa, Mykolaiv, Poltava, Zhytomyr, Kirovohrad, and Kharkiv oblasts. Russian claims of the scale and effectiveness of the strikes are overblown in comparison to official Ukrainian statements, and Russian forces continue to expend already limited stocks of precision munitions on such strikes.

Recent footage of a failed Russian assault near Vuhledar, Donetsk Oblast has become the latest point of neuralgia in the Russian information space. Milbloggers latched onto the footage to launch several critiques of Russian military leadership and claimed the same Russian commanders who oversaw highly attritional assaults by the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade on Pavlivka (near Vuhledar) in November 2022 are again responsible for the effort to capture Vuhledar, arguing the video illustrates these commanders continue to make the same costly mistakes.

One milblogger specifically stated that Eastern Grouping of Forces commander Lieutenant General Rustam Muradov is responsible for Russian tactical failures around Vuhledar whilst another called for public trials to punish high-ranking officers who repeatedly fail on the battlefield, arguing Russian forces will continue to repeat the same mistakes if these commanders remain in their positions.

Footage shows these Russian forces engaging in highly dysfunctional tactics far more indicative of the fact that the 155th Naval Infantry Brigade is likely comprised of poorly trained mobilized personnel than of poor command. Milbloggers likely blamed Russian commanders to downplay the fact that the systemic poor training of Russian mobilized personnel will continue to result in similar tactical failures throughout Ukraine. They routinely accuse Russian commanders of being responsible for tactical failures throughout the war, likely to shift the overall Russian military failure in Ukraine from the Russian military as an institution onto individuals.



Russian targets – Russia, Putin and the Kremlin continually profess to have no knowledge nor any engagement in aiming at Ukrainian civilian targets. The proof is in the pudding as they say, looking at the picture below of a civilian building destroyed by a Russian missile.

Barbarians to the last one standing.



Comments, Developments and Reports

Biden and Lula discuss democracy, climate change and the War in Ukraine during visit - During the Brazilian president's visit to the White House, both Biden and Lula sought to spotlight that Brazil's democracy remains resilient and that relations between the Americas' two biggest democracies are back on track.

President Biden and Brazilian President Lula met at the WH yesterday and reflected on how their nations were tested in their respective battles to preserve democracy, with the US president declaring that democracy ultimately "prevailed" over the far-right mobs that stormed their governments' halls of power in an attempt to overturn election victories.

Comment – An instrumental player in the BRICS alignment, it remains to be seen whether Brazil remains in the alliance and on the effect Lula's presidential victory over Bolsonaro, a strong Putin ally.

This portends to be a huge development as not only is Brazil a player in BRICS, but also the largest country in South America, around which other Mercosur states.

Hugely important going forward, and something to stymie Chinese and Russian influence in America's backyard.

Can EU-Russia relations be repaired post-Putin? - A year after Russia launched its full-scale and illegal invasion of Ukraine, the debate about whether this is Putin's war or not continues. Anti-war Russians, many of whom have sought refuge outside the country, blame the Russian president. For them, his delusions and paranoia have caused a turn to neo-totalitarianism at home and military aggression abroad. The Russian opposition in exile and in prison insists that if Putin is to fall from power, the situation would reverse. Leonid Volkov, number two of imprisoned opposition leader Navalny, has even suggested that following the end of the war, the West should offer "a Marshall Plan" not only for Ukraine, in dire need of reconstruction, but also for Russia.

In other words, opposition-minded Russians hope that Moscow will rebuild bridges with Europe and the US once Putin is no longer on the throne.

Understandably, the notion of “Putin’s war” has next to no purchase in Ukraine itself. By and large, Ukrainians fault Russia as a country and as a society, whether it is the jingoistic cheerleaders for Moscow’s “special military operation” or the silent majority who choose to simply ignore it and get on with their daily lives.

Why should Russia be trusted to behave differently one day, they ask, given that Putin speaks for a nation with an imperial mindset?

Besides, a successor to the 70-year-old leader is unlikely to come from the pro-Western opposition or be any different from the current occupant of the Kremlin. Some of the names pundits speculate about – say the head of Russia’s Security Council, Nikolay Patrushev – are at least as hawkish as Putin. So for Ukrainians, Russia has to be defeated, no matter who runs the show in Moscow.

But what about the European Union? Has the war moved its relations with Russia – cultivated so carefully for so long – past a point of no return?

For Poland and the Baltic States that is very much the case. For a year now, they have had their “told you so” moment. Even before the Russian invasion last year and the occupation of Crimea in 2014, they made the case that Russian revanchism poses a fundamental threat to the post-Cold War order in Europe.

To the west, France and Germany, however, have been much more ambiguous in their approach to relations with Russia. From the moment he first assumed office in 2017, French President Macron has been making a case that Europe should think about the long term and engage the Russians. Macron stuck to this line pretty much until the invasion and kept calling Putin in the hope of working out a diplomatic solution of some sort. And as recently as last December, the French president spoke of “security guarantees” to Russia that should be part of a settlement.

Germany has elicited even more frustration and ire among Eastern European friends of Ukraine. Long years of cozying up to the Russians and business cum political ventures, such as the Nord Stream gas pipeline, have tainted its record. The German political class has long seen Russia as a friend and some, like former Chancellor Schroeder, landed lucrative gigs with Moscow’s state-run energy companies.

In the past year, there has been some change in action and rhetoric. In the wake of the invasion, Chancellor Scholz declared the so-called *Zeitenwende* (historic turning point), the idea that Berlin will finally take European defence seriously and put its weight behind it both financially and politically. His position has found support among the German public, the majority of which is pro-Ukraine, too.

However, the German bias towards hugging closely Russia, in the expectation that denser ties yield greater security and predictability, has not been relegated to the past. With Scholz dragging his feet on providing military aid to Ukraine, notably on the Leopard tanks, he is signaling that German leadership has not given up on Moscow altogether. In Germany’s logic, Russia will always be there, whether we like it or not, and we cannot simply shut it down, build a fence around it or ignore it.

Of course, a more charitable interpretation of the tank tussle is that Scholz’s gambit aimed at committing the US to European security, with the 2024 US presidential elections looming on the horizon. But even so, it is safe to assume the Germans will not be in the avant-garde of the “stop Russia” coalition going forward.

So then does the lack of full alignment on Russia mean that the EU is leaving the door open for normalization of relations in the long term? Not exactly. The war may and probably will last years. So long as there is fighting, it is hard

to envisage any form of productive diplomatic engagement, let alone rekindling political and economic links. Certainly, until Putin is in office relations will be confrontational.

In case of de-escalation, a new line will be drawn across Eastern Europe leaving Ukraine and possibly Moldova and Georgia on the “Western side”, Belarus on Russia’s, and Armenia and Azerbaijan in no-man’s land.

A Cold War-like scenario will materialize, with the pro-Western countries drawn into EU and NATO’s orbit and Russia entrenching itself in whatever parts of Ukraine it might succeed to keep.

This also means that Cold War-style diplomacy will be deployed. The EU – and its ally, the US – will engage with Russia only in order to preserve stability and avoid a full-frontal collision. The essence of Western policy will be containment, not integration as was the case in the 1990s and 2000s.

The war has taken a heavy toll on economic links between Russia and the EU and Putin’s policy choices have accelerated forces that any future leader might struggle to reverse. Moscow used to be one of the main energy suppliers to the union; it is no more and is unlikely to recover its position. The Russian share of the European gas imports has gone down from 50 percent in 2021 to a meagre 12.9 percent at present.

The European sanctions have forced Russia to gravitate towards China and to some extent, the Global South. This will be one of the war’s lasting legacies.

Anti-Putin Russians hope that their country may eventually find its way back to the West. European leaders are right to think long and hard about what comes after the fighting stops – as sooner or later it will. Yet, as history shows, wars are transformative events. For better or worse, the clock will not turn back to February 23, 2022.

Article from Dimitar Bechev - Visiting Scholar at Carnegie Europe.

Comment – I would add that it will accelerate, perhaps not entirely – advancement of a bi-polar global order with re-aligned international divides, with some countries obliquely positioned or allied.

This will lead to growing local alignments or reinstatements of claim where warring factions, such as Armenia and Azerbaijan, vie with one another – or “others” rather than “another” – to rectify either what they historically believe to be their right(s), or what fall out remains of (then) colonial unilateral setting(s) of international border lines, such as in the Middle East and the Balkans.

There are power country moves already afoot to curry favor with African, South East Asian and South American states and regions, where raw materials and sensitive minerals abound and in some cases where strategic lanes and routes dominate global discussion and positioning.

The Andaman Sea islands located just north of the Malacca Strait, one of the world’s busiest sea lanes, where India and the US are striving to cultivate influence, or the São Tomé and Príncipe Islands in the Atlantic Ocean just south of Nigeria, straddling the undersea oil fields between that country and Angola, where the US has been contemplating building a naval base, being prime examples.

There potentially will be strategic moves such as China befriending Argentina in their conflict with the UK regarding the Falkland Islands.

Pressure will be exerted on those countries straddling these divides to coerce them one way or the other.

There will be a realignment, and not for the good, along geopolitical seismic lines, of which the Ukrainian invasion is but one.

India and China vying for land along their common boundaries and Turkish desires for a more accentuated global presence will couple with Iranian moves to exert influence in the Middle East, sowing dissent, territorial disruption and global unease.

Saudi Arabia seems to be awakening and Poland is headed to resurrect the old Polish-Lithuanian Confederation – marked in **green** in the map alongside.

Credible projections of a future eastern European geopolitical power alignment are already in writing – said to be within 40 to 60 years from now - that include Latvia, Estonia, Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey – see the **blue** divide in the map.

These disruptions will cascade into global food crises where smaller non-food producing states will see rioting and insurrections in search of food and water – **THE** basic requirements of life.

There will be a new “pursuit” for influence in countries blessed with strategic (and new) raw minerals and materials, producers and growers in global bread baskets as well as continuing focus on fossil-based energy producing zones.

Look for interesting times ahead!

Finnish president wants Finland, Sweden in NATO by summer - The Finnish president said in an interview published Saturday that he trusts that Finland and Sweden will be admitted into NATO by July, and hinted that he wants the United States to put pressure on Turkey to approve their membership bids.

If the issue drags on, the entire process of admitting new members into the military alliance will become questionable, President Sauli Niinistö said in an interview with the Finnish news agency STT.

“If it doesn’t happen by the Vilnius meeting, why should it happen afterwards?” Niinistö said.

Lithuania is set to host a NATO summit in the Baltic nation’s capital on July 11-12.

NATO requires unanimous approval from its existing members to admit new ones. Turkey and Hungary are the only nations in the 30-member military alliance that haven’t formally endorsed Sweden and Finland’s accession.

While Hungary has pledged to do so in February, Turkey hasn’t indicated willingness to ratify the two countries’ accession any time soon. Niinistö stressed that the final Turkish decision is up to Turkish President Erdogan.

Putin & Russia

Putin is gambling on the west growing impatient with Ukraine. We have to prove him wrong - The image was stunning, the optics perfect: a war leader addressing the nation in an ancient hall, the rays of stained-glass sunlight all but crowning him with a halo. And yet there was something wrong with that picture.

Zelenskyy was not stiffening the resolve of his own people, who after a year of war, bereavement and pain might be forgiven for losing heart. Rather, he was in Westminster to steady the nerves of British politicians – and, later, European ones – to ensure they do not abandon a fight that has cost them so much less.



His official request was for fighter planes – “Give us wings,” he said – but he had a wider purpose. His lightning trip to London, Paris and Brussels was aimed at ensuring the west does not grow impatient, that as the first anniversary of Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine approaches, it does not start looking at its watch – and for an early way out.

It’s odd that it should be this way around. It is the Ukrainians who are doing the suffering; it is on their soil that trench warfare is once again under way – the kind of combat that many assumed had been banished into history, to be glimpsed only via lavish Netflix re-enactments. It is Ukrainian men who are living in the ground, in networks of trenches and subterranean shelters along a frontline that stretches for 1,500km (930 miles) – and yet it is fear of quiet on the western front that preoccupies Zelenskyy.

You can see why. Admittedly, the calls for Kyiv to agree to an immediate ceasefire and negotiate with Moscow are fairly marginal right now. It fell, for example, to the former Pink Floyd front man Roger Waters to make that case to the United Nations this week, his stance as an anti-war campaigner neutral between the two combatants only slightly undermined by the fact that he spoke as the invited guest of the Russian delegation, and has described well-documented accounts of Russian war crimes as “lies, lies, lies.”

But others less easily dismissed have also begun to drum their fingers on the table, reminding Zelenskyy that all conflicts end in talks eventually, and so he should start thinking pragmatically now – among them no less than the former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger. (**Comment** – Although Kissinger did later recant his demand).

Whether articulated by the arena rock left or the establishment right, it sounds like the reasonable, humanitarian position: who could be against an immediate end to this horrendous war? But it’s a hollow call.

For one thing, the conditions simply do not exist for the two sides to negotiate now. To quote a recent Prospect essay by Jonathan Powell, who played a critical role in brokering the Good Friday agreement, which turns 25 this spring: “Successful peace negotiations usually require both a mutually hurting stalemate (a specific concept in diplomacy) and leadership on both sides prepared to take political risks for peace. Neither condition currently exists,” in the case of Ukraine.

In Northern Ireland, neither the British government nor the IRA could see a path to military victory: it was that stalemate that made negotiations possible. But wrote Powell, “Both Ukraine and Russia still think they can achieve their objectives militarily.”

What complicates things further is the specific figure of Putin. It’s not clear that the traditional carrot-and-stick calculus works with him. If Ukraine and its western allies were to de-escalate, Putin’s past conduct suggests he would see that as weakness and press harder.

But if Kyiv and its backers were to escalate, the same track record suggests an identical response: he would feel compelled to appear strong and hit back. Nor does the huge number of casualties on his own side count as any kind of pressure on him, given the clampdown on all internal dissent inside Russia, public grief is scarcely a consideration. He is happy to keep sending his young men into the meat grinder.

Watch the third episode of Norma Percy’s riveting new BBC documentary series Putin vs the West, and it becomes clearer still that traditional methods don’t apply.

Zelenskyy tells Percy of his repeated requests to join NATO, the alliance kept rebuffing him for fear of antagonizing Putin. Several European nations extended that caution into the rest of their dealings with Putin, attempting emollience even in early 2022, hoping not to provoke him into invading Ukraine. But it was all in vain: Putin invaded anyway. Still, let’s say that could be overcome, and somehow it was possible to get Putin and Zelenskyy to agree an immediate ceasefire. It would not end the suffering. Contemplate for a moment the fate of those places conquered by Putin, which would remain in Russian hands under an armistice that would freeze the current map in place.

Think for a moment of what has happened already in those places: the mass rape in Bucha; the massacre in Mariupol; the torture chambers in Iziium; the mass deportations of Ukrainians to Russia, including the transfer of hundreds of thousands of children, to face forced adoption and “Russification”. Those crimes would not end if there were a ceasefire. They would continue, except now Russia would have an even freer hand.

And who believes that Putin would stop there? What grounds would a Ukrainian have to trust that the Russian leader would be content to pocket the gains he had won and leave it at that? One would have to ignore everything that has happened these last two decades.

Much more likely is that Putin would simply regard an armistice as a pause to regroup for the next push. After all, he is not after a mere adjustment of boundaries: he has been clear that he regards the very existence of an independent Ukraine as an affront to Russia. Vadym Prystaiko, Ukraine’s former foreign minister, tells Percy: “You cannot bargain with him. He does not need anything from us. There is no reward, no building or city or prize. He wants us not to exist.”

Of course, enemies in every conflict would say their adversary is uniquely evil or impervious to reason. Often that assessment is wrong. But sometimes the world really does face a threat of a different order. Putin’s dictatorship inside Russia’s borders and his repeated territorial expansion beyond them – whether in Georgia in 2008, Crimea in 2014 or the rest of Ukraine in 2022 – suggest a man bent on reviving the specters that haunted Europe in the middle of the last century. He has played the long game and is playing it again now, gambling that he can absorb more death and devastation than we can, that we have less stomach for it, even when it’s not our people who are doing the dying. He believes he has greater strength and greater patience. It’s no exaggeration to say that the fate of Europe depends on proving him wrong. **Comment** – At a very minimum Ukraine will demand inclusion in NATO for itself and Moldova before agreeing to anything where land concession is involved.

Russian robot maker working on bot to target Abrams, Leopard tanks - But is it all just a PR stunt? - A Russian manufacturer says it is adapting one of its ground robots to target Abrams and Leopard tanks—the types heading to Ukraine from the United States, Germany, Poland and other countries.

Dmitry Rogozin, a former head of the Russian space corporation Roscosmos and current head of the “Royal Wolves” group, which advises the Russian government, took to Telegram on Wednesday to announce that his group was working with the Advanced Research Foundation and a company called Android Technology to develop a combat version of Android’s Marker ground reconnaissance robot.

“Everyone agrees that our strike [version] of the Marker, before the arrival of the Abrams and Leopards in Ukraine, should be prepared for their destruction,” Rogozin posted.

In an interview published by Russian news site RIA Novosti, Rogozin said the Marker would “be able to automatically detect and hit the ‘Abrams’, ‘Leopard’ and other vehicles due to the electronic catalog in the control system with images of enemy equipment.”

How well would a Russian robot perform against a well-trained human tank crew? On Twitter, Bendett expressed skepticism, calling the announcement mostly a PR stunt.

“Previous Marker tests - at least those made public - were against small UAVs, and these [unmanned ground vehicles, or UGVs] conducted tests for orienting in a complex space like a forest, but not an actual battlefield where multiple countermeasures are trying to destroy the vehicle. Moreover, Western tanks will be part of combined arms formations with aerial support like drones and UAVs, which are going to hunt for any Russian target, including the likes of Marker ground vehicles. Rogozin's earlier claims of Marker as a recon UGV were more realistic.”

Comment – Russia and the Kremlin routinely make statements regarding military prowess, battlefield advances and victory, technological development and claims of superiority on an ongoing and false basis.

Containment

Decrying Starlink's 'Weaponization,' SpaceX Cuts Support for Ukrainian Military - But Wednesday's explanation by the Elon Musk-founded company is at odds with its continuing work for the U.S. military.

SpaceX will no longer support certain Ukrainian military operations through its Starlink satellite-communications service, the company's president said on Wednesday, explaining that the tech was "never meant to be weaponized." But Gwynne Shotwell's explanation is at odds with Starlink's role in recent U.S. Army modernization experiments that seek to fire on targets more quickly.

SpaceX began providing Starlink terminals to Ukraine shortly after Russia invaded in February 2022. The satellite service—along with help from other Western IT companies—helped Ukraine ride out a Russian cyberattack intended to knock Ukraine's civilian population and government offline. That enduring connectivity has helped distribute aid, medicine, and supplies, and enabled Ukrainians to document and publicize Russian war crimes. And it's been vital to the Ukrainian military, which uses it for purposes such as communicating with Western experts about equipment upkeep and guiding drone strikes on Russian positions.

On Wednesday, Shotwell said has taken steps to keep Ukraine from using Starlink to control armed drones and perform other military tasks.

"We were really pleased to be able to provide Ukraine connectivity, and help them in their...fight for freedom. It was never intended to be weaponized, however," the SpaceX president said during an FAA Commercial Space Transportation Conference, according to Breaking Defense.

SpaceX's work for the U.S. military suggests otherwise. In May 2020, the company signed a cooperative research and development agreement with the Army to look at battlefield applications for the Starlink broadband. Later that year, Starlink played a key role in the service's inaugural Project Convergence experiment to test new and more interconnected weapons and systems.

Broadband satellite connectivity from SpaceX and other providers was an even more important part of the following year's Project Convergence, according to two military officials who spoke to Defense One at Yuma Proving Grounds that year. A big part of the reason for that was the increase in the number of commercial low earth orbit satellites like Starlink.

"The biggest difference in 2021 is really just the availability of low Earth orbit satellite constellation has matured much more," said one official. "We were having minutes of windows of time for [low earth orbit satellite communications], last year. This year, we're going on 24, you know, almost a continuous capability."

That high-bandwidth, low-latency satellite connectivity was important in helping the Army better meet mission objectives, finding and engaging more targets, faster.

In November, Olha Stefanishyna, Ukraine's deputy prime minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, told reporters that Starlink communications were a "signal of life" for Ukrainians, but said the country was growing increasingly concerned about the ever-erratic behavior of the company's founder, Elon Musk—especially after Musk made attempts to charge the Pentagon for Starlink services he had donated. Ukrainian officials said they are looking for alternatives to SpaceX.

Comment – A totally unreliable partner is Musk and his Starlink company. I find the timing of this directive very strange indeed. Right about and commensurate with Putin's revived offensive in the southeast Ukraine area. The last thing Putin needs is for Ukrainian intelligence forces to track his mobilized armed forces. Just last week the Kremlin outlawed any troop use of cell phones and electronic communications – things Starlink tracks and pinpoints.

So very strange indeed that Musk chooses this precise moment – immediate and in line with Kremlin desire – to make his announcement barring the exact use where Ukraine obtains maximum battlefield benefit from – just when Russia needs such a directive in order to limit damage and attrition to its invading forces.

Separately it is also being reported that Musk has reduced Twitter’s ability to spot foreign disinformation according to a former US data scientist.

It’s not clear how Twitter can filter out foreign disinformation now that he has gutted the teams meant to prevent a repeat of Russia’s effort to sway the 2016 presidential election, says a former Twitter senior data scientist.

He laid off all three data scientists working on disinformation algorithms, whilst 60% of employees working on trust and safety issues are gone as well. He also disbanded the volunteer trust and safety council and 80% of human reviewers. All of these moves limit misinformation tracking and elimination ability.

Perhaps the US government should start reviewing Musk’s government permits and authorizations for US military-linked activities and development. Quid-pro-Quo as they say.

Slovakia can start talks on sending MIG-29 jets to Ukraine, says PM - Slovakia can start the process of talks on delivering MIG-29 fighter jets to Ukraine now Kyiv has officially asked for the planes, the PM said on Friday.

Western countries that have provided Ukraine with arms have so far refused to send fighter jets or long-range weapons capable of striking deep inside Russia.

Ukrainian President Zelenskyy said he heard from several European Union leaders at a summit that they were ready to provide Kyiv with aircraft, hinting at what would be one of the biggest shifts yet in Western support for Ukraine.

Russian Recruitment & Mobilization

Mobilization and Force Generation Efforts (Russian objective: Expand combat power without conducting general mobilization) - Russian authorities are restricting international movement in and out of Russia, likely to support ongoing crypto-mobilization measures. The Russian State Duma passed a law on February 9 requiring all trucks and cargo trucks traveling between Russia and other states to apply for a certain timeslot to cross the border starting on September 1, 2023.

A prior version of this bill required all vehicles seeking to cross the border to apply for a timeslot ahead of time, but the State Duma reportedly adjusted the bill after public dissent. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Siberia service reported Russian authorities will implement facial recognition software at nine border checkpoints with China, Kazakhstan, Poland, and Lithuania to compare those crossing the border with existing biometric databases.

The Kazakhstan Ministry of Internal Affairs announced on February 8 that it is increasing documentation requirements for foreigners to obtain residency permits, which could force Russians without the proper documents who are staying in Kazakhstan to return to Russia, claiming it implemented this measure to crack down against migrants registering under fraudulent addresses, but Kazakhstan may have implemented this measure at the behest of Russian authorities.

Kazakhstan eliminated a loophole in legislation on January 17 that allowed Russians to stay in Kazakhstan indefinitely. These measures are unlikely to support a second wave of mobilization given the temporal proximity to the Russian spring conscription drive, which will occur on April 1, 2023.

Russian authorities continue to crack down against anti-mobilization figures. Independent Russian opposition outlet Mediazona reported on yesterday Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs placed Free Buryatia movement head Aleksandra Garmazhapova on the Russian federal watch list for unspecified charges, which Garmazhapova claimed would likely

involve distributing fake information about the Russian military. Mediazona reported Russian authorities designated Garmazhapova as a foreign agent in the fall of 2022 and blocked access to the Free Buryatia website in the summer.

ISW previously assessed Free Buryatia and other such dissent organizations formed in ethnic minority enclaves will continue to place pressure (albeit limited) on the Kremlin for its treatment of ethnic minority communities.