

Conflict Update # 238

October 21st, 2022

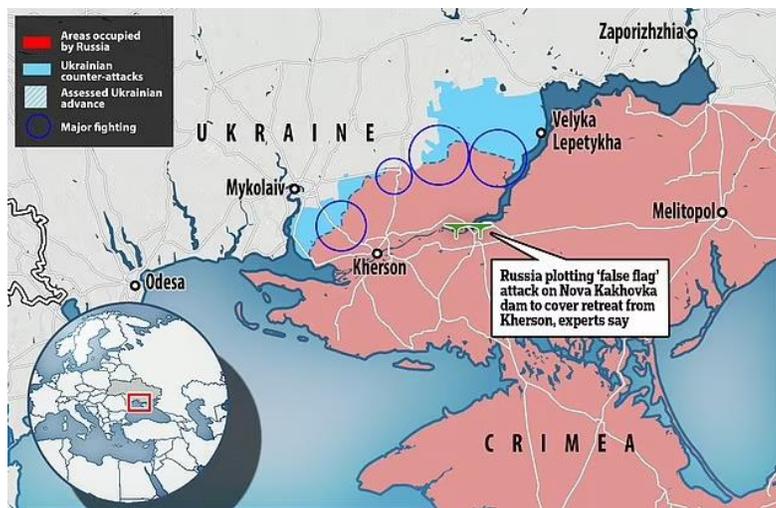
Back issues at www.accgroupco.com

Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 66,750 (+100) soldiers killed, 2,573 (6) enemy tanks, 5,258 (+3) armored combat vehicles, 1,648 (+2) artillery systems, 372 (+0) MLRS systems, 189 (+0) air defense systems, 269 (+0) warplanes, 243 (+0) helicopters, 1,325 (+14) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 329 (+0) cruise missiles, 15 (+0) warships/cutters, 4,006 (+1) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 76 fuel bowsers (+0) and 147 (+0) units of specialized equipment.

Key Takeaways

Kherson flooding would be like dropping 'atomic bomb' if Putin strikes dam – A Russian strike on the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant (HPP) in Ukraine's southern Kherson region, where their counteroffensive is ongoing, could be like dropping an "atomic bomb," an expert has assessed.



Pictured to the left is where the dam is located up the River Dniipro.

Pictured below is a graphic of how escaping water will affect the areas downriver from the dam, if released (Херсон – Kherson City)

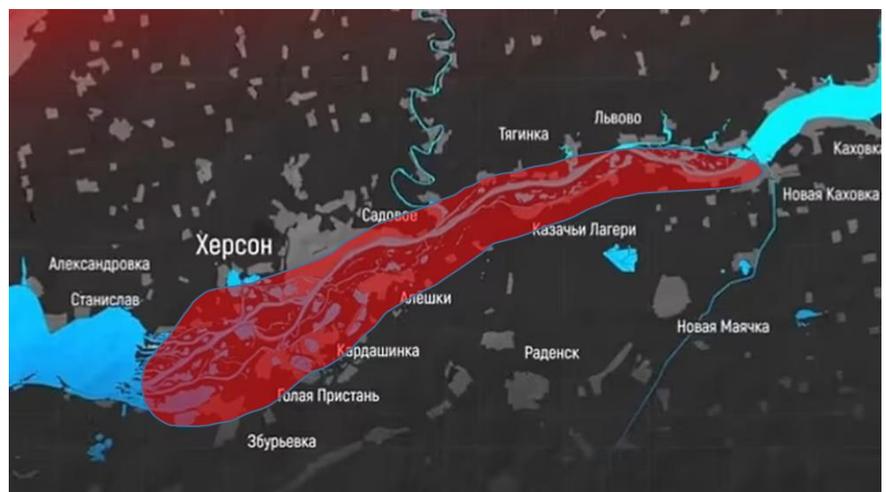
The Kakhovka HPP has been shelled by Russian forces since the beginning of the war, which began after Putin launched a full-scale invasion against Ukraine on February 24.

The Institute for the Study of War, a U.S. think tank, assessed this week that Russian forces may be preparing to carry out a false-flag attack on the

Kakhovka HPP where Kyiv is conducting extensive military action to take back its territory.

Ukrainian media outlet Rubryka reported in July that the Kakhovka HPP is a vital element of the country's infrastructure security, and if destroyed, could result in catastrophic consequences.

President Zelenskiy called on the West to warn Russia not to blow up the huge dam that would flood a swath of southern Ukraine, as his forces prepare to push



Moscow's troops from Kherson in one of the war's most important battles (See following article and previous Updates).

In a television address, he said Russian forces had planted explosives inside the dam, which holds back an enormous reservoir that dominates much of southern Ukraine and were planning to blow it up.

Destroying the Kakhovka hydro-electric power plant would add to Ukraine's energy woes after weeks of Russian missile strikes aimed at generation and grid facilities which Kyiv said have damaged a third of its country-wide power network.

It holds an 18 km reservoir that also supplies water to the Crimean peninsula, annexed by Russia in 2014, and to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant, which is also under Russian control.

- The volume of water in the reservoir is about equal to the Great Salt Lake in the U.S. state of Utah.
- Blowing the Soviet-era dam, which is controlled by Russia, would unleash a wall of devastating floodwater across much of the Kherson region that Russia last month proclaimed as annexed in the face of a Ukrainian advance.

Russia accused Kyiv earlier this week of rocketing the dam and planning to destroy it, in what Ukrainian officials called a sign that Moscow might blow it up and blame Kyiv, using it as a "false flag" event.

The Soviets used the same tactic in WWII to slow a Nazi invasion, killing thousands of civilians.

The vast Dnipro bisects Ukraine and is several km wide in places. Bursting the dam could send a wall of water flooding settlements below it, towards the city of Kherson, which Ukrainian forces hope to recapture in a major advance.

Comment – This is symptomatic of the Russian approach – to completely obliterate Ukraine and its people. Secondly, by flooding the terrain south of the dam will provide further cover to withdrawing Russian troops from west of the River Dnipro. This may be a Russian negotiation ploy to allow their soldiers to escape? Destruction of the dam will surely constitute a war crime.

Should Ukraine wish to prevent Russia from destroying the dam, it can remove the incentive by ensuring Russian soldiers are encircled west of the river.

Ukraine has already started bombarding river crossings, including those temporarily repaired by Russian engineers. All told, there remain approximately 80,000 evacuees, including Russian troops.

Keeping them on the Ukrainian side of the river will surely stop Russia from flooding the area and killing its own troops and thousands of Kherson residents.

Ukraine poised for crucial blow to Putin in battle for Kherson - Ukraine is poised to deliver another crucial blow to Putin's war effort with a counteroffensive to take back Kherson, which was the first major Ukrainian city seized in the invasion in February.

Ukraine has blacked out all media on its operations around the southern city this week, as it did ahead of a successful counteroffensive in the northeast last month. Experts studying the war said all signs point to a major offensive in the coming days, with Russia already signaling its potential retreat.

Ukrainian victory in Kherson, which is the only regional capital that has been captured by Russian forces, could set the direction of the rest of the war, said John Spencer, chairman of urban warfare studies at the Modern War Institute at West Point.

"Strategically, operationally and tactically, it'll send a signal that Russia can't hold ground in Ukraine, and the path to victory for Ukraine is pretty much assured. The timeline's still in question, but path to victory is pretty assured," he said.

Russia has sent nearly 30,000 troops to Kherson in an attempt to reinforce its positions; however, Ukraine has reclaimed dozens of settlements in the region and has been increasing its air strikes on Russian defense systems, suggesting a combined ground and air assault coming soon, Spencer said.

With no information coming from the Ukrainian side, war observers have been left interpreting radar and signals from the Kremlin, which appears to be “shaping the information space to prepare the Russian population for military defeat in Kherson,” said George Barros, a Russia and Ukraine analyst at the Institute for the Study of War.

Gen. Sergey Surovikin, the newly installed commander of Russian forces in Ukraine, this week said “difficult decisions” may be necessary in Kherson, adding: “We will be guided by the need to preserve the lives of the civilian population and our military personnel as much as possible.”

Barros said that does not mean Russia will give up the city without a fight, but rather that it is preparing for possible defeat, after its losses in Kharkiv last month seemed to stun many pundits and the Russian public.

Withdrawal of Russia’s 30,000 troops would not be easy. Ukraine has largely destroyed the main bridges crossing the Dnieper River around Kherson, leaving Russians only a pontoon bridge and an earthen crossing at the key Kakhovka dam to move forces and equipment across the river.

Comment – Superficial repairs to the main bridge have been completed by Russian engineers, but this will not present any significant passage of evacuees.

Ukrainian forces bombard river crossing; Kherson a fortress - Ukrainian forces bombarded Russian positions in the occupied and illegally annexed southern Kherson region, targeting resupply routes across the river while inching closer today to a full assault on one of the first urban areas Russia captured after invading the country.

Russian-installed officials were reported desperately trying to turn the city of Kherson, a prime objective for both sides because of its key industries and major river and sea port, into a fortress while attempting to evacuate tens of thousands of residents.

The Kremlin has poured as many as 2,000 draftees into the region — one of four Moscow illegally annexed and put under Russian martial law — to replenish losses and strengthen front-line units, according to the Ukrainian army’s general staff.

The Dnieper River figures prominently in the regional battle because it serves critical functions — crossings for supplies, troops and civilians; drinking water for southern Ukraine and the annexed Crimean Peninsula; and power generation from a hydroelectric station. Much of the area, including the power station and a canal feeding water to Crimea, is under Russian control.

Kremlin-installed Kherson officials said Ukrainian shelling of a Dnieper River ferry crossing killed two journalists working for a local TV station they set up under occupation. At least two other people were reported killed and 10 members of the broadcast crew and their relatives were wounded, Russia’s Tass news agency reported

Natalia Humeniuk, a spokesperson for Ukraine’s southern operational command, confirmed the Ukrainian military struck the Antonivskyi Bridge near the crossing but only during an overnight curfew Russian-installed officials put in place to avoid civilian casualties.

“We do not attack civilians and settlements,” Humeniuk told Ukrainian television.

This tactic makes sense in that it will constrain any Russian withdrawal, and potentially halting any destruction of the upriver dam.

What is Putin targeting?

Ukrainian infrastructure will demoralize Ukrainians table.

They are hammering grids, water supplies transportation all civilian indicate the and of the Russian state.



Putin and the Kremlin are targeting all ahead of winter in the hope that this and force them to the negotiating

away at power and hubs. These are targets and desperation pusillanimity

Ukraine's Soviet-era tanks target Russian logistics in defense of Bakhmut - Ukrainian forces are using Soviet-era T-64B tanks to defend the area around the key city of Bakhmut in the Donetsk region. Russian troops have been making slow but steady progress in the area.

Latest Developments At A Glance

- Ukrainian President Zelenskiy's office said 88 settlements in the southern Kherson region and 551 settlements in the northeastern Kharkiv region have been "de-occupied," while the Ukrainian forces' counteroffensive in the Kherson region moves ahead.
- Ukraine's energy minister said he has seen no signs of a deal involving Russia, Ukraine, and the UN's nuclear watchdog on resolving the situation at the Zaporizhzhya nuclear power plant.
- Ukraine is restricting electricity consumption as the country copes with damage to its infrastructure caused by waves of Russian air strikes.

Putin

Putin's war in Ukraine may destroy Russia - Michael Khodarkovsky in the WSJ - The Western media for decades has hailed Vladimir Putin as a great strategist. But if the past eight months have proved one thing, it's that this strategic wizard often achieves the opposite of his intentions.

Putin has promised many things, including to make Russia an attractive place to live by 2020. Instead, millions of Russians have left and settled in the West. Its economy remains largely dependent on oil and gas—and gross domestic product per capita income has fallen nearly 60% since 2013. Government efforts to slow demographic decline have failed, and mobilization has pushed more than 300,000 Russians to flee the country. Many of those unable to escape or bribe their way out of the draft are non-Russians from remote and impoverished regions in the east and south.

These factors paint a grim picture with clear implications: Rather than resurrecting his country's greatness, Putin might be presiding over the collapse of the last Russian empire, always a colonial power in denial. While conquering and ruling multitudes, it insisted that—in contrast with violent Western conquests—the indigenous peoples themselves sought Russian protection and that Russian rule was benign. This gap between rhetoric and reality is evident in the country's current designation as a "Russian Federation."

There are 21 republics within Russia, each with a titular non-Russian ethnic group. In Soviet times, Moscow drew the territorial boundaries and allowed each its own cultural autonomy. After the U.S.S.R. collapsed in 1991, these small republics demanded genuine administrative and political autonomy. A new democratic Russian government under

Boris Yeltsin was prepared to concede as much and signed bilateral treaties with all but one: Chechnya. When the Chechen Republic refused to comply, demanding instead full autonomy, the Yeltsin government sent in troops in what became the First Chechen War (1994-96).

During those few years of democracy, once-forbidden topics came to light. New research revealed that Russia was an expansionist empire bent on subjugating indigenous peoples. Putin curbed freedom and open discussion after becoming president in 2000. He brutally suppressed Chechen independence aspirations and ordered the celebration of anniversaries that marked indigenous people's choice to "voluntarily join Russia."

He resolved to undermine the autonomy of indigenous republics, to erase their ethno-territorial borders and turn them into regular Russian administrative entities. To this end, the Kremlin ordered that instruction in indigenous languages be cut back, and it appointed Russian loyalists to local posts. In July 2017, the Kremlin terminated the last and longest surviving power-sharing treaty, with Tatarstan.

The pace of this so-called Russification wasn't swift enough for Putin and his allies. The Kremlin understands that Russia's demographic trends are disastrous. Its ethnic Russian population has declined precipitously over three decades, while the non-Russian population grew rapidly. According to some estimates, Russia could become a majority-Muslim country by the 2050s.

Putin is obsessed by the Russian gene, which he labels "special" and "endangered." He invaded Ukraine in part to increase the Slavic population of Russia by incorporating Ukrainians, whom he considers "Little Russians." This attitude, together with his aspirations for a "Russian world" in which all Russian speakers are united under Moscow's rule, bears strong resemblance to 1930s Germany. It's why Moscow has been kidnapping and transferring people—particularly children—from occupied Ukrainian territories to Russia.

Comment – *There are three primary demographic groups within a country, each vital to long-term fertility stability. These are (i) children – who provide for the future, (ii) young workers – who are the consumers and drive GDP growth and (iii) mature workers – who invest and provide capital. Russia's balance between these three is out of kilter with, among other, the highest alcoholism and death from alcohol rates in the world. This is disastrous as these deaths predominate in the young and mature worker categories, seriously diluting future wealth and growth.*

Russia's population growth, according to World Bank numbers, was -0.4% last year.

This is why the loss of nearly 1 million draft escapees and an ongoing brain drain is catastrophic in Russian demographic terms. By forcibly moving Ukrainian citizens – all of Slavic blood – to the furthest Russian regions, Putin is achieving two aims – (i) removing non-Russian voting citizens from the occupied territories and (ii) introducing Slavic blood into non-Russian ethnic communities.

This compliments a disproportionate conscription of non-Russian ethnic minorities – who are being killed in unequal numbers to Russian deaths.

Hitler tried the same, Stalin tried it in the Baltics and the South African government tried it by transferring Afrikaans-speaking government male employees to English-speaking communities. It doesn't work, for example there are many South African families with Afrikaans surnames now pronounced in English fashion. Mothers predominate and rear children, prevailing upon them indigenous culture and language. This has been the way for thousands of years and one would think despots at some time will realize this.

Moscow has long considered Russia's multiethnic character a potential threat to its ideal of a unitary state. With his war in Ukraine, Putin seems to have found an answer to his Russification efforts: genocide of various non-Russian

peoples. Since the early days of its February invasion, Moscow has been disproportionately recruiting and drafting non-Russians, including Tatars from the illegally annexed Crimea region of Ukraine.

Yet non-Russian regions are beginning to wake up to Moscow's nefarious designs. In recent weeks protests have broken out in several Muslim regions of Dagestan and Bashkortostan, and in Siberia. After Chechnya recently claimed to have fulfilled its quota and refused to send more men, Yakutia, a large region of Siberia, did the same.

The significance of those protests hasn't been lost on Ukrainian authorities. On Sept. 29, President Zelensky gave a speech in front of the memorial to Imam Shamil, the 19th-century North Caucasus leader, commander of the Muslim war against Russia for nearly 30 years. Zelensky appealed to the peoples of the Caucasus and other non-Russians to prevent their sons from dying in Ukraine. Their cause, he added, was the same: to be free from Russian domination.

Putin should look to history. During World War I, Russian authorities tried to conscript Muslims from Central Asia. The result was a major uprising in the summer of 1916, which took months and tens of thousands of Russian troops to suppress. In the end, none of the Muslims were sent to battle—and, by withdrawing army units from the front to confront the internal uprising, Russia expedited its eventual defeat. Less than six months later, the czar and his government were forced to resign.

By sending poorly trained non-Russian men to Ukraine, Moscow may soon meet a similar fate. Centuries of pent-up bitterness and frustration over rule by Moscow may spill into a military confrontation and civil war. Given Russia's current military defeats, this isn't a distant prospect. If and when that happens, Russia will fall apart as the empire of the czars and Soviet Union did. It would be ironic if the man who wanted to revive the U.S.S.R. instead ushers in the twilight of Russia's last empire.

'Putin has three cards left, but he is doomed' - Roman Rukomeda in Euractiv - Analysing the positions and actions of the Russian aggressors, the conclusion is that Russia uses mass terrorism to postpone its defeat in Ukraine, writes Roman Rukomeda.

Russian aggression against Ukraine has come to an end. Last week it became apparent that Putin's last cards on the battlefield are:

- 1) Freshly mobilized men;
- 2) Kamikaze drones (UAVs) from Iran delivered to Russia that is used to destroy critical infrastructure and bring mass terror against the population;
- 3) Threat of using tactical nuclear (or other mass destruction) weapons against Ukraine.

These are the last cards Putin has as he tries to postpone his significant loss in the war against Ukraine.

Putin called an additional 300,000 men into the military a month ago, and it's taking a toll on the economy - Cracks are now beginning to show in the Russian economy, especially after Putin ordered a "partial mobilization" of the country's 300,000 military reservists in September, which sent many Russians fleeing the draft.

"The recovery of economic activity stalled in September," the research department of the Central Bank of Russia said in a report on Wednesday. By the end of the month, the economic conditions had worsened, the central bank's research unit added.

Russia's central bank did not reference those escaping from the call-up but said the mobilization has created new challenges for production processes and output maintenance. It is also expected to "negatively affect consumer and business confidence," the report said.

The bank said that the partial mobilization could also make it harder for companies to hire in Russia — where unemployment has hit a record low — in turn, "holding back overall economic activity in the coming months."

Russia has not released numbers on how many people have fled the country since Putin's mobilization, but reports from neighboring countries put the number at more than 300,000, according to a Washington Post report on Sunday.

Russian mobilization

Putin's conscriptions supercharge Russia's brain drain - Thousands of working professionals have escaped to neighboring countries.

The British defense department's daily intelligence update said in the seven days since Putin announced his partial mobilization, there has been a considerable exodus of Russians seeking to evade call-up.

While exact figures are unclear, the number of people who have already escaped from mobilization in Russia likely exceeds the total number of those who were used for the war against Ukraine when it began in February, the defense ministry assessed.

"When combined with those reservists who are being mobilized, the domestic economic impact of reduced availability of labour, and the acceleration of 'brain drain' is likely to become increasingly significant," the U.K. ministry said in its daily report.

Russia is known for the high academic integrity of its technical graduates. That takes years to achieve and expand.

Comment – We addressed this element in our Update earlier this week.

'The army has nothing': new Russian conscripts bemoan lack of supplies - Relatives purchase armour and clothing for soldiers on frontline due to theft, corruption and poor logistics.

When her recently mobilized brother rang from the frontline last week, Olesya Shishkanova recorded the phone call – and with it, a litany of complaints.

"They gave us absolutely no equipment. The army has nothing, we had to buy all our gear ourselves," complained Vladimir, 23, who was conscripted as part of Vladimir Putin's mobilisation earlier this month.

"I even had to paint my gun to cover the rust. It is a nightmare ... Soon they'll make us buy our own grenades," he added in the call that Shishkanova uploaded on her page on the Russian social media site VK.

Vladimir's story is far from unique. Across the country, newly mobilized men are buying up everything from thermal underwear to body armour as more evidence emerges that Russia's undersupplied army has not been able to provide them with even the basics when they arrive at the front. (**Comment** – winter is here, and these enlistees are going to freeze in the open terrains against Ukrainian forces).

On Telegram, dozens of discussion channels have sprung up in which the wives and sisters of mobilized men share advice on where to buy body armour and clothing for relatives before they depart to fight in Putin's war in Ukraine.

"From morning to evening, I scan the internet to find good deals for our boys," said Anastasia, a member of the Help for Soldiers group, which is based in Russia's Sverdlovsk region near the Ural mountains.

Anastasia said that the local recruitment office in Sverdlovsk "strongly advised" the newly mobilized soldiers to bring their own gear, despite statements from the defence ministry that all mobilized soldiers will be dressed and equipped.

For some Russians, the shortages in basic equipment feed the growing realization that their military, lauded before the invasion as a world-class fighting force, has turned out to be painfully underprepared for the war.

“It is bad enough that our men are being taken from us,” said Anastasia, a teacher from Bryansk, a Russian city less than 100 miles from the border with Ukraine.

According to a report by the business outlet Kommersant, prices for bulletproof vests have risen by 500%, and they are now selling for as much as 50,000 rubles (£710). Similar increases in price have been seen for helmets and basic camping equipment.

“Our stock is empty. Sleeping bags sold out two days after the mobilisation was announced,” said Aleksei, the owner of a hiking and outdoors shop in Ekaterinburg, Russia’s fourth biggest city.

“We only have a few winter boots lying around and two tents. This has never happened to us before.”

What little gear that the army does issue to newly mobilized soldiers appear to be outdated or outright inadequate.

Comment – Now escalate these comments up to military equipment and replenishment capability. Russia withdrew 1960’s-era tanks from storage that need to be serviced in order to be operable. They cannot even service existing armored equipment in the field, so how they are going to accomplish this remains to be seen. So, here we have decrepit equipment, unwilling and untrained troops, lethargic command, a sense of defeat permeating throughout Russian military ranks and winter already here, a recipe for disaster.

Containment

Lawmakers could rush through \$50 billion in aid for Ukraine before a possible GOP-led Congress can block it - Lawmakers are considering sending \$50 billion to Ukraine as quickly as possible, NBC reported. They are said to be wary that the looming midterms could make passing such a measure impossible.

Kevin McCarthy said this week that GOP control would be an obstacle to getting funds to Ukraine.

Comment – This is precisely what Putin is waiting for, German political coalition troubles, new Italian government, Liz Truss stepping down and the US Congress reversing direction. GOP sentiment was addressed and is being addressed by a number of GOP heavyweights such as Pence, who has come out against the McCarthy position.

Russia rages after son of Putin official is nabbed on U.S. charges - The Kremlin is threatening retaliatory action after authorities arrested Artyom Uss, the son of a top Russian official, at the United States’ request, for allegedly participating in a sanctions evasion and money laundering scheme.

Uss, who was detained in Milan, was charged in relation to a scheme to unlawfully obtain U.S. military technology and sanctioned Venezuelan oil in order to support Russia’s war effort in Ukraine, according to charges unsealed by the U.S. Department of Justice this week.

“We are categorically against this, and we condemn the practice of these kinds of arrests of Russian citizens,” Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

Uss’ father, the governor of Russia’s Krasnoyarsk Krai region, Alexander Uss, has suggested the arrest is politically motivated, according to TASS.

Another Russian government spokesperson, Maria Zakharova, said Moscow would not leave the United States’ search for Russians “unanswered” and accused the U.S. of “taking hostages for “political purposes,” TASS reported.

Uss wasn't the only one charged in the money laundering and smuggling scheme. Uss co-owned a trading company called Nord-Deutsche Industrieanlagenbau GmbH (NDA GmbH) which he and co-conspirators allegedly used as a front to ship U.S. defense technology to Russia.

Uss and co-conspirators are accused of using NDA GmbH to ship advanced semiconductors and microprocessors for fighter aircraft, missile systems, smart munitions, radar, and satellites in Russia—some of which have been found in weapons used in the war in Ukraine.

“Some of the same electronic components obtained through the criminal scheme have been found in Russian weapons platforms seized on the battlefield in Ukraine,” the Department of Justice said in an announcement, adding that the accused developed a “sophisticated network” of schemes that “undermined security, economic stability and rule of law around the world.”

The group of co-conspirators also allegedly shipped hundreds of millions of barrels of oil from Venezuela to Russian and Chinese entities, including at least one sanctioned oligarch.

The 12-count indictment charged five Russian nationals in total, including Yury Orekhov, Svetlana Kuzurgasheva, Timofey Telegin, and Sergey Tulyakov. Juan Fernando Serrano Ponce and Juan Carlos Soto were also charged with setting up illegal oil deals for Venezuelan state oil company Petroleos de Venezuela S.A.

One of the co-conspirators openly acknowledged that NDA GmbH was working for a sanctioned oligarch, according to court documents.

Israel's Iron Dome Air Defense System – Ukraine has requested Israel sell it the system, a request backed by the US. Israel however is refusing to do so. Pictured alongside is a schematic of the system.

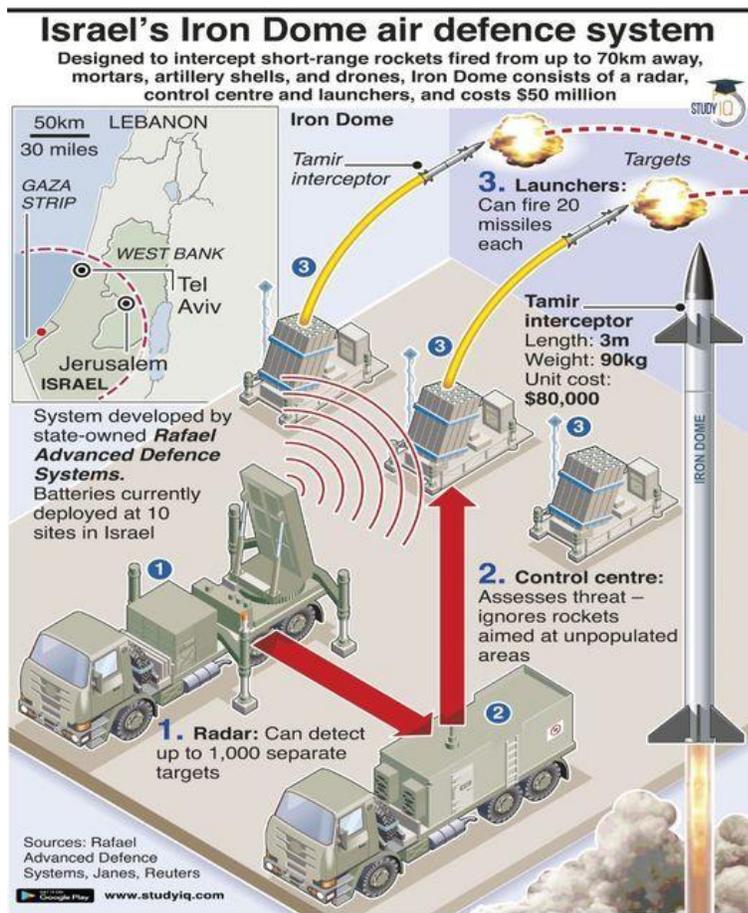
The above is an extract from Update #19 on March 31st this year.

Ukraine, being pounded with Iran-manufactured drones, has again asked for the Israeli system (pictured alongside), and once again Israel is refusing to assist.

This is because they do not want to upset the fragile relationship they have with Russia regarding airspace freedom over Syria, where Russian aircraft patrol. This week however Russia has announced it is withdrawing significant military strength from the Syrian region in support of the failing Ukrainian invasion.

Remains to be seen how this affects the Israeli decision not to help Ukraine.

There are a significant number of people of Jewish faith in both Ukraine and Russia, but more so in the latter. This fact plays heavily on their decision-making as well as the defensive rationale. Russia is holding Israel to georeligious ransom by threatening to close the Jewish Agency in Moscow.



Israel's Netanyahu says he will 'look into' supplying weapons to Ukraine if elected prime minister, could serve as mediator - If former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu returns to power in next month's elections, he will "look into" whether Israel will supply weapons to Ukraine and expects he may be asked to mediate negotiations between Ukraine and Russia, he told USA TODAY in an exclusive interview.

"If I become prime minister, that question (of mediation) presumably will come up again," he said.

How hard is Russia trying to acquire sensitive western military technology? A U.S. indictment provides clues - In late June 2019, a Russian man named Yury Orekhov met in a European hotel with a businessman representing a California-based company involved in consulting and logistics. Orekhov, the co-owner of a German industrial equipment and commodities trading company, told the businessman that he wanted to buy U.S. components to be used in a Russian Sukhoi fighter jet.

According to a U.S. federal indictment unsealed this week, Orekhov allegedly told the unnamed businessman that the paperwork would have to be falsified to show a fake Malaysian company was the purchaser, in order avoid U.S. export restrictions.

Not long after, a Russian woman who worked for Orekhov followed up with the businessman, requesting help to buy sensitive military technologies including "tactical air navigation interrogators and multi-mode receivers, radiation-hardened, military-grade two-terminal temperature transducers."

The sale never went through, according to U.S. prosecutors -- but others arranged by Orekhov's company did, including "a variety of sensitive, military-grade technologies in five transactions totaling over \$250,000" purchased from a New York company between 2018 and 2020.

Those and other details were listed in the indictment dated September 26 but unsealed this week, charging Orekhov and four other Russian citizens with a complex, multiyear scheme to secretly obtain U.S. military technology and circumvent export restrictions. Two other people were also charged in an unrelated scheme to sell Venezuelan oil.

The indictment offers a glimpse into how Russia has struggled for years, if not decades, to acquire sensitive Western technology and military hardware: everything from night-vision goggles for soldiers to powerful computer chips for advanced fighter jets.

How successful the effort has been is an open question. According to news reports and military analysts, sensitive Western technologies are widely employed in Russian weaponry and military equipment.

"Russia's multibillion-dollar, decades-long military modernization program has depended on the extensive use of microelectronics manufactured in the U.S., Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Switzerland, the Netherlands, the U.K., France, and Germany," according to a report published in August by the Royal United Services Institute, a London-based think tank.

Poland buying South Korean made MLRS, continuing Seoul spending spree - Since late July, Poland has inked agreements with South Korea to purchase 1,000 K2 tanks, 672 K9 self-propelled howitzers, and 48 FA-50 light combat aircraft, along with the MLRS announcement today.

Poland on Wednesday accepted the first batch of its new South Korean-made tanks and howitzers at a ceremony in Seoul, while signing yet another weapons deal with local industry — after key Polish officials were blocked from attending due to what seems to be a power play by China.

The Polish government delegation, led by Mariusz Błaszczak, Poland's Deputy PM and Minister of National Defense, planned to make the visit on Oct. 17, to participate in the delivery ceremony for the first K2 Black Panther tanks and

K9A1 Thunder self-propelled howitzers, and sign a new K239 Chunmoo rocket artillery system supply contract. According to Poland's official statement, the trip was cancelled because of technical malfunction of the aircraft.

But Polish website onet.pl, citing the Korean television station SBS News and the Yonhap agency, said the visit was canceled after the Chinese government refused to allow a Polish aircraft to pass through Chinese airspace.

US signs \$78 million deal to maintain Taiwan's Patriot air defense system - Taipei has signed a deal with Washington to maintain the island's MIM-104 Patriot air defense system for another five years, a Taiwanese authority posting revealed on Thursday.

The deal was announced on the Taiwanese Defense Ministry's online procurement platform, according to the South China Morning Post (SCMP), which first reported the story.

According to the Hong Kong-based paper, a source in the Taiwanese military said that the deal calls for engineering teams from Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, two US defense contractors, to be positioned in Taiwan "for the long term."

"The group's posting [to Taiwan] will not only help improve servicing of the Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) missiles but also ensure timely servicing for our systems," said the paper's insider source.

The deal was reportedly made after the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) fired 11 missiles over Taiwan during August military drills, which were held in response to a visit to the island by US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA). During the visit, Pelosi, the third-highest ranking US official, spoke with Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen and condemned the People's Republic of China (PRC) for trying to reunify with the island.

U.S., Russian defense ministers discuss Ukraine invasion in rare phone call - The U.S. and Russian defense ministers -- Lloyd Austin and Sergei Shoigu -- today discussed the current situation in Ukraine in a phone call that the Pentagon said was aimed at keeping the lines of communication open.

"Secretary Austin emphasized the importance of maintaining lines of communication amid the ongoing war against Ukraine," Pentagon spokesman Brigadier General Pat Ryder said in a statement following the phone call.

Austin separately spoke with his Ukrainian counterpart, Oleksiy Reznikov, "to reiterate the unwavering U.S. commitment to supporting Ukraine's ability to counter Russia's aggression," Ryder said in a statement later today.

A spokeswoman for the Department of Defense said Austin initiated the call with Shoigu and said Friday offered the best opportunity for the two sides to speak but did not explain why that was the case. She did not say whether any additional talks were scheduled between the two.

Impacts

Wood is also running into a Russia problem - Russia is retaliating against sanctions by stopping the export of Russian birch. Paper and packaging companies that buy pulp are going to struggle as pulp prices rise even beyond the goods mania of 2021.

Pulp producers and timber companies are better off, and this mitigates problems for wood.

Are Russia and Saudi Arabia collaborating against the US? - THE Saudi-led oil cartel OPEC+'s announcement earlier this month that it was cutting 2 million barrels of oil per day — a move that would drive up the price of oil just a month before midterm elections — rankled Democrats in Washington. They accused Riyadh of aligning itself with Russia, another powerful member of OPEC+, which would indeed profit off the move. "What Saudi Arabia did to help

Putin continue to wage his despicable, vicious war against Ukraine will long be remembered by Americans,” said Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

But Saudi Arabia actually pushed to cut oil production twice as much as Putin, surprising the Russians, two Saudi sources with knowledge of the negotiations told The Intercept, suggesting that Riyadh’s motives run deeper than what top Democrats want to admit. The sources requested anonymity, fearing reprisal by the Saudi government.

Public reporting has hinted at Saudi’s Arabia’s drive for a far more aggressive production cut than Russia as well as other OPEC+ members first sought. On September 27, Reuters reported that Russia favored a 1 million barrel per day cut — just half of what would later be agreed upon. Then on October 5, OPEC+ announced that it would be cutting 2 million barrels a day. On October 14, the White House’s National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby said that “more than one” OPEC+ members disagreed about the cut but were coerced by Saudi Arabia into going along with it — but he declined to specify which countries.

OPEC+ members who privately pushed back against the cut include Kuwait, Iraq, Bahrain, and even the United Arab Emirates, a close ally of Saudi Arabia’s, according to the Wall Street Journal. These countries reportedly feared that the production cuts could lead to a recession that would ultimately reduce demand for oil.

Saudi Arabia, a putative ally, pushed for even deeper cuts than what Russia, a U.S. adversary, even believed they could get away with, the sources said. “People in D.C. think MBS is siding with Putin, but I think MBS is even more Putinian than Putin,” one of the sources, a Saudi close to the royal family, said, referring to Saudi Arabia’s de facto ruler, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

While Saudi Arabia has maintained that the move was motivated solely by economic interests, the White House and other top Democrats have said that the Saudis are pursuing a conscious alignment with Russia. “The Saudi foreign ministry can try to spin or deflect, but the facts are simple,” Kirby said, alleging that “they knew” that the oil production cut would “increase Russian revenues and blunt the effectiveness of sanctions” against Russia amid its invasion of Ukraine.

Comment – A confidential Chinese source of this mine mentioned that China is, in creating its new bi-polar universe, looking to the Middle East for inclusion in this direction. High up its pecking order is Saudi Arabia, together with Iran and Venezuela as oil-producing countries. From MBS’ behavior it appears that he is leaning that way.

But he seems to forget that back in 1948 when President Truman visited the Saudi Kingdom to secure oil for the US and for it to be traded in US\$, he in return guaranteed Saudi security.

This has continued to this day. Neither Russia nor China can adequately replace the US as a supplier of military equipment to the Saudi’s – I am sure he has been reminded of this, but perhaps a public rebuke will teach this geopolitical novice a lesson in statesmanship – and dependency.

A strange hodge-podge this because the Saudi’s and Iranians have long been in conflict to gain the upper hand in Middle East politics and influence, with the latter being a Shia Muslim country whereas the former is a Sunni Muslim nation. MBS will need to ensure he remains on the right side of American largesse, given the downside of not being in favor.

Not a situation the Saudi royal family will relish I imagine, with Middle East proxy enemies abounding.

Stranger things have happened in the Middle East over the past half-century. One would think the Saudi’s are students of history, and if not, they should quickly brush up, for the winds of change may be upon them pretty soon.

Expanding trouble spots

With eye on Turkey, Greece opens Israeli-built flight school - Greece on Friday launched operations at a new international pilot training center created in partnership with Israel, as it tries to build on its relative air power advantage over regional rival Turkey.

Israeli defense contractor Elbit, which finalized a \$1.65 billion deal with Greece's government, assisted by Israel, last year, will help run the facility located on an air force base outside the southern Greek city of Kalamata.

Greece is undertaking an armed forces modernization program largely focused on its air force, as it hopes to outpace Turkey. Athens is acquiring advanced French-built Rafale jets, upgrading its aging fleet of F-16 fighter jets and wants to join the United States' F-35 jet program.

Turkey was dropped from the F-35 program after its purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system.

NATO members Greece and Turkey remain at odds over sea boundaries and the military presence on eastern Greek islands that Ankara maintains violates international treaties.

The new training center started operating Friday with 14 of an expected 25 T-6 single-engine turboprop aircraft. The fleet is set to expand next year with the delivery of 19 Italian-built M-346 training jets equipped with embedded virtual avionics that simulate combat and flight scenarios.

Norway points finger at 'foreign intelligence' after arrest of several Russians for suspicious drone flights - Norway's Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Store says foreign intelligence services are behind a recent slew of "unacceptable" drone flights in the country.

Store's comments on October 19 came after Norwegian police announced the arrest of a Russian who is accused of illegally flying a drone in the Svalbard archipelago in the Arctic region.

Andrei Yakunin, the son of ex-Russian Railways boss Vladimir Yakunin, a close confidant of President Vladimir Putin, was arrested on October 17 in Hammerfest in northern Norway.

"The suspect has admitted flying a drone in Svalbard," police official Anja Mikkelsen said.

Yakunin has been placed in custody for two weeks, and drones and electronics in his possession have been confiscated, police said.

He was the seventh Russian arrested in the past few days suspected of illegally flying drones or taking photos in restricted areas in the Scandinavian country.

Hours earlier a drone was observed near the airport in Bergen, Norway's second-biggest city, briefly suspending air traffic.

Bergen Airport, which is near Norway's main naval base, shut down at around 6:30 a.m. when the area's air space was closed. It reopened 2 ½ hours later.

Geopolitics

Taiwan continues to reject reunification as China's leader makes it a priority - Taiwan has responded to Chinese leader Xi Jinping's remarks at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China, reiterating that Taiwanese people reject the policy of 'One Country, Two Systems' pursued by China.

In his opening speech on Sunday, Xi said the CPC will "unswervingly advance the cause of national reunification."

He outlined official policy towards Taiwan that includes a firm warning on the use of force "directed solely at interference by outside forces and the few separatists seeking 'Taiwan independence' and their separatist activities."

"Resolving the Taiwan question is a matter for the Chinese, a matter that must be resolved by the Chinese," stated Xi, who also serves as Chairman of the Central Military Commission.

"We will continue to strive for peaceful reunification with the greatest sincerity and the utmost effort, but we will never promise to renounce the use of force, and we reserve the option of taking all measures necessary," he said.

Hitting back at Xi Jinping's speech, Taiwan's Presidential Office Spokesperson Chang Tun-han said "the Republic of China is a sovereign and independent country, and democracy and freedom are the belief and persistence of the Taiwanese people."

Humanitarian

Ukrainians risk lives to save cats, goats, and a dog named Crimea - Dogs, cats, and even goats have been evacuated from combat zones in Ukraine, including a dog called Crimea that was the sole survivor of a Russian missile attack on a family home in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro.

When viewing TV images and stories of Ukrainian evacuations over the past eight months, hundreds of stories surround Ukrainians carrying their pets with them.

It is a constant sight to see cats and small dogs in carriers being taken out of conflict zones. Very satisfying to see.