

# Conflict Update

*March 21<sup>st</sup>, 2022*

## Endgame

The conflict in Ukraine is underway on two levels: one is the bilateral level – a war between Russia and Ukraine intended to impose Russian influence on its western neighbor. The second is the regional and global level, with the United States and NATO members against Russia: this is a conflict over spheres of influence in Europe and the rules of the game in the international system. Putin wants to extend Russian influence into East European countries and block the eastward spread of NATO. Opposing it, the United States is fighting for its global status and the security of its allies, together with a fear of the consequences of hostilities with Russia for the competition between the powers, mainly between itself and China. (The Times of Israel).

The United States is publicly refusing to negotiate with Russia, but is allowing bilateral talks between Russia and Ukraine, as well as mediation attempts.

As it becomes harder to promote the Russian objective in the struggle with the West, and as Russian war plans are disrupted, it appears that Putin is ready to negotiate with the Ukrainian leadership, even though he sees it as lacking legitimacy.

**From within** – any change to the Russian elite will need to come from within. The Russian people have a history of Russians are used to turmoil and instability. They endured cruel social experiments during the 20th century, and the early 21st, performed upon them by their own political leadership. Except for the rare example of Mikhail Gorbachev, Russian leadership during that period was never democratic.

Not all Russians support the war in Ukraine and the government that dragged them into it. But all Russians are suffering from the sanctions and the crisis. Their common suffering is a dangerous thing: It is all too familiar; it makes them angry, and some are eager to strike back.

The possibility of this stems from the Russian national mindset, crafted in Soviet times and now affecting even generations that grew up in post-Soviet Russia. Western freedoms are only partially appealing, since historically, Russians never had them – not freedom of speech, self-determination, religion nor unrestricted travel.

## Conflict Assessment

**Russian forces** - Russian forces did not make any major advances on March 20 and around Kyiv are establishing defensive positions, preparing to deploy further artillery and fire control assets. Ukrainian forces repelled continuing efforts to seize the city of Izyum, southeast of Kharkiv, and Russian forces did not conduct any other offensive operations in northeast Ukraine, although they continue to make slow but steady progress on Luhansk Oblast and around Mariupol but did not conduct any offensive operations towards Mykolayiv or Kryvyi Rih. (ISW).

Ukrainian General Staff reported for the first time that the Kremlin is preparing its population for a “long war” and implementing increasingly draconian mobilization measures, including deploying youth military organization members aged 17-18.

Ukrainian forces reportedly killed three Russian regimental commanders in the last 24 hours.

Russia's Wagner Group will likely facilitate the deployment of Libyan fighters to Ukraine.

Russian forces are digging in to positions around Kyiv, including the first reports of the war of Russian forces deploying minefields.

Ukrainian forces repelled a Russian assault on Izyum, southeast of Kharkiv, and inflicted heavy casualties.

Russian military commissariats of the Kuban, Primorsky Krai, Yaroslavl Oblast, and Ural Federal Districts in Russia are conducting covert mobilization measures but are facing widespread resistance. This is because the Russian High Command cannot muster sufficient "warm bodies" to throw into the conflict.

Their forces face mounting casualties among officers and increasingly frequent desertion and insubordination. The Ukrainian Ministry of Defense reported on March 19 that "some [Russian] naval infantry units" (unspecified which, but likely referring to Eastern Military District units deployed to the fighting around Kyiv) have lost up to 90% of their personnel and cannot generate replacements.

Ukrainian military intelligence claimed another group of Chechnyan mercenaries aims to eliminate Ukraine's top military and political leadership, including Volodymyr Zelensky, Andriy Yermak, and Denys Shmyhal. The GUR claimed Russia is turning to assassination plans due to the failure of Russian conventional operations.

Russian commanders are also reluctant or incapable of cross-country maneuvering, and, as a result, they are restricted on roads, making the life of the Ukrainian defenders that much easier.

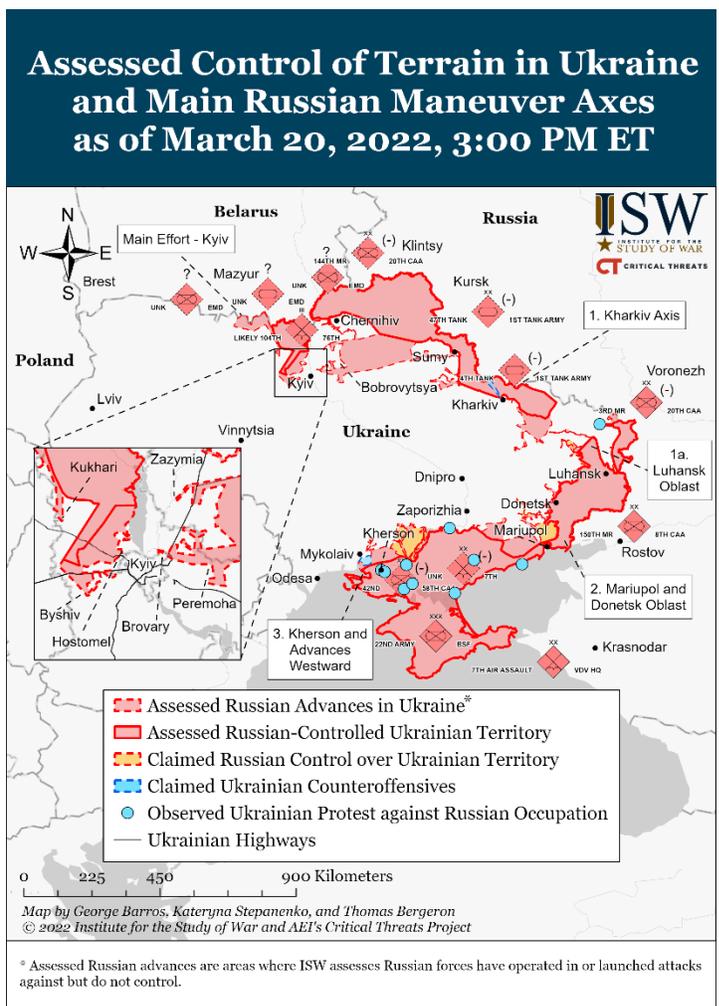
### Ukraine Will Pay Russian Pilots \$1 Million Bounty to Defect

## Widening of Conflict

**Russian frustration** - Ukrainian military officials say the use of the Kinzhal missiles further highlights how Russia has failed to meet strategic battlefield goals with conventional ground forces and is intensifying both indiscriminate bombing of civilian infrastructure and the use of high-precision strikes to try to terrorize Ukraine and break its will to resist.

Chechnya fighters imported for their ferocity appear to have been routed by Ukrainian forces and have reportedly been withdrawn back to Russia.

While Russian forces make some progress in the south of the country, if haltingly, they remain stalled in the north of the country and may have given up for now trying to press into Kyiv. This may and more than likely will lead to an escalation in indiscriminate missile and long-distance sheeling attacks.



**Russian-speaking areas** – Should Russia use similar justification for invading neighboring countries as was done by Hitler in the 1930’s and by Russia in the current conflict, there are many regions where Russian is the primary language, or where ethnic Russian groups exist.

Referring to the map alongside, one can observe the red areas which populate Moldova, Latvia, Estonia and Ukraine.

There are already approximately 1,500 Russian “peacekeepers” in Transnistria in eastern Moldova, who have been there since 1992. In Lithuania, Russian is still the 2<sup>nd</sup> most popular language spoken with around 5% of Lithuanians being “Russian”.

Russian speaking elements include Latvia (34%), Estonia (29%), Kazakhstan (21%), Moldova (10%) and Kyrgyzstan (9%).

**Mariupol** – Russian command has announced the impending collapse of Ukrainian resistance in the city of Mariupol which has been suffering constant barrages of missile and artillery attack since the conflict began.

Reports state that the city is essentially non-existent and flattened with the remaining citizens hiding in underground bunkers and basements.

Russia has announced they will lift the cordon around the city of it capitulates and admit rations and medical supplies to enter.

However, should they not surrender, then Russia will start holding military tribunals – more than likely seeing executions take place.

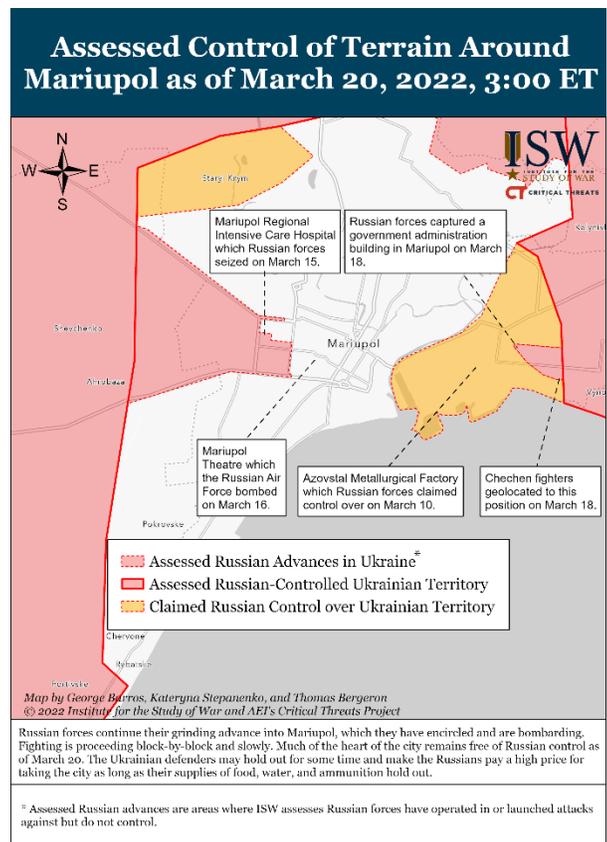
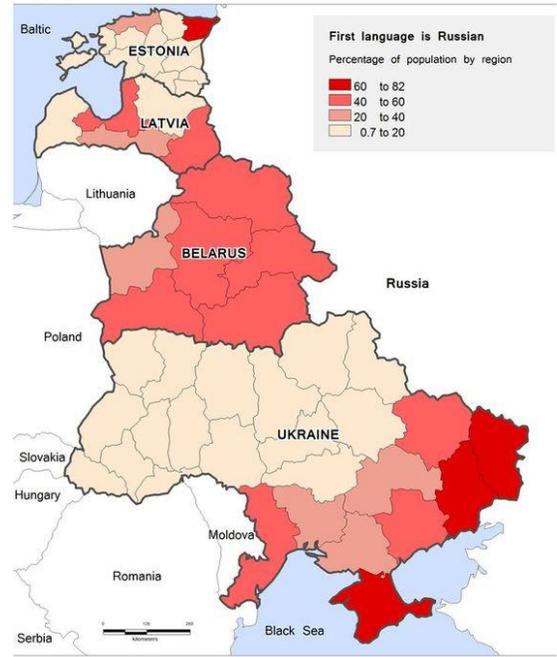
The mayor of Mariupol has advised that the city will not capitulate and will fight on.

Expect to see dramatic increases in the number of civilian casualties and military executions of captured Ukrainian men.

**Russian Navy Joins the Bombardment of Mariupol** - Russian warships have joined in the bombardment of the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, adding naval firepower to a weeklong campaign of indiscriminate shelling and bombing.

The Azov Brigade, a far-right Ukrainian unit based in Mariupol, reported Sunday that four Russian naval vessels had arrived off the coast and were attacking the city. These assets add to the artillery of Russia’s 8th Combined Arms Army, which has been shelling Mariupol since the beginning of the invasion on February 24. (Maritime Executive).

**China** - China has called for verification of Russian claims of US bioweapons help to Ukraine. This is a spreading of Russian disinformation regarding bioweapons. NATO fully expects Russia to continue along this path and to use it to justify their use of such weapons.



Russia claims the US operates a biowarfare lab in Ukraine, an accusation Washington and Kyiv have repeatedly denied. The war has raised the risk of an escape of disease-causing pathogen from its labs should the conventional medical facilities be damaged.

**Estonia** - NATO should intervene if Russia uses weapons of mass destruction, Estonia's chief of defense says.

**Armenia** - Armenian analyst Tigran Grigorian believes that "Russia, isolated from the West, will try to increase its influence in the regions it [already] controls." This could entail attempts to deepen and expand the integration processes within Russia-led regionalist projects. As Grigorian warned, this would further restrict Armenia's sovereignty.

Prominent Armenian analysts Pietro Shakarian and Benjamin Poghosian, in a piece in the Russian media, appealed to Moscow "to strengthen the strategic alliance between Russia and Armenia, with the aim of preventing Turkey, and by extension NATO, from establishing any domination in the post-Soviet Transcaucasia [South Caucasus]

**Azerbaijan** – it's alliance with Turkey is a guarantee against any adverse geopolitical situation in the region. Baku and Ankara are building up their military ties in the aftermath of the 2020 Second Karabakh War and, in particular, since they signed a declaration on allied relations in June 2021

## Containment

**Russian troops digging in** - Satellite imagery released by Maxar Technologies, a space technology and earth-observation company, appears to show the Russians building protective dirt berms near the villages of Ozera, of Zdvzyhivka and Berestyanka, northwest of Kyiv, and around Antonov Air Base.

**'Honest' Belarusians Are Cutting Russian Supplies By Train** – On March 17, Ukrainian presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych called on civilians in the conflict area to conduct a "railway war" against Russia by destroying rail lines and equipment, particularly in Crimea, other parts of southern Ukraine, eastern Ukraine, and near Belarus.

At present there are no trains moving Russian supplies and reinforcements into Ukraine because of the partisan attacks in Belarus.

**French Aircraft Carrier** - The French Navy aircraft carrier Charles de Gaulle and its air wing has started supporting NATO's enhanced Vigilance Activities in the Black Sea region following a short logistical stop in Cyprus. the French carrier strike group (CSG) stopped a few days in Cyprus, and went back to sea on March 2nd, heading to the central Mediterranean sea. The French CSG is thus actively reinforcing the defense and dissuasive posture of NATO in Eastern Europe.

US and French naval forces, led by two aircraft carriers, are conducting drills in the Aegean Sea off Greece in the midst of the military conflict in Ukraine.

The presence of the aircraft carriers off Greece is intended to monitor Russian naval forces in the eastern Mediterranean and conduct reconnaissance missions on behalf of NATO allies in the Balkans.

## Russian Concerns

**'Turmoil' in Putin's inner circle** – Increasing reports are being picked up by reliable US and NATO intelligence sources that there is a growing unease with Putin in Russian elite circles. Russian elites are allegedly planning to remove President Vladimir Putin, according to Ukrainian intelligence, with a successor already in mind.

The Chief Directorate claims that Putin and Bortkinov have recently had a falling out, with the Russian president blaming his subordinate for the country's difficulties in taking over Ukraine. Bortkinov is now reportedly working with the group of Russian elites in devising potential ways to remove Putin.

**Kill rate of Russian soldiers and commanders** – It appears that Russia is sending dead and injured soldiers to Belarussian morgues and hospitals in order to (i) access rapid medical treatment and (ii) not disclose the dramatic number killed and injured to the Russian people, particularly Russian mothers.

Examples hereof are (i) there's no room in the morgue at Mazyr, filled with the bodies of Russian soldiers, (ii) at one hospital in this Belarussian city about 60 kilometers from the border with Ukraine, the hallways and wards are filled with the sounds of soldiers moaning from their battlefield wounds and (iii) at the main train station, Russian soldiers have been recorded on video ferrying stretchers -- apparently holding wounded servicemen -- from a military ambulance to a waiting train operated by Russia's state railway company.

Passengers at the Mazyr train station were shocked by the number of corpses being loaded on the train," he said. "After people started shooting video, the military caught them and ordered them to remove it."

Ukraine's military claims that more than 14,000 Russians have been killed since Russia launched the invasion, although US estimates are around 7,500.

The deputy commander of Russia's Black Sea Fleet has been killed in battle near the Ukrainian port city of Mariupol, the Kremlin-installed governor of the Russia-occupied city of Sevastopol said.

Fifth Russian General Killed After Kherson Command Post Destroyed, Officials Say

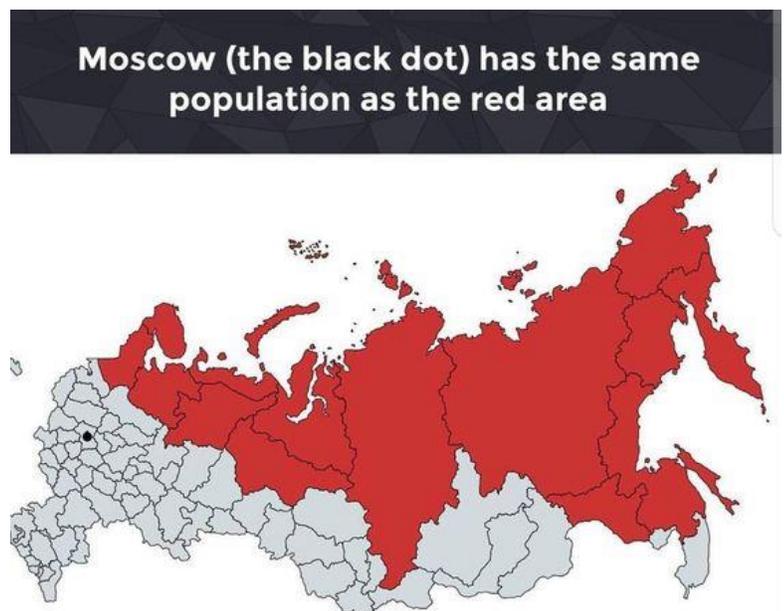
For the sake of comparison, the Russian military has lost more troops in three weeks of fighting than the U.S. military lost in over two decades of war in Iraq and Afghanistan combined.

**Desertion rates** – Russia is seeing increasing desertion rates and have sent "enforcement units" in behind regular army units to try and execute any deserters. They are also seeing increasing resistance by recruiters looking to enlist further soldiers for the conflict.

Russia will need to draw upon a concentrated population area in the west of the country as population density is extremely sparse the further east they go. See map to the right.

**75% Committed** - Russia Has Committed 75 Percent of Its Total Military to Ukraine. An unidentified U.S. "senior defense official" offered another briefing and made an eye-popping assessment of how much of Russia's overall military is devoted to the invasion of Ukraine.

**Russian military personnel** - consist of four primary groups: (i) **officers**, (ii) (a small pool of) **non-commissioned officers**, (iii) **contracted personnel** and (iv) **conscripts**. Historically, conscription has been used in Russia to ensure that a large portion of the population has military training in case of mobilization for a major war, and to cut costs associated with maintaining a military large enough to defend the country. They are also generally prohibited from being deployed abroad. Today, Russia requires all male citizens aged 18 to 27 to register for conscription, normally for the term of a year, and then move into a mandatory reserve status.



Currently, most estimates hold that approximately 25 percent of the Russian military is made up of conscripts, with the number varying within each military service and between unit types. And though Russia has attempted to move toward a professional army — primarily to increase the level of training and expertise in the force — the country must balance professionalization with its need to maintain a large military.

Public support for conscription is limited in Russia, and the deployment of conscripts is controversial. Conscripts are generally less capable than their contracted counterparts, as their service period limits their training. And although a longer conscription period would lead to a more capable conscript force, such a decision would prove unpopular with the Russian public. Thus, when used, conscripted service members are generally seen in roles requiring less technical expertise, like logistics, which has already proved a key sticking point in Russia's advance across Ukraine.

Furthermore, the use of conscripts in active combat will impact wide swaths of Russian families and is likely to draw a negative reaction from the broader public as casualties grow. During the Soviet-Afghan War in the 1980s, Soviet leadership was so concerned about public outcry over casualties and about denying the reality of war that it sent home soldiers killed in action in sealed zinc coffins. The comparison is unlikely to be far from anyone's mind.

If purposeful, the Russian military's use of conscripts despite all these drawbacks is an indication of how easy they thought the campaign would be. Conscripts are not often found in elite units, and early assessments of Russian operational plans suggest that elite units were expected to secure areas quickly and without much resistance. However, with the Ukrainian military's unexpected performance, Russia has had to push more units into combat, and it is unlikely it would have used conscripts if they did not think them necessary — thus, their involvement could also be a sign that attempts to fill military personnel needs with contract soldiers have failed.

**The Russian diaspora not supporting Russia in the conflict** - isn't showing much support for Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Members of diaspora communities often mobilize to provide support to their ancestral homeland during a crisis. While the Russian invasion of Ukraine is a crisis for Ukrainians, it's also a crisis for Russia, and thousands have been detained for protesting the war.

Russian authorities continue to justify the invasion of Ukraine by promoting two bogus interrelated victim narratives. First, Russia says it's protecting Russians who live in Ukraine from genocide by "neo-Nazis and drug addicts." Second, it says it's facing a security threat from NATO after its expansion into the former Soviet republics of Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia and its potential expansion into Ukraine.

Part of the reason why Russia's diaspora mobilization strategy amid the Ukraine war seems to be bearing so little fruit is that the Russian diaspora is based mostly on a common language with an ambiguous connection to the Russian state.

The Russian diaspora is actually made up of three quite different strands of people — Russians who live in former Soviet republics, Russians who have immigrated to the West from those republics and Russians who have left Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. **None of them seem to be publicly mobilizing to support Russia.**

This must create at least some alarm for the global Russian diaspora. So should indiscriminate Russian mortar attacks on civilian targets in many cities in Ukraine that have large Russian-speaking populations.

## Chinese Concerns

**Xi "unsettled"** - Xi Jinping 'is unsettled' by invasion, CIA director says. US spy chief William Burns says Xi's own intelligence community 'doesn't appear to have told him what was going to happen,' and admit that, despite predicting Putin's invasion plans, they had underestimated Ukraine's ability to defend itself.

China overestimated Russia's ability to achieve a decisive victory over Ukraine, Moscow overestimated Beijing's support and the US overestimated Russian military prowess, top US intelligence chiefs told senators on Thursday as they assessed the unfolding crisis.

Putin's invasion has undercut President Xi's goals by knocking global growth as China's economy wobbles, they added. And by driving Western allies closer together, Moscow has undercut Beijing's ability to play one off against the other and has seriously damaged China's reputation by its association with Russia.

**US/Chinese call** - the conversation was direct, substantive and detailed. The two leaders discussed Russia's unprovoked and unjustified invasion of Ukraine, as well as the implications of the crisis for U.S.-China relations and the international order.

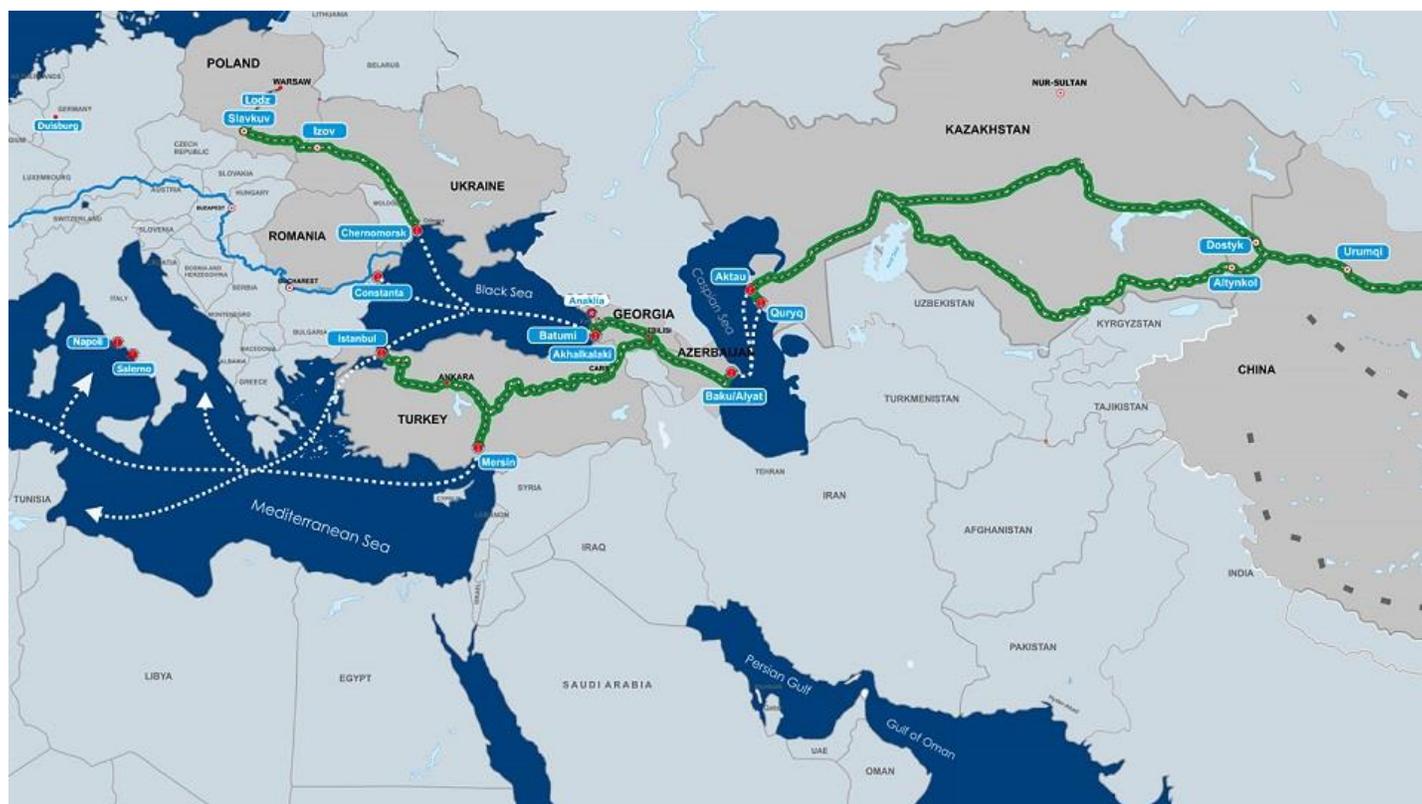
President Biden shared with President Xi a detailed review of how things have developed to this point, his assessment of the situation today, and President Biden underscored his support for a diplomatic resolution to the crisis.

Biden described the US assessment of Putin's actions and miscalculations, and the unity of the US and its Allies and partners, the unprecedented coordination with its European, NATO, and Indo-Pacific partners, and the overwhelming global unity and condemnation of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, as well as the support for Ukraine.

President Biden made clear the implication and consequences of China providing material support to Russia as it prosecutes its brutal war in Ukraine, not just for China's relationship with the United States but for the wider world.

**Bottlenecks and limitations on China's BRI** - Volumes transiting through northern routes passing through Russia - the "Middle Corridor" - are approximately 1,5 million TEUs and concerning for China. (Railfreight.com).

"The port of Constanța is heavily congested" with two consequences: (i) choose this route and add the slow lead times with waiting times in Romania, using rail in the European part of the route **is not feasible**, or consider using trucks



between Romania and central Europe,” or (ii) if this alternative to the already congested route proves unviable, then China cannot use Eurasian rail. This is a major concern for the Chinese as the Eurasian rail link is an instrumental element of the multi-trillion-dollar BRI investment, aside from the vital strategic advantage they plan to achieve.

**Chinese foreign policy strategy** - Xi's ill-advised support for Moscow on the eve of Russia's disastrous military campaign is not his first major foreign policy misstep. His decision to retaliate against EU officials last March in response to sanctions over human rights abuses in Xinjiang cost Beijing a long-coveted investment deal with Europe. His threats toward Taiwan are driving Washington and Taipei closer together and forcing other regional powers, such as Australia and Japan, to declare their own compelling interest in Taiwan's security. And the Chinese military's 2020 clash with the Indian army in the Galwan Valley galvanized hardline opinion in New Delhi. These mounting failures highlight an increasingly evident trend: the more powerful Xi becomes and the more direct authority he exerts over Beijing's foreign policy, the more adverse the outcomes are for China's long-term strategic interests. (Foreign Affairs).

**China is quietly making life harder for Russia** - with Russia's economy being slammed with sanctions from all over the world, there is growing evidence that China's willingness and ability to aid its northern neighbor may be limited. Beijing has refused to condemn Russia's attack on Ukraine but wants to avoid being impacted by the sanctions it has repeatedly denounced as an ineffective way of resolving the crisis.

## Nuclear Threat

**Glasgow** – Glasgow was oblivious as an unmarked military convoy carrying 'up to six' nuclear warheads passed through the city over the weekend amid heightened tensions over Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

**Russia** – it is being increasingly reported by Russia experts that the more Putin feels boxed in and without a success off ramp, the more he will be inclined to introduce unorthodox weapons such as biological and nuclear devices, particularly tactical nuclear warheads.

Some of the NATO ramping up exercise have been of anti-nuke systems.

## Financial

**Bulgaria** - signals historic shift from Russian gas. In a potentially historic move that could redraw the European energy map, the country's Deputy Prime Minister Asen Vassilev said that when Bulgaria's 10-year deal with Gazprom expires at the end of 2022, Sofia will look elsewhere to meet its natural gas needs.

**Britain** - will be using North Sea oil and gas for "decades to come" as the Government puts energy security and the cost of living at the top of its agenda. The words also provide a hint that the Government is prepared to have a rethink on shale gas and fracking with exploration company Cuadrilla last week offered a 12-month reprieve from blocking up its two wells with concrete to allow for the issue to be reconsidered.

**US Interest rates** - The Fed started a new interest rate hike cycle. Interest rates are now expected to be raised from 0% to 2.8% by 2023. Chairman Powell is sounding very hawkish.

## Impacts

**Thai submarine purchase from China** - Thailand's Chinese submarine order hits snag after Germany's export embargo on MTU engines. The first Yuan Class S26T worth US\$408 million is being assembled without German engines as promised, said a Thai opposition lawmaker. German military attaché says German engines cannot be used in Chinese military and defense items.

**North Macedonia and Albania** – Russia has threatened Bosnia should they join the EU. The EU's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, says the bloc should start formal accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania as soon as possible to enhance the security and defense of the Balkans as concerns that Russia's invasion of Ukraine will create volatility throughout the region.

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** – has asked for an accelerated start to EU membership. Bosnian Foreign Minister Bisera Turkovic and her German counterpart Annalena Baerbock have agreed that the process to approve Bosnia-Herzegovina's status as candidate for European Union membership must be accelerated in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Russia is now threatening to repeat the aggression it unleashed against Ukraine in Bosnia and Herzegovina if the country joins NATO.

**Stranded yachts** - Former Russian secret service agent's massive \$80 million explorer yacht is desperately stranded in Norway as no one is willing to sell it fuel.

Almost half a dozen superyachts owned by billionaire oligarchs linked to Russian President Vladimir Putin have been seized around the world ever since Russia invaded Ukraine. However, even the ones that are not on the EU's stringent sanctions list are facing the consequences of the war. An explorer superyacht that belongs to Russian oligarch Vladimir Strzhalkovsky is being made to feel unwelcomed in Norway.