

Conflict Update # 339

January 28th, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses¹ – 125,510 (800) soldiers killed, 3,189 (+7) enemy tanks, 6,344 (+4) armored combat vehicles, 2,188 (+8) artillery systems, 453 (+1) MLRS systems, 221 (+0) air defense systems, 293 (+1) warplanes, 284 (+1) helicopters, 1,947 (+6) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 796 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,027 (+26) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 199 (+0) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways

By the numbers – Another huge day of losses for Russia.

Reviewing information gleaned last night regarding the number of Russian injured, it appears I have significantly underestimated their injury attrition rate. Using what I believed, for good reason, to be a 1:2 ratio in killed versus injured as opposed to the conventional war ratio of 1:3, it appears the latter is actually evident and factual.

It was yesterday reported that 124,710 Russian soldiers have perished thus far in the invasion – but also that 374,215 have been injured, totaling an overall attrition rate of over half a million men and women.

190,000 invaded on February 24th last year, and with two scheduled conscription anniversary dates and Putin's late-September 2022 partial mobilization of 300,000, the total Russian manpower force is/was 900,000 across its military divisions, in toto.

This means that some 55% of all Russian forces have been either killed or injured – an absolutely horrendous rate of loss. This is going to force the Kremlin to mobilize additional troops, they have no option.

There are also a reported 1,000 Russian prisoners of war and an untold number deserting to Ukraine.

When including the huge quantity of ground, naval and air equipment lost, one can immediately see the dire straits Russia, Putin and the Kremlin find themselves in.

This doesn't bode well as Putin will be getting desperate, and desperation leads to desperate measures.

If he feels cornered, just like Japan did in 1941, he may strike out with weapons of mass destruction.

Contemporary messages coming out of the Kremlin and informed Russian media sources, are increasingly referring to NATO as being directly involved, depleted uranium shells being supplied by the US to Ukraine, and Crimea being part and parcel of Russia, among other topics of threat and war.

These all speak to a growing Russian narrative of being existentially under threat and attack by the West.

As the invasion extends, the sense of nationalism among Russian people, coupled with a complete news blackout of accurate and fact-based reporting, will grow exponentially and will see a (Russian) swing behind the "Putin Message." This is a natural phenomenon of rationalization. We can expect to see a hardening of Russian Main Street emotion.

This in turn points to a longer, harder and more desperate Russian approach to their Ukrainian dilemma.

February 24th 2023 looming - With the first (Russian) anniversary of their illegal invasion of Ukraine looming large, Putin and the Kremlin will endeavor to find something to declare as a success when turning the proverbial and anniversarial corner of February 23rd/24th 2023.

Looking along Ukraine's southeastern front lines, it is apparent from informed sources and geolocational information that the Kremlin is positioning well-trained battalions comprised of heavy armor, airborne divisions and command structures in the Donetsk and Luhansk areas of Kremmina and Svatove, whilst throwing thousands of ill-trained and essentially non-equipped mobilized soldiers into the affray further south toward Zaporizhia and Kherson.

This appears to be a Russian tactic of attempting to draw Ukrainian forces south and away from Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts so as to deplete their (Ukrainian) resources in these regions, where crucial Russian supply chain links and rail infrastructure are located.

Putin is desperate to project success to the Russian people and upper security echelons, and it is appearing he may command a military push in the next few weeks.

Russian supply chain

But this ignores his continuing supply chain challenge in that everything "Russian replenishment" is rail-centric.

Everything – armor, replenishment, troops, fuel, supplies and vehicles entering Ukraine come down from Russia through rail links and junctions – all of which are intimately familiar to Ukrainian command. They are after all, Ukrainian rail lines and links with precise home-grown awareness of geolocational coordinates to hand for precision striking.

Ukrainian battle armor

This is why Ukraine needs longer-range HIMARS and artillery platforms – in order to strike further behind Russian front lines to cut off supplies from reaching (Russian) BTGs along front lines.

The Ukrainian challenge is insufficient battle armor to not only withstand Russian attacks but also to advance and consolidate offensive maneuver.

Which is where the latest news regarding NATO and western tanks now entering Ukraine comes in.

Although precise information regarding the actual number of arriving modern main battle tanks is pending, latest reports lead one to estimate sufficient numbers of tanks and maintenance backup is en route to create five main (Ukrainian) battle tank formations.

This is precipitous from a Russian perspective because this Ukrainian field ability will see them cut through Russian defenses.

Ukrainian tactics

Ukraine will not enter battle unless 100% capable and supplied, whereas Russian commanders rush into battle, and then keep rushing, extending supply chains, rendering them essentially non-existent.

One can see the American and NATO influence in these Ukrainian tactics.

Ukraine follows roughly the following modus operandi:

- (i) **Intelligence** – they glean precise information on enemy positions, supply chains and capabilities – through both satellite and partisan infeed as well as internal geographic knowledge. They track all Russian land movements and troop cumulation points on an ongoing basis with exceptional and rapid analytical capability. All information and intelligence is contemporaneously shared between Ukrainian and American Battle Command centers.

- (ii) **Long-range strategic strikes** – their Command locates long-range artillery and HIMARS platforms to take out strategic targets such as bridges and supply chain routes. These can be weeks ahead of any engagement, but are generally limited to between 40 and 50 miles in range.
- (iii) **Anti-aircraft platforms** – they locate mobile anti-aircraft missile batteries supported by AA man-pads along planned routes of offense to deny Russia any air cover, essential in any successful field battle.
- (iv) **Ukrainian air cover** – Ukraine then places HIMARS and other smart assault weapons within range of Russian ground forces to provide “air cover” of an effective sort by precision targeting of enemy ground force defenses ordinarily subject to air attack.
- (v) **Supply chains** – Supply chains are installed but in dynamic fashion with rotation squads and supplies located in sporadic locations that move between zones so as to reduce enemy locating and return fire effectiveness.
- (vi) **Cumulation** – Ukrainian command then cumulates friendly forces in waves, without visible massing of troops so as to prevent both Russian awareness of a pending assault and large targets to aim at.
- (vii) **Advance** – Ukrainian forces then advance with APC’s and foot soldiers, supported by precision HIMARS ranging.

But – Ukraine has been limited in point (vii) above. Foot soldiers sans adequate armored protection and conveyance can only advance as far as they can walk, be fed and re-supplied. Hence their small and limited field advances to date.

NB – When Ukraine re-captured Kharkiv in September last year, they exploited the element of surprise and the mass panic and disorganized withdrawal of Russian occupation armies, whose retreating forces left behind vast swathes of undefended land open to extended Ukrainian advance.

- (viii) **Hole Punching** - Now with modern main battle tanks available, Ukraine can punch holes in enemy defensive positions. These new vehicles – Abrams’, Challengers, Leopards, Leclerc’s and other tanks with smart sighting and detection systems, allow Ukrainian ground commanders to locate enemy armor and, with vastly improved barrel and projectile technology, eliminate Russian tanks and armored platforms.

This also provides cover for advancing Ukrainian foot infantry as enemy tanks and heavy armor defensive nests are cleared out of the way.

- (ix) **Troop carriers** - Bradley fighting vehicles, of which there are hundreds arriving by the week, coupled with other NATO APCs, provide a substantial enhancement to Ukrainian ground force effectiveness by providing them armored vehicles within which to advance miles as opposed to yards.
- (x) **Leap Frog Consolidation** – Ukrainian Command then consolidates gains, rotates troops from dislocated, small and “indiscernible” locations, relocates HIMARS and anti-aircraft batteries forward in leap frog fashion into recovered territory to create “new” front lines. This way they recover and lock down recaptured land. If and when presented with unexpected benefits such as unexpected Russian retreats the Ukrainians will advance further, but no further than their supply lines accommodate.

Modern tanks will precipitate a rapid advance mode with Ukrainian forces punching large and gaping holes in Russian defenses to allow APCs to speedily advance through the gaps, penetrating far behind enemy lines.

The missing element here of course is Ukrainian air cover such as ground attack aircraft and helicopters. I am confident that these will soon be available.

Putin is keenly aware of these new, enhanced Ukrainian battle capabilities and the risk they pose for his defenses. His problem of course is the extent of his defensive lines and how to supply them with non-existent replenishment armor, ammunition and troops – all the time sans any decent air cover.

Ukrainian challenge – Russia will more than likely attack from multiple fronts, most often with “meat grinder tactics” in place so as to stretch Ukrainian lines and defenses. We will need to watch Belarus very closely as I do not see Putin locating thousands of troops and supporting equipment there just for show or “training,” as he puts it.

At least 10 civilians killed in new Russian shelling² - A new barrage of Russian shelling has killed at least 10 Ukrainian civilians and wounded 20 others in a day, the Associated Press (AP) reported, citing the office of Ukraine's president. Regional officials said towns and villages in the east and in the south that are within reach of the Russian artillery suffered most. Six people died in the Donetsk region, two in Kherson, and two in the Kharkiv region, the AP quotes them as saying. A day earlier, missiles and self-propelled drones that Russian forces fired had hit deeper into Ukrainian territory, killing at least 11 people.

Ukraine's army claims to have killed 109 Russian soldiers² and wounded a further 188 in one day during fighting around the village of Vuhledar in the eastern Donetsk oblast. Serhii Cherevatyi, a spokesperson for the eastern operational command of the Ukrainian armed forces, said the bloody death toll was recorded on Thursday, adding "Fierce fighting is ongoing. The enemy is indeed trying to achieve an intermediate success there, but thanks to the efforts of our defenders, they are unsuccessful."

Ukraine is setting up drone assault companies within its armed forces² that will be equipped with Starlink satellite communications, it has announced, as it presses ahead with an idea to build up an "army of drones".

According to Reuters, the general staff said the commander-in-chief Valeriy Zaluzhnyi signed off on the creation of the units in a project that will involve several ministries and agencies.

"The most professional servicemen" have already been chosen to lead the companies, each of which will receive drones and ammunition, Starlink terminals and other equipment, it said on Facebook. "We are doing everything to provide soldiers with modern technologies."

Starlink is a satellite internet system operated by Elon Musk's SpaceX company, and widely used both by civilians and the military in Ukraine.

Ukraine struggling to hold Bakhmut, military sources say² - On Saturday, Ukraine's armed forces reported that Russia had turned its artillery fire on 40 settlements close to Bakhmut, the city in the eastern Donetsk region that has been at the heart of some of the most intense fighting in recent months.

Military sources said Ukrainian forces were now struggling to hold the city, after the Ukrainian army's withdrawal from the nearby city of Soledar last week.

"The Russians are destroying anything that can be used for cover," said one source. "The Ukrainian forces don't have enough artillery."

The risk of Bakhmut being encircled was said to be growing, with Ukraine's army facing shortages of artillery that could hold back the advancing Russian forces.

Russia may run out of missiles in three months: Intelligence report⁵ - Russia may not have enough missiles to continue conducting massive strikes against Ukraine for more than three months, an Estonian intelligence official said in the wake of the newest Russian onslaught against its eastern European neighbor.

Since October 2022, Russia has been carrying out waves of attacks against Ukraine, targeting civilian areas and critical infrastructure like energy facilities. The strikes began after the Kerch Strait Bridge, which connects Russia to the occupied Crimean peninsula, and is also a key supply route for Putin's troops, was hit with an explosion in October. Ukraine did not formally claim responsibility for the explosion, but Putin blamed it on Ukraine, calling it an act of "terrorism," and vowed to respond.

The latest wave of strikes took place on Thursday. Valerii Zaluzhnyi, commander-in-chief of Ukraine's Armed Forces, said in a Telegram post that Russia fired 55 air and sea-based missile from aircraft and ships stationed in the Black Sea.

Ukraine was able to destroy 47 of the missiles, including 20 that were "in the region" of the Ukrainian capital of Kyiv, Zaluzhnyi said.

Putin is desperate for soldiers: Russia is sending the seriously wounded back to war⁹ - Seriously injured Russian soldiers are being sent back to fight on the frontlines in Ukraine without their doctor's permission according to a new Russian report.

Putin & Russia

Putin plotting fresh offensive to 'regain initiative' after losses: Reports⁶ - Russian President Vladimir Putin is reportedly planning a new offensive in the next month or two to combat Ukrainian gains in the war he started.

After months of losing ground, the Kremlin will look to "regain the initiative" with offensives that could come soon as February or March, Bloomberg reported, citing unnamed officials. This could pressure Kyiv and its allies to agree a truce in which Moscow retains control of the territory it now occupies.

The outlet said Russia's willingness to accept casualties had convinced Putin that he would win the war, despite recent setbacks. Ukraine has also warned of an Russian offensive, which Bloomberg said could come before Kyiv takes delivery of the Leopard 2 and Abrams tanks promised by the U.S. and Germany this week.

Putin has a problem: his so-called allies won't help fight in Ukraine⁸ - With Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, Putin has attempted to paint himself in a God complex. Comparing himself to Peter the Great, a well-known imperialist, he has tried to convince the non-western world that he will bring "multipolarity" back. Despite using faux pretenses to invade Ukraine, the Russian autocrat has directed much of his warring rhetoric toward Western governments the most.

To bring the multipolar world in order to upend long-standing American hegemony, the Russian President has attempted to form a coalition of countries that are willing to combat the West. These ambitions have been minuscule to say the least, as the people he thought were allies have not supported his war the way he thought it would go.

During the early stages of the war, Putin attempted to convince CTSO member states such as Kazakhstan and Belarus to formally send troops and join in on the invasion. As Russian media paints the war as Moscow's coalition versus NATO, this was a call to action towards their allies to intervene.

Central Asia

President Tokayev of Kazakhstan, who was backed by Moscow to crush internal dissidence has become one of the Kremlin's biggest critics thus far. Refusing to send troops to help Russia and humiliating him in front of the Saint Petersburg economic forum, Tokayev is starting to look to China and Turkey as its future economic and security partners, putting Almaty and Moscow in foreseeable odds. Likewise, other Central Asian nations under Russia's sphere have not lifted a finger to help during the war.

Syria

Despite recognizing Russia's annexation of Crimea, Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad has not militarily supported Russia. Quite the opposite has taken place, as Russia has become extremely weakened to where they've gradually withdrawn its top officers from Syria to Ukraine and air defense systems Assad needs against his rivals of Turkey and Israel.

Original reports of Syrian volunteers being sent to Ukraine last spring fell flat, as Damascus would need the manpower even more than ever as the Turkish military has threatened a renewed military operation if peace talks fall through. If Putin's regime falls, Assad would be one of the first to feel the effects of it.

Armenia

Once dependent on Russia for its security due to being geographically sandwiched in between hostile nations and isolated from the west, Yerevan's relations with Moscow hit an all-time low. Ever since the Velvet Revolution that replaced the pro-Russian ruling parties with a more western friendly one, the Kremlin has barely lifted a finger when Armenia needed it the most.

The past three years have seen a heavily Turkish-backed Azerbaijan in a near everlasting conflict with Armenia. Even when it activated CTSO articles, Russia has not responded. This has caused the country to gradually look elsewhere with calls and protests to expel Russian forces from the nation for an EU-led multinational peacekeeping one.

India

India and Russia have had a close knit relation for hundreds of years, but New Delhi has not provided military support for Ukraine, but rather has taken advantage of discounted oil. Usually siding with Russia as they've been a historical counterbalance to China's incursions on India's borders, Putin's military endeavor has weakened his state to where it is now a client of Russia.

With Beijing gaining influence in Moscow, this puts New Delhi in a precarious situation. India's PM Modi stated "now is not an era for war" signaling their displeasure in conflict despite abstaining on multiple UN Resolutions.

China

Usurping Russia in economic progression and growing its military past Moscow's might, Putin has relied on monetary assistance from the CCP to keep his economy afloat in the war. China has not supported Moscow militarily in the war thus far.

Signaling the disappointment of potential use of nuclear weapons by Russia, China has quietly backed away from support. Currently having a demographic crisis, economic decline and future standoff over Taiwan, China has refused to recognize any annexations and will focus on quelling their own internal problems.

Serbia

Serbia and Russia have a close relationship, as the Russian Empire helped Serbia gain independence from the Ottomans, but in the 21st century, these relations are at a crossroads. Though many Serbian citizens support Russia, especially far right and more religiously orthodox, the Serbian government has recently been at odds with the Kremlin.

The Wagner Group has heavily recruited in Serbia, giving a negative perception of the country the government has been fed up with. PM Vucic recently demanded the Wagner mercenaries leave Serbia and the government has sent generators to Ukraine. They have refused to recognize Russia's annexations as it affects the fate of Kosovo, which Belgrade is still interested in governing again one day.

Iran

Iran has been one of the biggest supporters of military technology to Russia today, sending the Shahed drones and potentially ballistic missiles. Though this seems like support, Iran has refused to recognize Russia's annexations and stated they will not anytime in the future.

Dealing with various separatist movements, Iran is in no position to recognize illegal land grabs. Their military support is primarily to combat test their weaponry towards a conventional army as a potential war with Israel and the U.S looms.

North Korea

The hermit kingdom of North Korea has backed the faux proxy states of Donbas and has quietly sent shells to help Russia's stagnant war effort. As the country remains isolated from the international community with one of the worst economies on earth, their support means little in the conflict.

Belarus

Alexander Lukashenko, the dictator of Belarus has been privy to Russian military operations throughout its invasion. Allowing the Kremlin to use his country as a launching pad, tens of thousands of RF poured into Ukraine through Belarusian borders. Despite the logistical support, Lukashenko has been wary of formally intervening.

Knowing the possibility of a civilian uprising or military mutiny if Belarus formally joins the war, as Lukashenko is highly unpopular among his own people, the autocrat has attempted to buy himself time with the Kremlin. Under pressure of intervening, he has instead placated his bases for the Russian military to launch missile attacks in Ukraine. If Putin's regime falls, Lukashenko knows he would be the next domino in the house of cards to fall.

Geopolitics

15th BRICS summit to be held in South Africa's Durban; China, India already ahead of the United States and EU members, says Lavrov⁷ - Russia's Foreign Minister Lavrov on January 26 said "countries like China and India are already ahead of the United States and EU members in many respects", while also announcing that the 15th BRICS summit will take place in August this year at Durban, South Africa.

He made these remarks at a joint news conference with Foreign Minister of the State of Eritrea Osman Saleh, Massawa. Responding to a question about the role of Africa in a world that is moving away from unipolarity to multi-polarity, he said, "Africa is one of the most serious centres with colossal potential. It is an extremely affluent continent, including when it comes to natural resources, which have been exploited for many centuries."

Accusing the West of regularly visiting Africa and demanding them to refrain from cooperation with the Russian delegation, Mr. Lavrov said, "No visits to deliver mentor advice nor the hybrid wars of the West (including in Ukraine) can stop the development of new centres of economic power, financial and political influence."

Calling the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS) grouping, "a manifestation of global multi-polarity," he said that more than 12 countries have showed an interest in joining it. "Developing links between BRICS and other countries will be a central topic at the upcoming summit of the five which is to take place in August in Durban, South Africa. The clock of multi-polar history is ticking in the right direction," Mr. Lavrov added.

Comments, Developments & Reports

Russian host explodes over U.S. help for Ukraine: 'should be on fire'¹⁵ - Russian state media host erupted in anger recently over military aid that was provided to Ukraine from the United States and the West during a recent appearance on his show.

Condemning the West for its support of Ukraine is the stock in trade for Vladimir Solovyov, however the Kremlin propagandist was equally as angered about what he sees as a soft Moscow response to such moves.

During a monologue on his radio show Polny Kontakt (Full Contact), which gradually grew in volume as it went along, Solovyov raged about the delivery that Ukraine would soon receive of Abrams tanks from the U.S and Leopard 2 tanks from Germany.

Despite the delivery falling far short of Kyiv's demands for at least 300 tanks, Solovyov warned his listeners not to underestimate the quantity of the armored vehicles being sent, suggesting that eventually Ukraine's allies "will deliver everything."

He said that he had previously warned that Adolf Hitler would be "rehabilitated" as he referred to the widely dismissed "denazification" justification for Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, adding "this is where everything is heading."

"World War Three is already underway," he said in the clip, tweeted by journalist and founder of the Russian Media Monitor, Julia Davis. "And the West has returned to its Nazi roots."

Solovyov blamed Russia for allowing this to happen and questioned why Moscow had not conducted strikes against New York or Washington, D.C.

The Kremlin said² on Friday that US President Biden had the key to end the conflict in Ukraine by directing Kyiv to settle, but that Washington had so far not been willing to use it. "The key to the Kyiv regime is largely in the hands of Washington," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters in his usual daily briefing. "Now we see that the current White House leader ... does not want to use this key. On the contrary, he chooses the path of further pumping weapons into Ukraine," he added.

Lynne Tracy², the new US ambassador to Russia, will not improve ties between Washington and Moscow because the former is engaging in a "hybrid war" against the latter, the Russian foreign ministry's spokesperson Maria Zakharova said Friday. Zakharova said Tracy's room for manoeuvre would be limited due to what she said was fierce anti-Russian bipartisan feeling in the United States.

The European Union² wants swift accountability for "horrific" crimes in Ukraine, EU justice ministers have said. But the member states differ over how to bring prosecutions, seek evidence or fund war damage repairs. The bloc's 27 justice ministers met in Stockholm, where they discussed collecting evidence as well as setting up a new international tribunal to prosecute Moscow's aggression.

Radio Free Russia - A senior EU official has called for a "Radio Free Russia" to help independent Russian media distribute content in their home country and evade heavy censorship.

Věra Jourová, the European Commission vice-president in charge of values and transparency, said the EU had a moral duty to support democratic ideals in Russia:

We should not give up on the Russian society ... regardless of how few or how many want to hear the real news, not Kremlin propaganda.

During a speech at Estonia's foreign ministry, Jourová called for a Radio Free Russia project to support independent Russian media that have been expelled or fled their home country.

The project did not mean establishing a new radio station, she said, but supporting journalists in the EU, so they could "produce more content and distribute it more widely without any editorial interference". She added:

We need to create the conditions for them to work and tell the story of the EU they see and experience to their Russian audiences. It is not only a moral duty, it is in our self-interest.

Chinese state media says NATO has 'evil intention' in Asia-Pacific⁵ - NATO has an "evil intention" in the Asia-Pacific region, the Chinese state-run media outlet the Global Times said on Friday.

In an opinion piece, the Global Times spoke about reports that India's capital of New Delhi is expected to host members of NATO for a meeting that will likely include Indian defense and foreign ministry officials.

"NATO is facing tremendous pressure in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, especially under Moscow's recent heavy offensive. Feeling that it might not be as strong as it has thought, the organization is seeking external assistance or moral support," the op-ed said.

"Besides, NATO still has the evil intention of expanding its engagement with the Asia-Pacific region, which will certainly disrupt regional order. It hopes to use India as a springboard to deepen its involvement in the region, thereby strengthening its containment of China and pinning Russia down from the west and the east sides," the article added.

Containment

A total of 321 heavy tanks¹⁰ have been promised to Ukraine by several countries, according to its ambassador to France.

France, Italy, agree to buy 700 antimissile systems for Ukraine in €2 billion deal - France and Italy have agreed on buying 700 Aster 30 missiles for SAMP/T antimissile system for Ukraine according to Italian news ANSA.

The deal between French defence minister Sébastien Lecornu and his Italian counterpart Guido Crosetto came on Friday evening, while the latter was in Rome.

The batch of Aster 30 missiles will cost about €2 billion. However, it is not known exactly how many missiles will be transferred to the Ukrainian military.

Poland will send an additional 60 tanks to Ukraine² on top of the 14 German-made Leopard 2 tanks it has already pledged, the former's prime minister has said. Mateusz Morawiecki has told CTV News "we are ready to send 60 of our modernized tanks, 30 of them PT-91. And on top of those tanks, 14 tanks, Leopard 2 tanks, from in our possession."

Ukraine: 'Fast-track' talks underway for missiles, planes⁴ - Ukraine and its Western allies are engaged in "fast-track" talks on the possibility of equipping the invaded country with long-range missiles and military aircraft, a top Ukrainian presidential aide said Saturday.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, said Ukraine's supporters in the West "understand how the war is developing" and the need to supply planes capable of providing cover for the armored fighting vehicles that the United States and Germany pledged at the beginning of the month.

However, in remarks to online video channel Freedom, Podolyak said that some of Ukraine's Western partners maintain a "conservative" attitude to arms deliveries, "due to fear of changes in the international architecture." Russia and North Korea have accused the West of prolonging and taking a direct role in the war by sending Kyiv increasingly sophisticated weapons.

Belgium has announced a package of an additional €93.6m² (£84.5m / \$104.7m) in military aid for Ukraine. The prime minister, Alexander De Croo, said that, taking into account previous spending, it amounted to the biggest ever military aid package given to another country by Belgium. The package will include surface-to-air missiles, anti-tank weapons, machine guns, grenades and munition.

It will take about six months to train Ukrainian pilots for combat in western fighter jets², such as the US' F-16, Kyiv has said, as it steps up its campaign to secure fourth-generation warplanes.

Reuters reports that Ukraine got a huge boost this week when Germany and the US announced plans to provide heavy tanks to Kyiv, which is now hoping the west will also provide long-range missiles and fighter jets.

Western military support has been vital for Kyiv and has rapidly evolved. Before the invasion, even the idea of supplying lethal aid to Ukraine was highly controversial, but western supplies have since shattered taboo after taboo.

Ukrainian air force spokesman Yuri Ihnat said F-16s may be the best option for a multi-role fighter to replace the country's current fleet of warplanes, which are older than modern Ukraine itself. He said Kyiv was using four types of Soviet-era planes.

The pilots are saying it is not a problem to fly the F-16, they could learn it within several weeks. To fight with these planes is a very different thing, to use all types of weapons. Pilots say they could master it in about half a year.

Ukraine uses its warplanes for intercept missions and to attack Russian positions.

Russia is violating the “fundamental principles of child protection” in wartime² by giving Ukrainian children Russian passports and putting them up for adoption, the UN's refugee agency (UNHCR) chief Filippo Grandi has said. “Giving them nationality or having them adopted goes against the fundamental principles of child protection in situations of war,” Grandi said. Grandi said his agency was unable to estimate the number of children who had been given passports or put up for adoption, as access in Russia was extremely limited. Russia has said accusations Ukrainian children have been abducted are false.

Sources

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