

Conflict Update # 42

April 27th, 2022

Conflict Assessment

Subordinate Main Effort—Mariupol - Russian forces continued ground and air assaults against Ukrainian defenders in Mariupol's Azovstal Steel Plant on April 27. The Ukrainian military reported Russian forces continued to conduct a high tempo of air strikes against Ukrainian defenders, including by Tu-22M3 strategic bombers.

Subordinate Main Effort—Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts - Russian forces made marginal advances in frontal assaults around Severodonetsk, Rubizhne, and Popasna on April 27 and continued to shell the entire frontline.

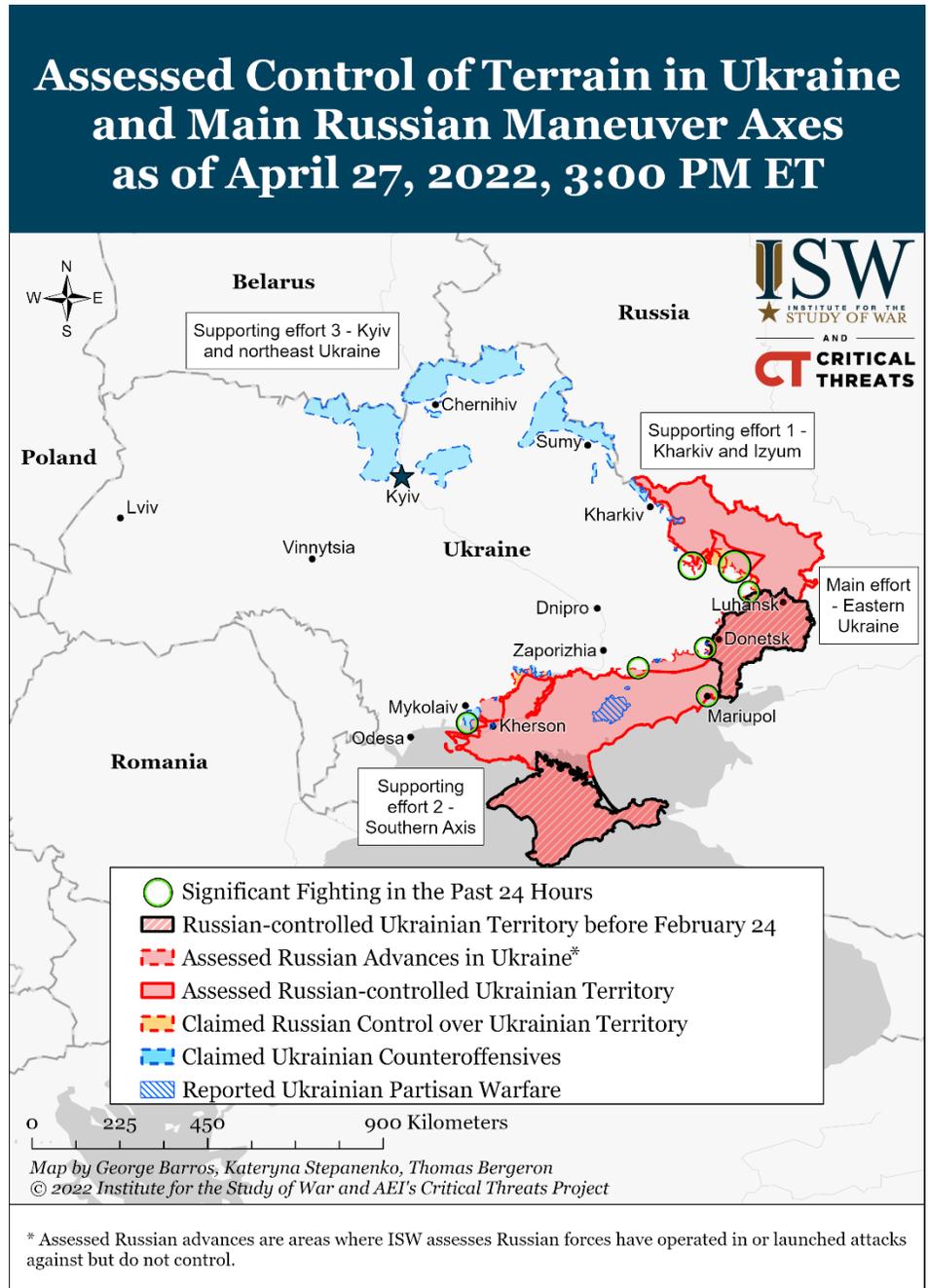
The Ukrainian General Staff confirmed that Russian forces captured Novotoshkirsk, a small town 25 km south of Severodonetsk, and attempted to advance further west.

Russian forces advancing south from the Svatove area (west of Rubizhne) additionally captured the town of Zarichne.

Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks in Avdiika, near Donetsk city.

Russian forces are making slow progress on these multiple small axes of advance, likely due to their increasing use of concentrated artillery, but their ability to encircle Ukrainian forces and the extent to which they will be able to advance remain unclear.

Supporting Effort #1—Kharkiv and Izyum - Russian forces in Izyum continued attacks on three lines of advance – southeast towards Slovyansk, southwest towards Barvinkove, and directly west away from Donetsk Oblast.



The Ukrainian General Staff reported that

- (i) Ukrainian forces repelled Russian attacks near Nova Dmytrivka, towards Barvinkove, and repelled unspecified attacks towards Slovyansk,
- (ii) elements of Russia's 1st Guards Tank Army, 20th Combined Arms Army (CAA), 35th CAA, and 68th Army Corps are active on the Barvinkove front Two Battalion Tactical Groups (BTGs) from the 76th Airborne Division – which was heavily damaged in fighting northwest of Kyiv – deployed from Belgorod, Russia, to the Izyum frontlines on April 27,
- (iii) two Iskander-M ballistic missile batteries, likely in part from the 20th CAA's 448th Missile Brigade, deployed to Belgorod Oblast from an unspecified location on April 27.

Supporting Effort #2—Southern Axis - Russian forces continued to shell along the entire line of contact along the southern axis and reinforce forward positions in preparation for the likely resumption of offensive operations towards Mykolayiv and Kryvyi Rih on April 27. Ukrainian Ministry of Defense Spokesperson Oleksandr Motuzyanyk stated that elements of Russia's 8th CAA, 49th CAA, 22nd Army Corps, coastal troops of the Black Sea Fleet, and airborne troops are reinforcing their forward positions and replenishing ammunition for further operations.

They added that Russian forces are actively conducting aerial reconnaissance in likely preparation for offensive operations. Local fighting continued in the Mykolayiv direction, with Russian forces conducting failed attacks towards Tavriyske and Nova Zorya and Ukrainian forces reportedly recapturing Shyrokye, Novopetrivka, and Lyubino, 50 km north of Kherson.

Russian forces are likely attempting to reorganize forces to launch larger-scale offensive operations in the coming days to capture the entirety of Kherson Oblast, but successful Ukrainian counterattacks are likely delaying and disrupting Russian operations.

Supporting Effort #3—Sumy and Northeastern Ukraine - There was no significant change in this area in the past 24 hours.

Immediate items to watch

- Russian forces attacking southeast from Izyum, west from Kreminna and Popasna, and north from Donetsk City will likely make steady but tactical gains against Ukrainian defenders.
- Russian forces will likely attempt to starve out the remaining defenders of the Azovstal Steel Plant in Mariupol and will not allow trapped civilians to evacuate but may conduct costly assaults on remaining Ukrainian defenders to claim a propaganda victory.
- Russian forces are likely preparing to conduct renewed offensive operations to capture the entirety of Kherson Oblast in the coming days.
- Russia may continue false-flag attacks in and around Transnistria or might move to generate a more serious crisis in Transnistria and Moldova more generally.

Putin's forces struggling to make gains in eastern Ukraine 'because they don't like to fight in the rain' - Putin's troops "don't like to fight in the rain" and this is slowing his attempts to seize more territory in the Donbas region of eastern Ukraine, Western officials said on Wednesday.

They stressed the Russian president's forces were making "minor gains" as they seek to advance. "But when they come up against genuine military objectives, they are finding it difficult to overcome the staunch Ukrainian resistance and they are suffering losses," said one official.

"It's not helped by the weather conditions at the moment in the Donbas with heavy rain. Russians don't like to fight in the rain and that is slowing progress. "What we are seeing...they are not advancing in heavy rain."

Russian forces are believed to be suffering from low morale, partly as some of the troops were sent to war having reportedly been told they were just going on a military exercise.

They have also seen many of their comrades killed and injured, as well as equipment damaged and problems with supplies such as food, fuel and ammunition earlier in the invasion.

Pro-war factions now believe Russia is fighting NATO, not just Ukraine. That means committing the nation's entire forces, they claim.

Deputy commander Rustam Minnekayev hinted at this when he suggested Russia forge a corridor from the Donbas to Moldova in striking comments last week.

He said: '[We must] establish full control over the Donbas and Southern Ukraine. This will provide a land corridor to the Crimea, as well as influence the vital objects of the Ukrainian economy.'

'Control over the south of Ukraine is another way out to Transnistria [the pro-Russia breakaway region of Moldova], where there are also facts of oppression of the Russian-speaking population.'

It's not yet clear that control over Moldovan territory is a priority for Moscow - but Minnekayev's comments suggest it is something army leaders are pushing for.

Agents also stated leading spies had confirmed controversial reports that an FSB general is locked up in Russia's most notorious prison for 'intelligence failings'.

Colonel General Sergei Beseda is reportedly behind bars at Lefortovo for his role in the flagging war. This has been strenuously denied by the Kremlin, which has even altered the name on Beseda's prison records.

A Spetsnaz contact told the agency: 'Well done!' A source at the Service of Economic Security of the FSB added: 'All true!'

The mutiny follows news that Russia will be unable to fight another war for 'years' due to mass equipment losses in Ukraine. Putin will struggle in the Donbas because vital 'inventories are getting low', according to Washington analyst Mark Cancian.

Wrecked Kremlin equipment now amounts to 939 tanks, 185 planes, 155 helicopters, 421 artillery units and eight ships, the Ukrainian army estimated this morning.



When Russian forces entered Ukraine on February 24, the invading Moscow military dwarfed Ukraine's, prompting many to believe the war would be swift and effective. (Daily Mail).

Russian military

Vicious Blame Game Erupts Among Putin's Security Forces - President Putin and his security institutions are no longer a united front. Russia's army is deeply unhappy at the new and curtailed strategy Putin has ordered them to

adopt in Ukraine, abandoning the big goal of capturing Kyiv for a much more modest objective of invading Donbas in the country's east.

And they are pointing the finger at other agencies, the FSB's foreign intelligence branch primarily, for misinforming the president about the true conditions inside Ukraine that have led to failure. Other FSB departments appear to share the military's analysis.

The war in Ukraine sharply divided Russian society. As journalists, we expected to lose many of our contacts in the Russian military and secret services after the invasion began on Feb. 24. After all, it's one thing to complain to a journalist about corruption in one's agency, and it's quite another to speak about the war with those who have taken a public antiwar stand. And indeed, in the first month of the war, some sources refused to answer our calls and messages.

But the situation has now changed dramatically. Last week we began to receive more and more calls and messages from our contacts in the military and in the FSB commenting on our reporting about Sergei Beseda, one of the heads of the Fifth Service of the FSB, who gathers political intelligence on Ukraine and cultivates the pro-Kremlin opposition in Kyiv. The general was sent to the infamous Lefortovo prison in Moscow, which has had a horrible reputation since the Stalin purges — innumerable victims have been murdered in the building's basement.

The Kremlin has made frantic efforts to hide the details of Beseda's arrest, going as far as to change the general's name in prison records. (The Investigative Committee, Russia's main investigative authority, went so far as to deny the fact of Beseda's criminal prosecution.)

"Well done!" was a message from our old contacts in the Russian Spetnaz (special forces in the Russian military intelligence.) "All true!" we were told by our contact in the Service of Economic Security of the FSB. Videos about Beseda's plight have recorded millions of views on Russian YouTube and were widely debated on pro-Kremlin telegram channels. The rumor mill went wild suggesting that compromising material on Beseda was provided by its rival agency, SVR, the foreign intelligence service.

Does this mean that the military or the FSB has concluded that the war, with its enormous casualties and incompetent direction, was a mistake? The short answer is no, quite the opposite.

Russia's military believes that limiting the war's initial goals is a serious error. They now argue that Russia is not fighting Ukraine, but NATO. Senior officers have therefore concluded that the Western alliance is fighting all out (through the supply of increasingly sophisticated weaponry) while its own forces operate under peacetime constraints like a bar on airstrikes against some key areas of Ukraine's infrastructure. In short, the military now demands all-out war, including mobilization. (The Moscow Times).

Russia Unable to Fight Another War After Catastrophic Military Losses - On Monday, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said that the U.S. wanted to see Russia so "weakened" that it won't be able to support another war like the one it initiated in Ukraine.

Now, analysts suggest Moscow might have already reached that point. In an article published today, analysts told The Times they believe Russia already burned through so much of its military strength in the past two months of war that it could be "years" before the Kremlin is able to order another such invasion of a neighboring country.

Mark Cancian, a senior adviser at Washington think-tank Center for Strategic and International Studies, told the British newspaper that, according to estimates, Russia might have already lost the equivalent of two years of tank production, one year's supply of aircraft and likely several year's worth of missile production since the beginning of the invasion on February 24.

According to the investigative website Bellingcat, Russia is estimated to have lost 70 percent of the precision missiles in its inventory - costly, highly valuable military equipment.

Russia's Military Is Pulling Out Of Storage Old Soviet Weapons - Russia Struggling to Resupply, Forced to Use Soviet Equipment in Ukraine – As Russia continues to struggle to resupply its troops in the eastern Donbas region, Russian troops are reportedly being forced to rely heavily on outdated Soviet-made military equipment to continue the military offensive in the region.

According to a statement from Ukraine's Intelligence Directorate, Russian forces are using weapons that have been in storage since the 1970s. In a statement, the Intelligence Directorate alleged that Russian forces in April took 18 ACS "Msta-S" howitzers, 28 ACS "Acacia" self-propelled artillery guns, 15 additional ACS "Msta-S" howitzers, and 20 ACS "Gvozdika" howitzers out of storage.

Furthermore, 15 MLRS "Uragan" self-propelled multiple rocket launcher systems and 11 TRC "Tochka-U" tactical ballistic missiles were also removed from 109 old arsenals.

"Restoration of combat capability and staffing of the military equipment of the grouping of troops of the Western MILITARY IS is carried out, including at the expense of the military equipment, withdrawn from storage of 239 mobilization deployment centers (Boguchar, 45 km from the SCU). Maintenance and repair are carried out by units 215 orvb (Marshal Zhukov) 20A," the statement continues.

UralVagonZavod, the Russian manufacturer in Sverdlovsk responsible for much of the country's battle tank manufacturing, is struggling to produce T-90 and T-72 tanks, as well as the next-generation T-14 Armata tank.

The Vladivostok shipyard was reportedly unable to meet government weapons orders valued at an estimated value of 25 billion rubles (\$323 million).

Sanctions

Canada sanctions more than 200 Putin loyalists in Ukraine's separatist Donbas region - The Canadian government said Wednesday that it has imposed sanctions on more than 200 people who are loyal to Russian President Vladimir Putin in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. Russian forces have been backing separatist rebels in the Donbas area for eight years following Russia's annexation of the Crimean peninsula in 2014.

Russian Economy Crumbling as Officials Reveal Inflation Set to Soar to 20% - Alexei Kudrin, chairman of Russia's accounts chamber, a parliamentary financial body, said that preliminary estimates showed base rate inflation could reach as high as 20.7 percent in the 2022/2023 financial year.

"This is a crisis that is bigger than the 2009 crisis, bigger than the pandemic crisis," Kudrin said, according to news agency RIA Novosti. "Of course, we are forced to admit that the real incomes of the population will decrease," he told Russian lawmakers.

The impact of the Western sanctions imposed on Russia will make themselves felt in the coming months and years, according to analysts.

Earlier this month, Capital Economics projected that Western sanctions would shrink Russian gross domestic product by 12 percent this year while its inflation forecast was higher than Kudrin's—at 23 percent year on year.

Putin

What's Putin's Next Move? Look to Syria – As shocking as Russia's invasion of Ukraine was, no one could say it came without warning.

Troops had been building up along the border for months. And long before that, Russia had been sending signals for years — not just in Eastern Ukraine, but in Georgia, Crimea and — especially, with the world watching, in Syria, where Russian actions were met with impunity, even indifference.

The conflict is far from over, and Vladimir Putin's ambitions are far from slaked. As the West considers how to contain Russia, and how to counter the next offensive, we need to understand the signals Russia has already sent and draw the most useful lessons we can from its tragic, deadly seven-years-long engagement in Syria.

1. **This isn't the whole war** - Ukraine's conflict now appears to be entering a new phase. While our unified front with Ukraine may have won the first bout, we must not get ahead of ourselves. Ultimately, what we have witnessed play out so far is likely to have been merely the opening salvo of what could be — or in fact, already has been — a long-running war in which the Kremlin may still have a winning hand.
2. **Russia knows the West can lose focus** - With regards to the actual conflict in Syria, aware that the West was distracted by ISIS, fatigued by the regime-opposition conflict and convinced that Syria would soon become a Russian "quagmire," Moscow pivoted in 2016 and 2017.
3. **Putin knows the West is risk-averse** - Few crimes in Syria have revealed Russia's geopolitical complicity more than Assad's use of chemical weapons in at least 340 chemical attacks since 2012. When at least 1,400 civilians were murdered in Eastern Ghouta, in a Sarin nerve gas attack within eyesight of Assad's presidential palace in August 2013, it was a Russian diplomatic olive branch that persuaded President Barack Obama not to conduct a punitive response. That offer, to facilitate the removal and destruction of Syria's chemical weapons stockpile was a deft distraction — and the Obama administration fell for it.

Is Putin's Inner Circle Turning On Him Over The Ukraine War? - Russian oligarch Oleg Tinkov, the billionaire founder of Russian digital bank Tinkoff and the 15th richest person in Russia, slammed Russian President Vladimir Putin last week over his invasion of Ukraine.

Writing on Instagram on Tuesday, the high-profile Russian entrepreneur claimed that 90% of the Russian people are against the war and that Russian government officials are still in shock that they won't be able to vacation in the Mediterranean this summer.

"The Kremlin's civil servants are in shock that not only they but also their children won't go to the Mediterranean this summer. Businessmen are trying to save what's left of their property," he added.

Along with Russian business leaders becoming increasingly vocal in their opposition to Putin's war in Ukraine, reports suggest that a "small and growing number" of senior Kremlin insiders are now beginning to question the Russian president's decision-making.

Bloomberg reports that some Kremlin insiders are beginning to believe that the invasion of Ukraine was a catastrophic error that is likely to set Russia many years in terms of its standing in the world. Kremlin officials revealed their views on the matter to the news outlet on the condition of anonymity, explaining that there was no chance the Russian president will reverse course and end the war in Ukraine without some kind of victory.

Some officials also expressed concern that Putin may consider deploying tactical nuclear weapons if faced with the possibility of failure in Ukraine.

“Senior officials have tried to explain to the president that the economic impact of the sanctions will be devastating, erasing the two decades of growth and higher living standards that Putin had delivered during his rule, according to people familiar with the situation,” Bloomberg reports, adding that Putin has “brushed off” the warnings and said that Russia is willing to pay the price.

Humanitarian

Russia's Destruction Of Ukraine's National And Cultural Heritage - War brings not only death but also the devastation of historic buildings, monuments, libraries, churches, and even unique forms of transportation closely identified with a country or region.

Ukraine's Ministry of Culture and Information Policy accuses Russia of committing war crimes by destroying or damaging 242 cultural heritage sites and objects. UNESCO has verified damage to 110 sites since Russia's invasion began on February 24. That includes 48 religious sites, 10 museums, 22 historic buildings, 11 buildings dedicated to cultural activities, 13 monuments, and six libraries. As the war drags on, there are concerns that more sites will be added to the list.

Putin agrees to UN, Red Cross help to evacuate civilians from Mariupol steel plant - Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed “in principle” to UN and International Committee for the Red Cross (ICRC) involvement in the evacuation of civilians from a besieged steel plant in Ukraine’s southern city of Mariupol, the United Nations said on Tuesday.

During a meeting in Moscow, Putin and UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres discussed the situation at the huge Azovstal steel plant, where the last Ukrainian defenders of Mariupol are hunkered down after months of Russian siege and bombardment.

Scores flee for their lives ahead of Russia's sham independence vote in Kherson - The occupied areas around the city of Kherson -- the first to be taken by advancing Russian forces in the opening days of the war -- have been terrorized in the past week by both the advancing second phase of Moscow's offensive, but also fears of a referendum on Wednesday.

Ukraine has said Russia plans to hold a vote in the region -- widely viewed there as a sham referendum -- to try to show popular support for the creation of a new entity called the Kherson People's Republic, which would mirror similar entities in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region. (Moscow sent in troops to the self-declared republics -- and began its war in Ukraine -- after Russian President Vladimir Putin recognized their independence.)

Impacts

Wary of Russian Propaganda Opportunity, Israel Cancels May 9 World War II Veterans Parade - As a result of the war in Ukraine, Israel has decided to cancel this year’s World War II veterans parade in honor of Victory Day on May 9 — a national holiday inaugurated in the former Soviet Union to mark the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945.

Pnina Tamano-Shata, the Israeli government’s Minister for Aliyah and Absorption, confirmed on Wednesday that the 2022 parade would not take place due to the “current delicate situation,” according to a report from Newsru, an Israeli news site catering to the country’s Russian-speakers.

Tamano-Shata’s decision was reportedly taken following consultations with veterans organizations in Israel. Russian President Vladimir Putin intends to hold a massive victory parade in Moscow on May 9, sparking fears of even greater intensification of his military campaign as the date approaches. According to Ukrainian sources, more than 20,000 Russian soldiers have already been killed during an invasion that has been depicted by the Kremlin as a “denazification” operation.

Canada lawmakers voted unanimously to label Russia's acts in Ukraine as 'genocide' - Canadian lawmakers voted unanimously on Wednesday to call Russia's attacks in Ukraine a "genocide", with members of parliament saying there was "ample evidence of systemic and massive war crimes against humanity" being committed by Moscow.

The Canadian House of Commons' motion said war crimes by Russia include mass atrocities, systematic instances of willful killing of Ukrainian civilians, the desecration of corpses, forcible transfer of Ukrainian children, torture, physical harm, mental harm, and rape.

Russia Is Being Hacked at an Unprecedented Scale - The orders are issued like clockwork. Every day, often at around 5 am local time, the Telegram channel housing Ukraine's unprecedented "IT Army" of hackers buzzes with a new list of targets. The volunteer group has been knocking Russian websites offline using wave after wave of distributed denial-of-service (DDoS) attacks, which flood websites with traffic requests and make them inaccessible, since the war started.

Russian online payment services, government departments, aviation companies, and food delivery firms have all been targeted by the IT Army as it aims to disrupt everyday life in Russia. "Russians have noticed regular hitches in the work of TV streaming services today," the government-backed operators of the Telegram channel posted following one claimed operation in mid-April.

The IT Army's actions were just the start. Since Russia invaded Ukraine at the end of February, the country has faced an unprecedented barrage of hacking activity. Hacktivists, Ukrainian forces, and outsiders from all around the world who are taking part in the IT Army have targeted Russia and its business. DDoS attacks make up the bulk of the action, but researchers have spotted ransomware that's designed to target Russia and have been hunting for bugs in Russian systems, which could lead to more sophisticated attacks.

Soviet Monuments Come Down Across Europe - Statues and memorials built to glorify and commemorate the Soviet Union and the Red Army have been torn down -- in one case illegally, in several countries amid outrage at the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

On the same day workers in Kyiv dismantled a Soviet-era monument to friendship between Ukraine and Russia on April 26, far to the north in Latvia a Red Army memorial stone was being pulled out of the ground.

Ukraine war to cause biggest price shock in 50 years - World Bank - In a new forecast, it said disruption caused by the conflict would contribute to huge price rises for goods ranging from natural gas to wheat and cotton.

The increase in prices "is starting to have very large economic and humanitarian effects", Peter Nagle, a co-author of the report, told the BBC.

He said "households across the world are feeling the cost of living crisis".

"We're particularly worried about the poorest households since they spend a larger share of income on food and energy, so they're particularly vulnerable to this price spike," the senior economist at the World Bank added.

Energy prices are set to increase more than 50 percent, pushing up bills for households and businesses, the World Bank says.

The biggest rise will be in the price of natural gas in Europe, which is set to more than double in cost. Prices are forecast to fall next year and in 2024, but even then will remain 15 percent higher than they were last year.

The World Bank said this means that from the lows of April 2020 until the highs of March this year we have seen "the largest 23-month increase in energy prices since the 1973 oil price hike", when tensions in the Middle East sent prices soaring.

Containment

As the West increases arms shipments to Ukraine, worries grow about the reaction in Russia - The war in Ukraine is accelerating in the eastern Donbas region. On Tuesday, as ministers from dozens of nations met in Germany to coordinate their efforts to arm Ukraine, American leaders changed their tone, from one of just helping Ukraine fend off Russia, to helping them defeat and weaken Russia for the long term.

DJI temporarily suspends operations in Russia and Ukraine - Chinese drone maker DJI dropped a quick note on Tuesday to state it was suspending operations in Russia and Ukraine.

"DJI is internally reassessing compliance requirements in various jurisdictions," the note said.

"Pending the current review, DJI will temporarily suspend all business activities in Russia and Ukraine. We are engaging with customers, partners and other stakeholders regarding the temporary suspension of business operations in the affected territories."

Widening of conflict and war

'Lightning-quick' response if NATO intervenes in Ukraine: Putin - Russian leader delivers a bellicose warning to the West while vowing his 'special operation' in Ukraine will be 'unconditionally fulfilled.'

Western nations' intervention in Ukraine will be met with a "lightning-quick" military response, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned. The bellicose threat from Putin came as Russia claimed today to have carried out a missile strike in southern Ukraine that destroyed a "large batch" of Western-supplied weapons.

Countries aiding Ukraine "that get it into their heads to meddle in ongoing events from the side and create unacceptable strategic threats for Russia, they must know that our response to counterpunches will be lightning-quick," said the Russian leader.

"We have all the tools for this that no one else can boast of having," Putin told lawmakers in St Petersburg, implicitly referring to Moscow's ballistic missiles and nuclear arsenal.

"We won't boast about it: We'll use them if needed and I want everyone to know that. We have already taken all the decisions on this." Russia's leader was not specific, but he recently oversaw the successful test of the Sarmat intercontinental ballistic missile, which Russia is soon expected to deploy with the capability for each to carry 10 or more nuclear warheads.

Russia's Lavrov Warns Of 'Real' Danger Of World War III - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said Monday that peace talks with Ukraine would continue, while warning there was a "real" danger of a World War III.

Speaking to Russian news agencies, he criticized Kyiv's approach to the talks, adding: "Good will has its limits. But if it isn't reciprocal, that doesn't help the negotiation process.

"But we are continuing to engage in negotiations with the team delegated by (Ukrainian President Volodymyr) Zelensky, and these contacts will go on."

But Lavrov accused former actor Zelensky of "pretending" to negotiate.

"He's a good actor," he said.

But he added: "If you watch attentively and read attentively what he says, you'll find a thousand contradictions."

Given the current tensions, Lavrov said the danger of a World War III was "real".

U.S., Ukrainian officials weigh 'high possibility' of Putin invading Moldova - U.S. and Ukrainian officials on Sunday discussed the possibility of Russian President Vladimir Putin expanding his invasion from the Donbas region of southeastern Ukraine into the neighboring nation of Moldova — another former Soviet state and non-NATO member in Eastern Europe.