

Conflict Update # 364

February 22nd, 2023

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Conflict Assessment

Russian losses – 145,060 (620) soldiers killed, 3,334 (+8) enemy tanks, 6,569 (+7) armored combat vehicles, 2,338 (+0) artillery systems, 471 (+0) MLRS systems, 243 (+0) air defense systems, 299 (+0) warplanes, 287 (+0) helicopters, 2,026 (+3) UAVs of the operational-tactical level, 873 (+0) cruise missiles, 18 (+0) warships/cutters, 5,212 (+2) trucks and tankers, 4 Iskander Missile Launchers (+0), 239 fuel bowsers (+0) and 226 (+0) units of equipment.

Key Takeaways

Longer-range missiles deployed? – Yesterday Russia was rotating troops away from the Bakhmut area to Mariupol where freshly arriving soldiers from Russia gather, shown as the longer black arrow heading south, and sending fresh troops north – the shorter black arrow.

Ukraine struck Mariupol (3 in the map) assembly points, killing numbers of replacement and reserve conscripts, shown by the solid blue arrow toward the city.

This was a first in extra-long range assault by Ukrainian batteries, and points to one thing – availability of longer range missiles in the Ukrainian army.

These have been promised by western allies and now appear to be in hand and deployed.

It is being reported that the Ukrainian extended range is now 190 miles, meaning Kievan forces can now reach the entirety of Russian-occupied Ukrainian oblasts, including Crimea, the dotted blue arrows pointed south above.

This is what transpired yesterday and is a demonstrable and fundamental challenge to Russian High Command.

They have been pulling assembly points, depots, resupply stores and rail junctions further and further away from front lines, given Ukrainian successes in finding, reaching and bombarding their forces and supply chains, denoted by the short straight black arrows headed toward the Black Sea coastline.



The Kremlin problem is they have pulled these all the way to the shoreline, and can now retreat and withdraw no further south. The Black Sea beckons from there.

Pulling storage and assembly points further away from conflict zones where soldiers, equipment and supplies are needed, extends distances and time required to travel to and supply these front line battalions, and forces the Kremlin to deploy additional trucks, trains and drivers to ensure effective delivery, all already in dire supply.

This in turn stretches their already stretched resource line and further exposes inbound front supply vehicles to detection and attack, such as has been happening for months.

It further enables Ukraine to reach and target Russian rail lines – the major routing of inbound equipment, troops and supplies from Russian (Russia proper that is) origin points. Diverting from rail to road, requires Moscow to route vehicles south along roads running through Donetsk and Luhansk Oblasts, precisely where Bakhmut, Kreminna **2** and Svatove **1** come into the picture, particularly the latter two. They are both on the main rail line linking Russia to its Ukrainian forces.

Now we can see the Ukrainian tactics of drawing Russian and Wagner Group forces into a protracted battle around Bakhmut **4** for so many months, away from **1** and **2**.

Given that the next few weeks will bring warmer weather and with it a melting of snow on the ground, terrain will become ever-more muddy, after which it hardens in Spring, allowing for traction equipment to once again move.

This is when we can anticipate Ukrainian offensives to start. Only now with hundreds of added APCs and modern tanks.

Kievan forces are currently encamped within miles of Kreminna and Svatove and within 60 miles of Mariupol, where they have been camped since pre-winter. Russian forces have striven to dislodge them but to no avail. They are still there whilst Kremlin battalions have exhausted themselves and lost thousands of young troops.

This is disastrous news for the Kremlin as it exposes all supply routes to BTGs engaged throughout Ukraine to attack and destruction from launching platforms located well behind front lines and due to their mobility, relatively safe from Kremlin counter attack.

Russia has deployed over 350,000 troops against Ukraine, Ukrainian army preparing for offensive – General Nayev - He also said that Ukraine is now preparing forces for its offensive, but the timing of the military action is a secret.

Nayev said that the number of troops and equipment in the Russian Federation was important, but the quality of Ukrainian forces would prevail over the quantity of Russian forces.

“That’s why we need Western weapons, which are significantly better than the Soviet models with which the Russian army is equipped,” Nayev said.

Earlier, head of the Main Directorate of Intelligence Kyrylo Budanov told Forbes magazine in an interview that the occupiers want to reach the administrative borders of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts by March 31, but that they were unlikely to be able to do so. (**Comment** – This Russian objective is in line with our previous assessments).

Russia preparing for mass mobilization of students, warns Ukrainian intelligence - In order to draft these students, so-called “alert stations” are being created across Russia, which will assist military commissars in serving summonses, HUR said.

Citizens who are not officially subject to mobilization are also planned to be involved in this work.

In particular, the management of Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University, Tomsk Polytechnic University, and Tomsk State Pedagogical University have issued documents obliging the structural divisions of higher education institutions to allocate a certain number of students and employees to work at these “alert stations”.

Meanwhile, at the Tomsk Polytechnic University, inclusion into these “districts” takes place without the consent or even prior informing of certain students and employees, Ukrainian intelligence noted.

“The mobilization will likely be carried out before April 1 – the beginning of the spring draft for conscription,” HUR explained.

Comment – This speaks to the dire recruitment straits the Kremlin finds itself in. Once this commences, that cat we talk about is well and truly out of the bag.

Positions of Ukrainian and Russian forces in eastern Ukraine as of February 22.



Ukraine pushes Russian forces back from around Vuhledar – Ukrainian forces have pushed invading troops back approximately two kilometers from Vuhledar, seen in the amp above, over the past two days.

This is significant as the Kremlin has been preparing and staffing for this initiative for some months now, which was regarded as an integral element of their new offensive.

Russia has ambitious goals for great offensive, but will fail says Ukrainian General Kyrylo Budanov - "The big offensive of Russia, which they have in mind, is already underway," Budanov told Forbes.

"But it's going on in such a way that not everyone can even see that it's going, that's (how weak) this attack is. They have a strategic task – to reach the administrative borders of Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts by March 31."

Budanov said he was convinced that the Russian invasion forces would not be able to achieve this goal.

In front of him, the TV screen displays a Google Earth map of the city of Moscow. "Their priority target was Kyiv. Why wouldn't I look at the map of Moscow?" he said with a smile.

Waves of infantry to attack Bakhmut, few armored vehicles used – Ukrainian General Budanov said that Russia is throwing infantry into the battle, instead of using artillery and other equipment.

"The shift to different tactics is obvious to everyone in Bakhmut," Budanov said.

"Vuhledar has given a clear example of this. Wave after wave of infantry is simply coming in Bakhmut, in general. The artillery only supports them, there are only a few armored vehicles. In Vuhledar, they did use armored vehicles, that were destroyed in the first hours, and everything turned into small arms fighting."

Comment – Yes, this is obvious from the daily casualty rate atop our Updates, where armored equipment being destroyed is minimal compared to previous confrontations.

In contrast to the Russians, Ukrainians master a mix of high-and-low-end technology on the battlefield
It is not technology alone that wins battles. Ukraine has received a large assortment of NATO equipment, learnt how to use and deploy it with impressive speed and effectiveness. The past year has seen Ukraine become a technical fighting force, able to combine different levels of technology in support of a cohesive strategy.

In contrast, this year has shown that Russia, despite having modern technology and weapons, has been unable to use its seeming technological advantage due to poor leadership, bad strategy and lack of competence.

Much attention on Western-furnished technology has focused on top-tier systems like the Patriot missile battery, HIMARS, High-speed Anti-Radiation Missile (HARM) and Javelin portable antitank missile, and other precision anti-tank weapons. This does not do justice to the scale of technology Ukraine is using on a daily basis across the war zone.

Three tiers

Military technology in the war in Ukraine can be categorized in three tiers. The weapon systems mentioned above fall in the **high-end** tier. These systems have proved to be powerful weapons in the hands of Ukrainians, but have somewhat limited utility due to cost and training requirements, factors limiting the number of systems available to Ukrainian forces. Ukraine now fields 20 HIMARS, and will get only a single battery of the Patriot system, which alone requires several months of training in the U.S.

In addition to training, these weapons require a large support system of highly specialized parts and maintenance. The long logistics tail for high tech systems decreases their utility. These high-end systems are critical to Ukraine's fight, but need to be supplemented by mid- and low-tier systems that can be delivered and used in large numbers.

Mid-tier includes drones like Turkey's Bayraktar TB2 and the American-made Switchblade and ScanEagle, provided in the hundreds and coming with minimal outside training requirements, while offering an immediate advantage on the battlefield. This level of technology requires less training, which means it can enter the battlefield much more quickly and be put in more hands.

The ability to provide weapons systems that are more cost-effective and less training-intensive has supported the efforts to get high-end systems into Ukrainian hands by buying Ukraine time. With mid-level technology as a stopgap, it has been able to meet immediate Russian threats while preparing to use high-tech systems.

Low-end tier of systems should not be mistaken as less important than the other classes of weapons and capabilities and includes commercially available, off-the-shelf products proven to be game changers in Ukraine, products like commercial quadcopter drones and Starlink satellite internet terminals.

Commercial technology has allowed Ukrainian forces to equip themselves with capabilities that dramatically improve command and control, communications and overall situational awareness. Command and control in a military context refers to battlefield commanders being able to efficiently direct the forces and systems under their command. Situational awareness in a military context refers to knowing battlefield conditions, including the positions and status of friendly and enemy forces.

Putting it together

Ukraine's success has come by figuring out how to integrate these three tiers of weapons and technology into a cohesive battlefield strategy. They use Starlink to ensure connectivity between commanders, personnel who identify targets and front-line units who attack those targets.

Drones based on commercial quadcopters that have been retrofitted for military use and mid-tier drones provide critical targeting and surveillance data in real time. This connectivity and airborne intelligence allows small, mobile units to use limited supplies of precision high-end munitions to greatest effect.

The speed with which Ukraine has taken this hodgepodge of technology and capabilities and mastered their integration and use is remarkable. It provides a stark contrast to Russia's use of technology.

Russian mismanagement

In February 2022, Russia appeared to be technologically superior to Ukraine on the battlefield. The Russian military has continually failed to capitalize on this advantage because of poor command and control, lack of expertise and dismal performance of troops in the field.

It has faced many of the same pressures as Ukraine to adapt to new technology and come to some similar solutions. Their forces have also used quadcopter drones for tactical surveillance and reconnaissance, and, like the Ukrainians, have fitted some with grenades. They have hit civilian as well as military targets with Iranian-made Shahed-136 drones, which are a form of loitering munition that can fly overhead until a target is identified and detonate on impact.

Moscow embraced mid-level technology because it was hesitant to commit its most advanced weapons systems like the beleaguered Su-57 fighter jet or the T-14 Armata tank, which was only recently deployed in Ukraine. Russia has been unable to secure air superiority or destroy Ukraine's air defenses or long-range artillery, which means committing Russia's best weapons puts them at great risk.

Putin is 'not smart' and 'lost everything,' Ex-Russian Diplomat says - Putin has "lost everything" because of his decision to invade Ukraine nearly a year ago, former Russian diplomat Boris Bondarev said.

Bondarev, 42, is Russia's only diplomat to publicly quit over Putin's war in Ukraine. The former member of Russia's delegation to the UN in Geneva resigned in May 2022, saying in an open letter that the war is "not only a crime against the Ukrainian people, but also, perhaps, the most serious crime against the people of Russia."

Speaking about Putin in an interview with Newsweek, Bondarev said he believes Putin "has already lost strategically."

"[Putin] lost everything. And everybody must see that he is not smart. He's not a strategist, he is just a very lucky guy whose counterparts were even more short-sighted than he was, but he's still very short-sighted," Bondarev said in a phone interview from Switzerland.

The former diplomat said he believes Putin "doesn't think about the future" and didn't think about the consequences of the war.

Containment

Hundreds of foreign soldiers to help train Ukrainian troops in Germany, general says - German military instructors teaching some 1,000 Ukrainian troops how to use Western tanks and other arms will soon be reinforced by several hundred specialists from other countries, the head of the Special Training Command said on Wednesday.

"We are talking about some 30-50 troops from Norway and several hundred from the Netherlands," Lieutenant-General Andreas Marlow told Reuters in an interview at his headquarters in the town of Strausberg near Berlin, adding he was aiming for further contributions from other nations.

Comments, Updates, Developments and Reports

US Secretary of State Blinken will meet with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres this week to discuss support for Kyiv, including a UN-brokered deal to keep grain exports flowing.

Moldovan president invites Biden to visit amid Russia tensions - Moldova's leader said on Wednesday she had invited U.S. President Biden to visit the tiny former Soviet republic, whose relationship with Russia is becoming increasingly tense.

President Maia Sandu wrote on Facebook that she had extended the invitation during a meeting in Warsaw on Tuesday, at which the White House said Biden had affirmed support for Moldova's sovereignty. She did not say how Biden had responded.

Putin cancels decree underpinning Moldova's sovereignty in separatist conflict - Putin yesterday on Tuesday a 2012 decree that in part underpinned Moldova's sovereignty in resolving the future of the Transdniestria region - a Moscow-backed separatist region which borders Ukraine and where Russia keeps troops.

The decree, which included a Moldova component, outlined Russia's foreign policy 11 years ago which assumed Moscow's closer relations with the European Union and the United States.

The order revoking the 2012 document was published on the Kremlin's website and states that the decision was taken to "ensure the national interests of Russia in connection with the profound changes taking place in international relations." It is part of a series of anti-Western moves announced by Putin yesterday.

Zelenskyy plans to attend July NATO summit in Vilnius - Ukraine's President Zelenskyy plans to attend in person a NATO summit taking place in Vilnius in July, Ukraine's ambassador to Lithuania told local newswire BNS.

Bucharest 9 meet with Biden – Russian aggression in Ukraine has changed the security situation in Europe, Polish President Andrzej Duda told the Warsaw meeting of the Bucharest 9 countries with Biden, who said Washington was committed to defending every inch of NATO.

"You are the front line of our collective defence," Biden told the summit of countries which joined the Western military alliance after being dominated by Moscow during the Cold War.

Most are among the strongest supporters of military aid to Ukraine, and officials from countries in the group have said they will seek extra resources such as air defence systems.

Biden said however that by suspending the treaty, Putin had "made a mistake".

He underlined his support for Kyiv in a surprise visit to war-torn Ukraine on Monday and then rallied NATO allies in Poland, saying the invasion had tested the world but Washington and its allies had shown they would defend democracy.

He rejected Russia's assertion that Western allies were seeking to control or destroy Russia, and accused Moscow of crimes against humanity such as targeting civilians and rape. Russia denies committing war crimes or targeting civilians.

NATO allies and other supporters have sent Ukraine tens of billions of dollars' worth of arms and ammunition. Since the new year they have promised modern battle tanks, though they have yet to offer Western fighter jets sought by Kyiv.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has warned Beijing against supplying weapons to Moscow, prompting anger from China.

No peace as long as Russian troops in Ukraine - Kyiv says there can be no talk of peace with Russian troops in Ukraine.

"This unprovoked and criminal Russian war against Ukraine, Europe and the democratic world must end with the cleansing of the entire Ukrainian land from Russian occupation and solid guarantees of the long-term security for our state, the whole of Europe and the entire world," President Volodymyr Zelenskiy wrote on the Telegram messaging app.

China ready to further strengthen ties with Russia - Making the highest level visit to Russia by a Chinese official since the countries signed a "no limits" partnership weeks before the invasion, China's top diplomat Wang Li told President Vladimir Putin that Beijing was ready to enhance ties.

Times of crisis require Russia and China "to continuously deepen our comprehensive strategic partnership", Wang said.

Putin said he was looking forward to a visit to Moscow by Chinese President Xi Jinping and a deeper partnership.

A year on

The Kremlin invaded Ukraine February 24th of last year.

Putin loudly acclaimed a quick victory against Ukrainian "Nazi's" and US-influenced NATO encroachment of Russia.

Beijing announced their "No limits" policy with Moscow, obviously subscribing to the rapid execution of operation notion coming from Putin in their pre-Olympics meeting.

Since then Russia suffered three major battlefield reverses over the past year but still controls nearly a fifth of the country. It has launched a massive "new" offensive in recent weeks in eastern provinces, but so far is making only marginal gains despite some of the heaviest losses of the war, with entire BTGs being wiped out.

The governor of Luhansk region said Ukraine is repelling and continues to repel intense Russian attacks around the town of Kreminna further north, destroying several of their tanks, and further south toward Bakhmut.

In the intervening nearly twelve-month period Russia and Ukraine have lost large numbers of soldiers in combat. A primary difference being that Ukraine values each and every soldier's life, whereas Russia feeds soldiers into battle "meat grinders," irrespective of cost and loss of life.

In less than this year, Ukraine's military has emerged as a modern, effective fighting force in large part due to an abundance of technology provided by the United States and its NATO allies and on Feb. 24th was still dependent on Russian-made military equipment, much of it antiquated. Today it fields high-tech Western weapons systems such as HIMARS and anti-radar missiles.

While Russian forces continue to mismanage their technology, Ukraine masters theirs.

In that same time period Russia has proven tactically inept with a command structure so stretched and bureaucratic that it has been rendered practically redundant.

Putin commenced targeting of civilian and infrastructural targets, indiscriminately and wantonly striking hospitals, power stations, railways and domestic dwellings and buildings, killing women, children and the infirm in the process.

Cities such as Kharkiv and Mariupol were wiped from the face of the earth by Russian barrages on a continuing basis.

However, Putin gravely miscalculated, directly and continuously suffering significant battlefield defeats and losses from this miscalculation and many other strategic and tactical blunders. They have lost more than half their battle tanks, forcing them to draw down stocks of 1960's-era Soviet units from storage, they have enjoyed zero air supremacy despite an overwhelming superiority in aircraft numbers, and the Kremlin has seen their soldiers decimated in battle against Ukrainian forces, with an estimated 60% to 70% killed or injured and atop all of this, seeing an economy on the brink of collapse.

Their much-vaunted Black Sea fleet saw the loss of its flagship to Ukrainian anti-ship missiles, forcing withdrawal of their remaining ships south of Sevastopol, rendering it effectively a brown-water flotilla. Sevastopol itself saw attack, losing a number of in port vessels to Ukrainian drone attacks.

Sanctions continue, with both short-term and long-term bite. Oil exports are now routed to the east and India at a hugely discounted rate, hurting Moscow revenue and, with an exodus of western oilfield technologists and technology, Moscow is headed to a pipeline catastrophe through lack of equipment maintenance.

Russia is now a global pariah amongst major countries and is seeing a severe erosion of erstwhile Politik and influence in the Central Asian zone with former Moscow-aligned Soviet states showing growing independence and differences with one another and with Moscow. This is essentially eliminating decades of Russian influence building and peddling and Politik investment.

Geopolitically Russia and China have clearly stated their desire for a new bi-polar world order, seeking to align 3rd World zones, South America and the Middle East in their sphere of influence and control.

Putin's blind and failed escapade in invading his smaller neighbor is harming that objective, seemingly infuriating his partners in Beijing, now intimating a deeper association with Moscow in order to save their bi-polar day.

China still hasn't provided Russia with any lethal assistance or supplies that the West knows about, albeit lately threatening to do so in diplomatic dispatches. The West in turn is directly warning Beijing and Xi in short, terse fashion of the folly of this threat and the consequences that will follow, further angering Beijing.

Finland and Sweden have both applied for NATO membership, the latter moving away from centuries of neutrality, with Switzerland engaging in conflict Politik for the first time in ages. Austria is re-considering its position of neutrality.

Moscow and Putin, by trying to reinstate Soviet-era alignment(s), aim to insulate and bring under Kremlin control historic invasion “Gateways,” have instead seen the opposite with NATO ever-closer and ex-Soviet countries openly and defiantly rallying to the Ukrainian cause.

Russia’s primary aim in their invasion has not changed – to destroy Ukraine as a nation.

This, from what we have seen and witnessed over the past 12 months, is not going to take place. Instead it is in danger of reducing to a shadow of its former self and glory, a close to bankrupt nation subservient to its erstwhile junior partner in Beijing, and losing both geopolitical and moral support across vital strategic fronts and intersections.

Putin styles himself on Peter the Great, whereas he is far closer to False Dmitry.

The global concern going forward is uncontrolled escalation dragging in other countries and potentially leading to an expanded and wider conflict. Moscow is increasingly desperate and may resort to “forbidden” weapons, use of which will trigger drastic reactionary measures as well as further widen geopolitical gaps.

China is growing frustrated, given its global bi-polar plan via a tight relationship with Russia and India and through its BRI initiative, appears to be unravelling fast. Regarding the former, Russia is rapidly reducing in dependability whilst in the case of the latter, the BRI is running into financial crises throughout its global alliance.

BRICS - **B**razil, **R**ussia, **I**ndia , **C**hina and **S**outh Africa – is by no means a dead cert going forward, potentially weakening **R** and **C** elements, albeit sounding out Saudi Arabian and Iranian membership. Two stalwarts of this arrangement, **B**razil and **I**ndia are being heavily serenaded by the West.

The Russian disaster may be a precipitator of global geopolitical fracturing – something to be watched and understood.

Putin & Russia

Hackers claim to have caused Russian websites broadcasting Vladimir Putin's annual address to go offline - Online broadcasts of Putin's annual speech were interrupted after an apparent cyberattack.

Reuters reported journalists in several locations were unable to access the websites associated with the All-Russia State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company, a state broadcaster, during Putin's address to the federal assembly.

Smotrim.ru, a live-streaming platform that broadcasts the state-run Rossiya-24 channel, also went offline at points.

Tass, a Russian state-owned news agency, confirmed in a post that broadcasting of the speech was interrupted on those websites, noting that an error message saying "technical work is underway" was displayed instead.

Russia's state-run RIA Novosti news agency, meanwhile, said disruptions to the broadcast were the result of a Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attack. This is when a series of bots flood a website or service with HTTP requests and traffic in a bid to shut down a network and make it inaccessible to its intended users.